

German Version of the Engagement With Beauty Scale

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The Engagement with Beauty Scale (EBS) was designed using the philosophical works of Kant (1790/1987), Hegel (c. 1835/1993), and Aquinas (c. 1260/1947), as well as the psychological work of Haidt and Koller (2004). The scale has construct, concurrent, and predictive validity as well as internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of .90 for total score with an American sample (Diessner, Solom, Frost, Parsons, & Davidson, 2008). In the study reported here, the EBS was translated into German and administered to a sample of Germans living in southern Germany, revealing a Cronbach's alpha of .94 for total score (validity was not formally assessed). Discussion centers on comparing the German sample's scores on the natural beauty, artistic beauty, and moral beauty subscales of the EBS with the American sample's scores.

In beauty (happily) I walk.
With beauty before me I walk.
With beauty behind me I walk.
With beauty below me I walk.
With beauty above me I walk.
With beauty all around me I walk.
It is finished (again) in beauty.
It is finished in beauty.

(Navajo/Diné Prayer; quoted in Underhill, 1956, p. 212)

Since ancient times, people have been fascinated by the beautiful. The earliest theories of beauty, in the West, were developed by the ancient Greeks. One such theorist was Pythagoras, who placed great emphasis on the golden ratio, which in mathematics, refers to a geometric proportion in which a line is divided. This ratio appears in objects humans experience as more beautiful, thus intertwining both mathematics and beauty. In fact, “since antiquity many philosophers, artists, and mathematicians have been intrigued by the golden section, which Renaissance writers called the divine proportion. It is widely accepted that a rectangle with sides in this ratio exhibits a special beauty” (Golden section, 2009). Others, such as Plato (1937; viz. *The Republic*, Book VI, 505b-508e) focused on the concepts of beauty, truth, and good

—especially the unity among these three ideas.

Beauty has always been a topic of interest in philosophy, especially in the philosophical discipline of aesthetics. Consider, for example, Kant (1790/1987) who concentrated on both objective and subjective qualities of beauty. Among his most famous statements regarding beauty are: “The judgment of taste, therefore, is not a cognitive judgment, and so not logical, but is aesthetic which means that it is one whose determining ground cannot be other than subjective” (p. 44) and, when referring to the observer, “he judges not merely for himself, but for all men [sic], and then speaks of beauty as if it were a property of things” (pp. 55-56).

Even though there is a paucity of research with regard to modern psychological theories of beauty, with most of it focusing on visual arts (Eysenck, 1988; Oatley, 2002) or music (Gabrielsson & Juslin, 2003), research from humanistic psychology needs to be

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acknowledged. For example, an important component of Rogers' (1961) theory of the fully functioning person involves openness to experience which he defined as the opposite of defensiveness. In his model of how to acquire a rich and engaged life, Rogers also gave special attention to beauty and the emotional reactions that can be elicited from it when we are fully immersed in the moment, interacting and engaging with the environment.

Another prominent representative of the field of humanistic psychology was Maslow, most known for his hierarchy of needs (1943). He (1964) wrote extensively about awe or peak experiences, distinguishing between peakers and nonpeakers, and he also focused on human virtues. Maslow (1970) considered beauty to be a B(eing)-value (meta-motivation); that is, part of the B(eing)-cognition which motivates us for psychological growth and the development of our full potentials.

With regard to psychosocial correlates of engagement with beauty (i.e., cognitively appreciating and at the same time being emotionally involved with beauty), there is still a considerable void in scientific literature. However, there is a significant positive correlation between spiritual transcendence (Piedmont, 1999) and appreciation of beauty. This relationship had been speculated upon by Haidt and Keltner (2004) before having been empirically demonstrated by Diessner et al. (2008). Furthermore, appreciation and gratitude also are correlated (McCullough, Emmons, & Tsang, 2002).

It was not until the positive psychology movement's (Peterson, 2006; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Snyder & Lopez, 2002) recognition of the importance of appreciation of beauty as a character trait that the Engagement with Beauty Scale (EBS) was developed (Diessner, Rust, Solom, Frost, & Parsons, 2006; Diessner, et al., 2008). This scale constitutes a direct response to Haidt and Keltner (2004), who noted the lack of an instrument measuring this particular construct. The EBS is a 14-item self-report scale describing various levels of cognitive and emotional engagement concerning natural, artistic, and moral beauty. Theologically, "moral beauty" can be seen wherever the attributes of God are manifest, or, philosophically and psychologically, when we witness acts that involve human virtues. According to Peterson and Seligman (2004), these virtues can be grouped into the following six universal clusters: wisdom and knowledge, courage, humanity (love and kindness), justice, temperance, and transcendence—appreciation of beauty and excellence belonging to this last cluster. This "engagement" then may result in "self-transcendent emotions such as awe, admiration, and elevation" and various bodily responses (e.g., "the proverbial lump in the throat," (Haidt & Keltner, 2004, p. 539).

