

Religious Motivation in the Elderly: A French-Canadian Replication and an Extension

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ABSTRACT. To clarify further the relationship between religiosity and personal adjustment, four kinds of religious motivation were distinguished: intrinsic, self-determined extrinsic, non-self-determined extrinsic, and amotivation. A study of 176 French-Canadian elderly people found that these four kinds of religious motivation can be reliably measured, that they display a pattern of intercorrelations consistent with theoretical predictions, and that they are related to other important aspects of the lives of these elderly people in a theoretically meaningful manner.

IS RELIGIOSITY ASSOCIATED with personal adjustment and mental health (e.g., Bergin, 1980)? Or is it a sign of mental and emotional disturbance (e.g., Ellis, 1980; Walls, 1980)? In the long history of debate on this question, different aspects of religiosity have been examined (e.g., attitudes toward religion, church attendance) and conflicting findings have emerged (Bergin, 1983; Meadow & Kahoe, 1984; Tellis-Nayak, 1982).

Recent studies, however, indicate that the individual's motivation toward religious activities is an important factor that may help resolve some of the inconsistencies in the literature. Specifically, there is growing empirical

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support for Allport's (1963) statement that "mental health will vary according to the degree to which adherents of any faith are intrinsic in their interpretation and living of their faith" (p. 105). In this view, the individual's motivational orientation toward religion is considered a more precise indication of religiosity than actual behavior (Donahue, 1985; Wimberly, 1974). Bergin, Masters, and Richards (1987) and McClain (1978) found that an intrinsic religious orientation among college students was positively related to personal adjustment, and Haitsma (1986) found a positive relation between intrinsic religious orientation and life satisfaction among elderly people. One purpose of the present study was to see whether this relationship between intrinsic religious orientation and adjustment also holds for French-Canadian elderly people.

A second purpose was to extend research in this area by distinguishing different kinds of religious motivation according to the more general motivational framework of Deci and Ryan (1985, 1987). In this framework four kinds of motivation are defined: intrinsic, self-determined extrinsic, non-self-determined extrinsic, and amotivation.

Intrinsically motivated behaviors are performed for their own sake. They are voluntarily performed in the absence of rewards or constraints, for example, praying for the simple pleasure derived from doing so.

Extrinsically motivated behaviors are engaged in as a means to an end (to receive or avoid something once the activity is terminated) and not for their inherent experiential aspects. Deci and Ryan have proposed that there are different types of extrinsic motivation, and in the present study a distinction is made between self-determined and non-self-determined extrinsic motivation.

Non-self-determined extrinsic motivation occurs when behavior is externally regulated. For example, elderly persons may go to church because they feel urged to do so by a minister or by family members. Non-self-determined extrinsic motivation exists when the individual experiences an obligation to behave in a specific way and feels controlled by a reward or by a constraint, for example, praise or criticism from others.

In contrast, self-determined extrinsic motivation occurs when a behavior is valued and is perceived as chosen by oneself. Behavior is internally regulated. For example, a person may go to church "because I find that it does me good for the days ahead." The motivation is extrinsic because the activity is performed as a means to an end (feeling good during the days ahead). However, the behavior is self-determined because the individual has decided by him- or herself that going to church is beneficial. There is a sense of direction and purpose, instead of obligation and pressure, in performing the behavior.

Amotivation exists when individuals perceive a lack of contingency between their behavior and outcomes. Amotivated behaviors are neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated: They are nonmotivated (e.g., "I really don't know why I go to church; I don't see what it does for me"). There are

no rewards, and participation in the activity will eventually cease. Learned helplessness (Abramson, Seligman, & Teasdale, 1978) is an eventual consequence of amotivation. These behaviors are the least self-determined because there is no sense of purpose, and no expectation of reward or of the possibility of changing the course of events.

Given that religious behavior can be intrinsically, extrinsically, or amotivated, what are the consequences for adjustment and well-being? Because the four kinds of motivation are supposedly on a continuum from high to low self-determination, and because self-determination is associated with enhanced psychological functioning (Deci, 1980), one might expect intrinsic motivation toward religious activities to have the most positive consequences, followed by self-determined extrinsic motivation. Non-self-determined extrinsic motivation and especially amotivation toward religious activities should be associated with negative consequences.

The hypothesis that there are increasingly positive consequences on the continuum from amotivation to intrinsic motivation has been confirmed in research on young adults (Boggiano & Barrett, 1985; Deci & Ryan, 1987; Maddi & Kobasa, 1982). The purpose of the present study was to determine whether the four kinds of motivation also apply to the religious practice of French-Canadian elderly people. Application of Deci and Ryan's framework to religious motivation in the elderly would involve (a) reliably measuring the four kinds of religious motivation; (b) determining whether the four kinds of religious motivation display a pattern of intercorrelations that is consistent with the theory; and (c) determining whether the four kinds of religious motivation are related to other important aspects of the lives of elderly people in a theoretically meaningful manner.

Method

Subjects and Procedure

The subjects were 176 French-Canadian elderly persons drawn from nursing homes in the greater Montreal area, 146 women and 30 men, with a mean age of 81.6 years. The questionnaires were administered interview-style by trained research assistants.

Measures

The four kinds of religious motivation were measured by the Religious Motivation subscale of the Motivation in the Elderly Scale (MES; see Vallerand & O'Connor, 1988), developed to measure four kinds of broad, cross-situational motivational tendencies in elderly people. It is composed of six subscales that tap motivation in different life domains, one of which is religion.

