6-14-2019

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Recommended Citation
Plante, T. G., & McCreadie, A. (2019). Further Developments of the Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire. Pastoral Psychology. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00882-5

The final publication is available at Springer via https://doi.org/10.1007/s11089-019-00882-5.

Further Developments of the Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire

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Abstract Ethics and ethical decision-making are critically important for high-functioning communities, including those on college campuses. This brief paper provides further research support for the Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire, a brief and no-cost 10-item questionnaire assessing general ethics. The questionnaire was administered to 329 university students along with several other measures to assess convergent and divergent validity. Results suggest that compassion, hope, and self-esteem predict about one-third of the variance in ethics scores. Implications for future research and use are discussed.

Keywords Ethics, College, Morality, Assessment

Ethics are principles of living and problem-solving that ultimately seek to answer the question "Who do you want to be and how do you want to be in the world?" (Plante 2004). Ethics can be

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defined as “moral principles that govern a person’s behavior or the conducting of an activity” (Ethics n.d.) and help in reflecting upon and offering guidance for various decisions in life and determining a preferred course of correct action (Bishop 2013; Vaughn 2015).

Professional ethics is a topic of considerable importance and debate across almost all professions, many of which have developed their own ethics code. Additionally, many disciplines have developed specific assessment scales, such as the Participatory Ethics Scale (Tarvydas et al. 2017) that is suited to rehabilitation and other counselors. Others focus on scales most appropriate for nurses (Monroe 2019) and postdoctoral trainees (Self et al. 2018). Interest in ethics and assessing ethical behavior extends beyond the helping professions and includes other fields as well, such as information and computer technology (Jung 2009) and marketing consumer brands (Ferrell et al. 2019).

Research on ethical issues and concerns has also become an important part of the larger conversation concerning social issues. For example, Tyler (2019) suggested that embodied ethics can be a useful framework for thinking about diversity and inclusion. Francis and Keegan (2018) highlight the ethics of care as it relates to workforce engagement strategies. Collén (2019) developed workshops regarding ethical dilemmas associated with sustainable development. An important element of these programs is strategies for students to reflect on how their ethical values can be best utilized to serve the world.

Given the increasing importance of ethics in society and the need to assess general ethical engagement, we developed and published an ethics scale that has the advantages of being very brief (10 items) and completely free to use (Plante and McCreadie 2019; see appendix). The initial development of the scale was conducted with 200 college students and examined the relationship between ethics and a variety of relevant variables such as narcissism, faith, self-

compassion, compassion, and social desirability. The current study seeks to further examine the properties of the Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire by using a much larger sample population as well as including additional relevant variables such as hope, resilience, and self-esteem.

Method

Participants

Participants were 329 university students between the ages of 17 and 22. They were recruited through SONA, an online system through which university students receive class credit for participation in course-related research studies. Participation was voluntary, and there was an alternate class assignment available for those who desired that option. Of these participants, 70% were female (n = 226), 30% were male (n = 98), and 5 did not report their gender identification. The mean age of the student sample was 18.8 years, and all were enrolled in a general psychology course during the 2017 fall academic term.

Measures

Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire (SCEQ; Plante and McCreadie 2019). The SCEQ was designed by the first author with the intent to assess ethical interest and engagement. The 10-item measure includes statements regarding ethics such as "It is more important for me to behave ethically than to get an advantage in life," rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). This scale offers adequate reliability and validity and reports a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83.

Santa Clara Brief Compassion Scale (SCBCS; Hwang et al. 2008; Plante and Mejia 2016). The SCBCS is a 5-item scale designed to measure compassion. Plante and Mejia (2016)

report coefficient alphas of .89 and .90. Each item is measured on a 7-point scale, where 1 is "not at all true of me" and 7 is "very true of me." Items include statements such as "I often have tender feelings toward people (strangers) when they seem to be in need."

Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire (SCSORF; Plante and Boccaccini 1997). The SCSORF assesses strength of religious faith through 10 items. It includes statements such as "My religious faith is very important to me" and is measured on a 4-point scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). The authors of the study (Plante and Boccaccini, 1997) report a Cronbach's alpha of .95.

Hope (Snyder et al. 1996). Hope, defined as a person's current state in regard to agency and goal-directed thinking, was measured through six items on a scale ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). Items included statements such as "There are lots of ways around any problem that I am facing now." This scale has a high internal consistency, with researchers reporting an alpha of .93.

Self-Esteem (Rosenberg 1979). Self-esteem was measured on a 10-item scale with response options ranging from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4). Each item includes a holistic statement such as "On the whole, I am satisfied with myself." This test is both valid and reliable, with an alpha of .92 and a high test-retest reliability.

Resilience (Smith et al. 2008). Resilience was measured on a 6-item scale designed to measure how one responds to negative events in life or one's ability to bounce back from stress. One such item is the statement "It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event," to which participants rate their agreement or disagreement from *strongly disagree* (1) to *strongly agree* (4).

Procedure

The research project was approved by our university's Institutional Review Board, and all students consented to involvement in the study. Their responses were kept confidential using a unique code assigned to each participant. They were recruited for participation through an online questionnaire and received class credit for completing the survey. The results were converted to an SPSS file for statistical analysis.