The scale is based on the works of Kant (1790/1987; nature), Hegel (c. 1835/1993; art) and Aquinas (c. 1260/1947; morality and virtues) as well as on the psychological work of Haidt on moral beauty and the moral emotion of elevation (Haidt, 2000, 2002, 2003, 2006; Haidt & Keltner, 2004; Keltner & Haidt, 2003). Although there are two other instruments which measure appreciation of beauty as a subscale—the 10-item Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence (ABE) subscale of the 240-item Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and the Openness to Aesthetics (McCrae, 1996) subscale of the revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO-PI-R; Costa & McCrae, 1992)—the EBS is the only existing full scale that is devoted to measuring the trait of engagement with beauty.

In particular, the EBS subscale of moral beauty was modeled after Haidt's (2002) work on elevation (the moral emotion that is brought about by appreciation and appraisal of beauty) and prosocial behavior associated with this emotion. According to Haidt (2002), moral emotions are "emotions that respond to moral violations or that motivate moral behavior" (p. 853). He (2002) further states that elevation "is elicited by moral beauty [and] appears to be caused by seeing manifestations of humanity's higher or better nature; it triggers a distinctive feeling in the chest of warmth and expansion; it causes a desire to become a better person oneself; and it seems to open one's heart, not only to the person who triggered the feeling, but also to other people" (p. 864).

Given this theoretical background and the relative paucity of cross-cultural investigations into the topic of engagement with beauty, the aim of the present research was to develop an internally consistent and reliable German translation of the EBS, a first step in establishing cross-cultural validity of the scale. Without a German translation, no reliable data can be collected from native speakers of German. It should be noted that German is not only the first language in Germany, but also in Austria, the Principality of Liechtenstein, and parts of Switzerland, Italy, and Belgium. Therefore, German is the most widespread first language in Europe, spoken by about 100 million people (Auswaertiges Amt, 2006).

The examination of engagement with beauty in different cultural contexts is timely because the positive psychology movement has clearly established the importance of this particular character trait and its relevance for counseling and positive psychotherapy. More empirical evidence concerning levels of engagement with natural, artistic, and moral beauty among people from different backgrounds would enhance our understanding of the interplay between culture

and this specific character trait.

Furthermore, because the previous American study relied on a convenience sample comprised exclusively of white undergraduate students at a small college in the Northwest, a further objective was to improve the generalizability of findings by testing a more diverse sample in the present study.

Method

Participants

A convenience sample of $N = 71$ Germans completed the measure, two of whose protocols were unusable. The $N = 69$ consisted of 59.4% women, ages 18 to 81 years ($M = 48.8$; $SD = 16.6$). The sample was 98.6% Christian and 1.4% Jewish; nationality was 100% German. At time of data collection, all participants lived in or near the town of Memmingen, Bavaria, in southern Germany.

Materials

The EBS uses a 7-point Likert scale ranging from “very unlike me” to “very much like me” on items such as “When perceiving beauty in nature I feel changes in my body, such as a lump in my throat, an expansion in my chest, faster heartbeat, or other bodily responses”; “When perceiving beauty in a work of art I feel something like a spiritual experience, perhaps a sense of oneness or being united with the universe or a love of the entire world”; and “When perceiving an act of moral beauty I find that I desire to become a better person” (Diessner et al., 2008).

The EBS provides a total scale score (possible range 14–98) and also has three subscales tapping engagement with natural beauty (four items; possible range 4–28), artistic beauty (four items; possible range 4–28), and moral beauty (six items; possible range 6–42). A study of the EBS with an American sample ($N = 206$; 58% female) yielded a total score internal consistency of $= .90$ and subscale alphas of $.80$ for Natural Beauty, $.87$ for Artistic Beauty, and $.85$ for Moral Beauty (Diessner et al., 2008).

In an American study ($N = 206$), the EBS showed adequate internal consistency and temporal stability, with a total score of $.90$ – $.91$, and test-retest reliability from $.79$ – $.85$; the EBS Natural Beauty subscale was $.80$; Artistic Beauty subscale from $.87$ – $.88$; and the EBS Moral Beauty subscale from $.85$ – $.89$. After confirmatory factor analysis, a chi-square test and a root-mean-square error of approximation (RMSEA) demonstrated a satisfactory fit for the model with three correlated subscales of the EBS; likewise, several goodness of fit indices (AGFI, GFI, CFI), ranging from $.91$ – $.97$, indicated the 3-factor model of the EBS as reasonable (Diessner et al., 2008).

