Religiosity and the motivation for social affiliation☆,☆☆

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ABSTRACT

Although universal, the motivation to affiliate can vary as a function of individual differences and of the characteristics of the target. Three studies explored the extent to which religious beliefs and identity are related to social affiliation motivation. Because most religions advocate affiliation and provide opportunities for frequent experiences of affiliation, we reasoned that religious people might show greater affiliation motivation in everyday attitudes and behaviors. We found that religiosity was positively related to implicit and behavioral measures of general social affiliation (Studies 1 and 2). However, manipulating the identity of the affiliation target revealed that when affiliating might not lead to positive outcomes, the relation between religiosity and social affiliation disappeared (but did not reverse). In Studies 2 and 3, when the target of the affiliation was explicitly identified as a member of a threatening out-group (atheist), religiosity did not predict affiliation behaviors. We discuss the mechanisms by which religiosity motivates and constrains social affiliation and the potential implications for social influence and intergroup processes.

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1. Introduction

Affiliation motivation is defined as a concern with establishing, maintaining, or restoring positive interactions with another person or group. Social affiliation is characterized by a desire to interact and by pleasure in being with others and is one of human beings' basic and universal motivations (McClelland, 1987). Yet, the extent to which a person is motivated to affiliate differs across people (Dufner, Arslan, Hagemeyer, Schönbrodt, & Denissen, 2015; Hill, 2009). For example, early research showed that birth order predicts social affiliation motivation. Only, first-born, and later-born children have progressively higher affiliation motivation, probably because later-born children have less undivided attention from their parents (Conners, 1963). Affiliation motivation also varies based on ethnicity. Asian Americans appear to have higher affiliation motivation than Whites, a finding that may reflect the collectivistic values present in many Asian countries (Pang & Schultheiss, 2005). Women also appear to have higher affiliation motive compared to men as indexed by both self-report and implicit measures (Drescher & Schultheiss, 2016). Finally, natural and medical variations in hormones are associated with changes in affiliation motivation. For example, in normally cycling women, natural variations in progesterone are positively correlated with affiliation motivation, with increases in progesterone priming increased affiliation motivation. In addition, women taking oral contraceptives, which typically contain progesterone-like hormones, have higher implicit affiliation motivation than women who do not take oral contraceptives and than men (Schultheiss, Dargel, & Rohde, 2003). The polypeptide oxytocin has also received much attention because of its role in social affiliation processes more generally (MacDonald & MacDonald, 2010).

In the present paper, we examine whether people's religious beliefs and identities play a role in the motivation to socially affiliate, as assessed with implicit and behavioral measures. Specifically, we investigate whether individual differences in religiosity predict affiliation motivation and examine the extent to which this general effect is moderated by the religious identity of the target of affiliation.

1.1. Religiosity and individual differences in affiliation motivation

Social affiliation is a core feature of most religions. In fact, the word "religion" comes from the Latin word, "religare," which means "to

bind." One interpretation is that of binding people together and humans with gods and their set of obligations. In most psychological and sociological theories of religion, one consistently finds a basic social dimension in addition to the introspective dimension of religion manifested in individual prayer or meditation (Atran & Henrich, 2010; Durkheim, 1912; James, 1958 on institutional religion). Religiosity has been found to be generally related to interdependence and collectivism, both in individualistic and collectivistic cultures (see for a review, Saroglou & Cohen, 2013). Indeed, religion in itself may be partly a response to people's need to affiliate (e.g., Epley, Akalis, Waytz, & Cacioppo, 2008), providing a way to connect people with each other (and with God). Furthermore, as Durkheim (1912) suggested, affiliation may fuel religion itself, and a consequence of religious rituals is to reinforce shared beliefs and bind people to the ideals of the group (Páez, Rimé, Basabe, Wlodarczyk, & Zumeta, 2015; Rossano, 2012; Van Cappellen & Rimé, 2014).

Being religious appears to bring more frequent opportunities for social affiliation. Around the world, millions of people gather in groups for religious services at least a few times a year and, for many, every week. Even outside the place of worship, religious individuals are invisibly bonded by their common beliefs. Research has shown that religious involvement is related to having a larger social network as well as greater frequency of contact and greater intimacy with members of the social network (Ellison & George, 1994; Hayward & Krause, 2014; Idler, 1987). In a longitudinal study that followed a representative sample of adults in a California county, those who attended religious services at least weekly in 1965 reported greater social involvement and size of social network in 1994 compared to less frequent or non-attendees (Strawbridge, Shema, Cohen, & Kaplan, 2001).

Although these studies provide preliminary evidence that being religious is related to social affiliation, they are limited by their reliance on self-report and by their failure to distinguish between social networks that are and are not based on religion. Surprisingly, we know very little about the link between religiosity and the motivation for social affiliation in day-to-day attitudes and behaviors outside places of worship.