The Religious Motivation subscale consists of three questions: (a) "Why do you go to church?", (b) "Why do you pray?", and (c) "In general, why do you practice your religion?" For each of these three questions individuals are asked to rate the truthfulness of the following four statements, which correspond to the four kinds of motivation: (a) "I don't know, I don't see what it does for me" (amotivation); (b) "Because I am supposed to do it" (non-self-determined extrinsic motivation); (c) "I choose to do it for my own good" (self-determined extrinsic motivation); and (d) "For the pleasure of doing it" (intrinsic motivation). In the present study, the internal consistency values for the four kinds of religious motivation ranged from .89 to .92.

The subjects were also asked to complete one or more of the following measures: a French translation of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale (Vallerand, 1987); a French translation (Bourque & Beaudette, 1982) of three items from the Beck Depression Inventory that are known to be homogeneous and valid (Kane & Kane, 1981, p. 117); and a French translation of Diener's Satisfaction With Life Scale (Blais, Vallerand, Pelletier, & Brière, 1989). Four other questions were adapted from Reker and Peacock (1981) to tap meaning in life. Internal consistency values for these scales ranged from .78 to .87.

Results

The pattern of intercorrelations among the four kinds of religious motivation (Table 1) was consistent with the predictions of Deci and Ryan (1985): It indicates a continuum from amotivation, to non-self-determined extrinsic motivation to self-determined extrinsic motivation, to intrinsic motivation. Adjacent scales on this continuum show moderate positive intercorrelations, whereas scales farther apart show negative intercorrelations. The simplex structure proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985) is therefore supported for religious motivation among the elderly in this sample.

In Table 1 the Pearson correlations between the four kinds of religious motivation and the other variables were also generally in accord with the predictions. Life satisfaction, meaning in life, and self-esteem showed negative correlations with amotivation and non-self-determined extrinsic motivation and significant positive correlations with self-determined extrinsic motivation and intrinsic motivation. For depression, there was a strong positive correlation with amotivation, $r = .61$, $p < .001$, and negative correlations with self-determined extrinsic motivation, $r = -.36$, $p < .001$, and intrinsic motivation, $r = -.34$, $p < .001$. The hypothesis of increasingly positive consequences from amotivation to intrinsic motivation was supported for life satisfaction, although the correlations for non-self-determined extrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation were modest, and received moderate support for depression, meaning in life, and self-esteem.

TABLE 1
Correlations Among the Four Kinds of Religious Motivation and Between the Four Kinds of Religious Motivation and Other Variables

Correlate	Amotivation	Non-self-determined extrinsic	Self-determined extrinsic	Intrinsic
Motivation				
Non-self-determined extrinsic	.20**			
Self-determined extrinsic	-.35***	-.04		
Intrinsic	-.49***	-.18**	.39***	
Variable				
Depression ($n = 146$)	.61***	.40***	-.36***	-.34***
Life satisfaction ($n = 174$)	-.35***	-.17*	.18*	.25***
Self-esteem ($n = 146$)	-.26***	-.29***	.26***	.30***
Meaning in life	-.27***	-.28***	.22**	.31***

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

The relationship between intrinsic religious motivation and personal adjustment observed in past research on English-speaking Americans was replicated in this study of French-speaking Canadians. The present findings also indicate that four kinds of religious motivation tendencies in elderly people can be reliably measured, that the intercorrelations among the four kinds of religious motivation are in accord with the simplex structure proposed by Deci and Ryan (1985), and that the four kinds of motivation are related to other important aspects of the lives of elderly people in a theoretically meaningful manner. The framework proposed by Deci and Ryan based on nonreligious research with young people thus appears quite applicable to religious motivation among the elderly.

The findings also confirm the hypothesis that intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation are not polar opposites; in fact, there was a moderate positive correlation between intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation, as predicted by Deci and Ryan (1985, 1987). Furthermore, there appear to have been two main types of extrinsic religious motivation, one of which, the self-determined type, is associated with adjustment and well-being. On the other

hand, participating in religious activities "because one is supposed to" (non-self-determined extrinsic motivation) is associated with somewhat negative consequences, as is amotivation towards religion.

The present data also suggest the importance of distinguishing between intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic motivation. The two are moderately related because both are internally regulated. But the intrinsic-extrinsic difference still applies and is conceptually important (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 1987). Some items from the Intrinsic subscale of the frequently used Religious Orientation Scale (Allport, 1968) appear to tap self-determined extrinsic motivation, for example, "I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life," whereas other items appear more genuinely intrinsic, for example, "The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotion as those said by me during services." Similarly, existing measures of extrinsic religious motivation, such as those of Hoge (1972) and Allport and Ross (1967; see Allport, 1968), confound self-determined and non-self-determined extrinsic motivation.

Finally, although intrinsic and self-determined extrinsic religious motivation are associated with adjustment and well-being, the present findings suggest that urging or forcing individuals to participate in religious activities, as some members of the clergy and parents do, many actually have detrimental effects on motivation. In the terminology of Deci and Ryan (1985, 1987), forcing individuals to participate in an activity may lead to an external perceived locus of causality for the activity, which reduces intrinsic motivation, increases non-self-determined extrinsic motivation, and may eventually lead to amotivation and withdrawal. Clearly, any encouragement to participate in religious activities should also provide for freedom and self-determination regarding the participation.

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