The EBS has a positive correlation of $.80$ with the Appreciation of Beauty and Excellence subscale of the Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (the ABE of the VIA-IS; Peterson & Seligman, 2004; note that this subscale of VIA-IS measures appreciation of both beauty and excellence, whereas the EBS is solely devoted to engagement with beauty). As predicted by Haidt and Keltner (2004), concurrent validity studies show the EBS has medium to high positive correlations with measures of gratitude and spiritual transcendence and low negative correlation with materialistic values. A known-groups study demonstrated that the EBS Artistic Beauty subscale differentiated students engaged in the arts from those who are not (Diessner et al., 2008). The EBS has also been shown in a beauty intervention study to differentiate between a group of students who participated in focused engagement with beauty exercises from a group that did not; and it correlated positively and significantly with the trait of agentic hope (Diessner et al., 2006).

In the confirmatory factor analytic study ($N = 206$; Diessner et al., 2008), the Americans' EBS mean total score was 68.7 ($SD = 15.5$); Artistic Beauty subscale $M = 17.2$ ($SD = 5.9$); Natural Beauty subscale $M = 20.7$ ($SD = 5.1$); and Moral Beauty subscale, $M = 31.4$ ($SD = 7.4$).

In the present study, the American-English EBS was translated into German by the first author who was helped by an independent translator (a German college-preparatory teacher of English and French and lecturer in adult education specializing in business English, possessing a German university degree equivalent to a M.Ed.) who otherwise did not participate in the study. The scale was then back-translated by another German college-preparatory teacher of English and French, also possessing a German university degree equivalent to a M.Ed. (who was not further involved in the study either), and compared to the original. The back-translation was judged by both translators to compare favorably to the original English one. Both translators agreed on its validity and therefore there was no need to alter the initial translation into German.

Procedure

The Institutional Review Board at the first author's US college approved the study, informed consent was obtained from all participants, and debriefing was offered. Using her social network in her hometown of Memmingen, Bavaria, southern Germany, the first author of this study contacted 71 individuals, approached them in person, and asked them to complete the translated self-report measure during the summer of 2007.

Specifically, prior to distributing this sole measure, participants were verbally informed of the purpose of

TABLE 1

T Test for Equality of Means

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	M	SEM	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
2.61	273	.01	1.89	.72	.46	3.31
2.49	108.20	.01	1.89	.76	.38	3.39
-.70	273	.48	-.58	.82	-2.20	1.04
-.70	117.56	.48	-.58	.82	-2.20	1.05
5.62	273	.00	5.97	1.06	3.88	8.07
5.29	105.96	.00	5.97	1.13	3.73	8.21
3.26	273	.00	7.28	2.24	2.88	11.68
3.05	104.85	.00	7.28	2.39	2.54	12.03

the study, and it was emphasized that they were free to participate or not and that they could stop at any time if a questionnaire statement unduly upset them. In order to avoid procedural bias or any influence on participants' attitudes and task performance, which might lead to socially desirable responses and a distortion of results, no monetary or other type of incentives were provided. Participants were further instructed that their anonymity would be guaranteed, that the completed measures would be stored in a safe place, and that only the principal investigator and her research supervisor would have access to the completed measures.

No time limit was given for returning the questionnaire, and participants were free to complete it on site (usually in the comfort of their own homes) or to return it by post in a prepaid envelope to the first author's home address in Germany. Of the 91 questionnaires distributed, 71 were returned to the first author (response rate of 78%). However, due to incompleteness, 2 questionnaires had to be excluded, resulting in 69 usable protocols.

Results

The German participants' responses yielded Cronbach's alphas of .94 for EBS total score; .85 for the Natural Beauty subscale; .85 for the Artistic Beauty subscale; and .90 for the Moral Beauty subscale. The EBS total beauty score can range from 14 to 98, and in this sample ranged from 21 to 92 ($M = 61.5$, $SD = 17.7$). Both the Artistic Beauty and the Natural Beauty subscales have possible ranges of 4–28 with ranges for both in the present study of 4–27. Artistic Beauty subscale was $M = 17.2$ ($SD = 5.9$); Natural Beauty subscale was $M = 18.8$ ($SD = 5.6$). The possible range for the Moral Beauty subscale is 6–42 with a range of 6–40 in the present German sample ($M = 25.4$, $SD = 8.4$).