Results

The mean ethics score assessed by the Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire was 31.81 (*SD* = 4.21, *n* = 323), with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 40. Descriptive statistics of the variables in the study can be found in Table 1. The Santa Clara Compassion Scale reports a mean compassion score of 27.01 (*SD* = 5.77, *n* = 322, minimum =10 , maximum = 40). The Santa Clara Strength of Religious Faith Questionnaire produced a mean of 21.72 (*SD* = 9.60, *n* = 323), with a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 40. The mean hope score was 33.58 (*SD* = 7.27, *n* = 325, minimum = 6, maximum = 48). The mean resilience score was 18.23 (*SD* = 2.17, *n* = 323, minimum = 6, maximum = 30). The self-esteem scale resulted in a mean of 26.69 (*SD* = 2.30, *n* = 320), minimum of 10, and maximum of 40.

Table 1

Mean and Standard Deviation of Measures

Measure	Mean	Standard Deviation	*n*
Compassion	27.01	5.77	322
Faith	21.72	9.60	323

Ethics	31.81	4.21	323
Hope	33.58	7.27	325
Resilience	18.28	2.17	323
Self-Esteem	26.69	2.30	320

Table 2 includes all of the Pearson zero-order correlation coefficients that were calculated for the measures mentioned. Ethics and compassion had a strong positive correlation ($r = .49$, $p < .01$). There was a moderate positive correlation between ethics and hope ($r = .29$, $p < .01$). Also significant was the positive relationship between ethics and self-esteem ($r = .24$, $p < .01$). Ethics was also positively correlated with religious faith ($r = .14$, $p < .05$). Hope and resilience were strongly positively correlated ($r = .35$, $p < .01$). Self-esteem and compassion were positively correlated ($r = .15$, $p < .01$), as were hope and faith ($r = .14$, $p < .01$). Faith was also positively related to compassion ($r = .21$, $p < .01$).

Table 2

Pearson Correlation Coefficients for Measures

	Hope	Resilience	Compassion	Self-Esteem	Ethics
SCSORF	.14*	.11	.21**	.10	.14*
Hope		.35**	.10	−.02	.29*
Resilience			−.01	−.07	.06

Compassion	.15**	.49**
Self-Esteem		.24**

Note. ** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (two-tailed), * Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (two-tailed).

A multiple regression analysis was conducted using the total of the scores of the SCEQ as the dependent measure. Compassion, hope, self-esteem, and faith were entered into a stepwise model. Compassion accounted for 24% of the variance in ethics, $F(1,316) = 99.19$, $p < .001$. When hope was added, these two variables accounted for 29% of the variance, $F(2,316) = 65.76$, $p < .001$, and when self-esteem was entered, the three together accounted for 33% of the variance, $F(3, 316) = 51.13$, $p < .001$. Strength of religious faith did not have a significant effect when added to the regression equation.

Discussion

This study aimed to identify variables predicting ethics in order to further help understand and validate the Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire. The inclusion of new measures, including resilience, self-esteem, and hope, helped us to accomplish this goal. Strength of religious faith and compassion were included, as they were in the previous study, because of their strong relationship to the ethics measure in the earlier study.

All but one of the measures—resilience—was significantly correlated with ethics. The other measures offered significant association with ethics. In comparing the current study with our previous one (Plante and McCreadie 2019), we found similar relationships between faith and

ethics. In both studies, the correlations were significant at $p < .005$ and differed by only .02 ($r = .16$, $r = .14$). Compassion and ethics were similarly aligned in both studies, significant at $p < .005$ and differing by .04 ($r = .53$, $r = .49$). This relationship underscores the importance of compassion in predicting ethics.

This relationship of compassion to ethics was also supported by the results of the multiple regression that we conducted. Compassion alone accounted for 24% of the variance in the ethics measure, but when hope and self-esteem were included, the relationship rose to account for about one-third of the variance in the ethics measure. Faith did not add any significant variance to the regression equation when these other variables had already been added. This may make sense considering the fact that having faith is not sufficient for being compassionate and being compassionate is not necessary for having faith.

Future research should include additional variables that might be related to ethics, including the important role that social desirability might play in self-reported ethics measures (Dalton and Ortegren 2011). Additionally, research should include samples from diverse populations across the country, including other college students as well as more mature non-college student samples as well. Finally, research that goes beyond self-reported measures and assesses actual observable behavior would be a productive future direction as well. The current study is a step in the right direction, but much more research is needed to best measure ethical behavior and perspectives.

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Appendix

Santa Clara Ethics Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions using the scale below. Indicate the level of agreement (or disagreement) for each statement.

1 = strongly disagree 2 = disagree 3 = agree 4 = strongly agree

_____ 1. Respecting others, even those whom I don't like or agree with, is very important to me.

_____ 2. Being responsible and accountable, even when I have to admit that I'm wrong or have erred, is very important to me.

_____ 3. Being honest, fair, and maintaining integrity, even when it might put me at a disadvantage, is very important to me.

_____ 4. I strive to be competent in my areas of personal or professional expertise and am the first to admit it when I am not and have fallen short.

_____ 5. I feel a great deal of compassion for others, even those whom I don't know or have few things in common with.

_____ 6. I have clear ethical guiding principles that I keep in mind and follow at all times.

_____ 7. It is more important for me to behave ethically than to get an advantage in life.

_____ 8. I never take advantage of others and am truthful in my relationships and interactions

even when it might put me at a disadvantage.

_____ 9. I would not be embarrassed if all of my actions were filmed and played back for others to see and evaluate.

_____ 10. I typically ask myself what the right thing to do is from an ethical or moral perspective before making decisions.