In the present studies, we investigated whether religiosity is related to general social affiliation motivation. Theories often distinguish between two motives for social affiliation (Gable & Berkman, 2008), which yields different expectations regarding whether the relation between religiosity and affiliation motivation should be negative or positive. One motive is avoidance-oriented (i.e., aiming to reduce loneliness and disconnection), and one is approach-oriented (i.e., aiming for affiliation, closeness, and positive outcomes). Research has mostly focused on how people turn to religion as a coping mechanism to reduce loneliness, an avoidance-oriented affiliation motive. A series of laboratory experiments revealed that people who were primed to feel lonely or high in need to belong subsequently reported greater religiosity (Burris, Batson, Altstaedten, & Stephens, 1994; Epley et al., 2008; Rokach & Brock, 1998) and a stronger intention to engage in religious behaviors (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010). Much of the research on religion and social affiliation has therefore been based on a deficit model that assumes that turning to religion is partly driven by loneliness and inadequate affiliation. This research is consistent with an early conceptualization of affiliation motivation suggesting that the motive to affiliate is activated primarily in response to a deficit in affiliation (Shipley & Veroff, 1952). Importantly, this conceptualization assumes that the motivation for affiliation should be lower for people who have close relationships with others. If so, religious individuals would not seek to affiliate with others at the same rate as less religious people because their desire for social contact and connections are already satisfied through their religious networks.

Although most work has attributed affiliation primarily to this avoidant affiliation motive (e.g., avoidance of rejection and exclusion), the conclusion that experiences of affiliation would predict lower affiliation motivation is not consistent with Boyatzis (1973) observations. He proposed an approach-oriented affiliation motive, independent of the avoidance-oriented affiliation motive, that reflects people who are motivated by a desire for close, harmonious interactions and the potential positive outcomes of social affiliation. Many authors use the term "intimacy motivation" instead of affiliation motivation to specifically target this approach oriented motivation for warm and close relationships (e.g., McAdams & Constantian, 1983). According to this conceptualization, the existence of close relationships should stimulate further social affiliation instead of satiating the desire to affiliate. From this perspective, religious individuals, bolstered by their frequent experiences of social affiliation and by the affiliative nature of their religious beliefs would continue to seek affiliation in their everyday lives. We tested the relationships between religiosity and affiliation motivation in Studies 1 and 2.

1.2. Religious identity of the affiliation target

People high in affiliation motive desire pleasant interactions and relationships. Therefore, if the target of affiliation does not afford potentially pleasant outcomes, affiliation motivation may be undermined. This notion is in line with evidence showing that people high in affiliation motivation desire to be around like-minded people and tend to avoid conflict (Weinberger, Cotler, & Fishman, 2010). It is also consistent with what we know about how religious individuals interact with similar and dissimilar others. Both history and recent headlines show in dramatic and often deadly ways that religion does not always promote affiliation. In fact, religion often provides a basis for rejecting other people, particularly those who are not a member of one's own religious faith. For example, research on prosociality has shown that religious priming and trait religiosity are related to prosocial behaviors as long as the target to be helped is not a member of an out-group that threatens the person's religious values (e.g. homosexuals, feminists, Blogowska & Saroglou, 2011). When the target is an in-group member or when the target's identity is not specified, religion seems to support prosocial actions such as forgiveness (e.g., Saroglou, Corneille, & Van Cappellen, 2009), suggesting that it might promote affiliation motivation as well. However, in the case of prejudice and antisocial attitudes, religiosity is related to greater prejudice toward value-threatening out-groups (e.g., Johnson, Rowatt, & LaBouff, 2012). Further, in another study, religiosity was related to antisocial behavior against a gay target but not toward a neutral target (Blogowska, Lambert, & Saroglou, 2013).

Regarding the motivation for social affiliation, we hypothesized that if religiosity is related to greater general motives to socially affiliate, this relation should disappear (or perhaps even reverse) when the target is explicitly identified as a member of an out-group. This intergroup bias might take two forms (for a review, see Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). The bias could reflect either in-group favoritism in which religious individuals affiliate more with members of their in-group and ignore or exclude members of the out-group, or the bias could involve out-group derogation in which religious individuals reject outgroup members.

In general, the in-group bias takes the milder form of in-group favoritism rather than out-group derogation (Brewer, 1999). People often show an absence of positive feelings toward out-groups rather than a presence of strong negative feelings. Accordingly, we hypothesized that religiosity would be related to the presence of social affiliation toward neutral and in-group targets and the absence of social affiliation toward an out-group target who does not afford the potentially good outcomes of social affiliation. However, given that out-group derogation is partially driven by threat (Riek, Mania, & Gaertner, 2006), we reasoned that the style of religious beliefs might change these predictions. In Study 3, we tested whether religious fundamentalism, the belief that one's faith is true and should be defended against evil forces that attack it (Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 2005), is related to both out-group derogation and in-group favoritism.