As Table 1 shows, comparing the German EBS scores to the original American sample's scores revealed that the American average was higher, $t(273) = 3.26$, $p < .001$, two tailed; with an effect size of $d = .45$. There was no significant difference between Germans and Americans on the Artistic Beauty subscale. On the Natural Beauty subscale, the Americans scored higher, $t(273) = 2.61$, $p = .01$, two-tailed, with effect size d at .36; and on the Moral Beauty subscale, the American average was also higher at $t(273) = 5.6$, $p < 0.001$, two tailed, with an effect size of $d = .78$.

Discussion

Our objectives were to develop a reliable German translation of the Engagement with Beauty Scale and to subsequently administer it to a sample of Germans. Based on the relatively high Cronbach's alpha of .94 for total score, the German EBS appears internally consistent and reliable. The alphas on the Natural Beauty and Moral Beauty subscales of the German EBS were higher on those two subscales than was the original American sample, as was the German EBS total score alpha.

As can be seen in Table 2, it is difficult to explain and understand the Germans' significantly lower scores on the EBS total score ($M = 61.5$, $SD = 17.7$) compared to the Americans ($M = 68.7$, $SD = 15.5$); as well as on the Natural Beauty subscale (German $M = 18.8$, $SD = 5.6$; American $M = 20.7$, $SD = 5.1$), and the Moral Beauty subscale (German $M = 25.4$, $SD = 8.4$; American $M = 31.4$, $SD = 7.4$). On the one hand, it is possible that these are real differences, and that Americans—at least the college students tested—actually do perceive themselves as more engaged with beauty than Germans do. On the other hand, Germans might have a higher standard for engagement with beauty, and thus when they mark a "5" on the EBS's 7-point Likert scale, they

TABLE 2

Group Statistics					
	Group	N	M	SD	SEM
Natural Beauty	American	206	20.66	5.07	.35
	German	69	18.77	5.57	.67
Artistic Beauty	American	206	16.67	5.92	.41
	German	69	17.25	5.88	.71
Moral Beauty	American	206	31.42	7.39	.52
	German	69	25.45	8.35	1.01
Total Beauty	American	206	68.75	15.48	1.08
	German	69	61.46	17.73	2.14

may be indicating higher engagement with beauty than when Americans mark a “6” in this context.

An important limitation of the present study is the relatively small sample size. Furthermore, both the previous study using the original English EBS and the new study conducted in Germany with the German version of the scale solely relied on nonrandom convenience samples (i.e., both samples were not representative of their nations as a whole).

Therefore, it is not possible to make generalizations. Future studies will need to examine the temporal stability of the newly-developed translation of the measure. In particular, it will be important to employ multi-method assessments using more diverse subject samples to investigate the temporal course of how people engage with various forms of beauty.

Another caveat is that, just as with the original English EBS, this new German version constitutes a subjective self-report measure. Thus, it is unclear whether participants accurately responded to each item or only gave a socially desirable response, which ultimately raises concern about the validity of the findings. It might be advisable to include a “lie scale” in a revised version of the scale.

Last, the present study lacks validity data. Although the results imply that the translation makes good sense to native speakers of German, validity was not formally assessed because the focus was on prerequisites of cross-cultural validity. In a future study, however, it will be fruitful to make up for this and therefore to also focus on obtaining validity data.

Despite the limitations of the initial study, this measure may become a potentially useful tool in basic and clinical research. In addition to the present German version, the EBS has also been translated into Cypriot Greek, Farsi, Croatian, and data have been collected

in Cyprus, Iran, Croatia, and American Samoa (Richel et al., 2008). The Cronbach’s alphas have all been in the high .80s to low .90s for EBS total score, so it appears that the conceptualization of engagement with beauty across natural, artistic, and moral dimensions provides a coherent construct in a wide variety of cultures.

Engagement with beauty may have important implications in counseling psychology, as shown by recent research in positive psychology indicating that appreciation of beauty may be one of the most important and effective character strengths involved in overcoming depression and other psychological disorders (Seligman, 2002; Peterson, Park, & Seligman, 2006). It seems that facilitating positive change in psychotherapy will be the key because, [t]he symptoms of depression often involve lack of positive emotion, lack of engagement, and lack of felt meaning, but these are typically viewed as consequences or mere correlates of depression. We suggest that these may be causal of depression and therefore that building positive emotion, engagement, and meaning will alleviate depression. (Seligman, Rashid, & Parks, 2006, p. 775)

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