Personality and Individual Differences xxx (2016) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Personality and Individual Differences

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/paid

Love thy neighbor? The effects of religious in/out-group identity on social behavior

Joanna Różycka-Tran *

Institute of Psychology, Gdansk University, Poland

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 19 December 2015
Received in revised form 20 October 2016
Accepted 3 November 2016
Available online xxxx

Keywords:
Religious identity
In/out-group
Social behavior
Helping

ABSTRACT

In the article, keeping with the hypothesis that people use religious identity to regulate their norm directed behavior appropriately toward in/out-group members, two natural experiments took place in the center of Gdansk city. The samples consisted of bystanders: passengers traveling by tram and customers shopping in a supermarket, where religious identity of the target was manipulated. In Study 1, a female student simulates a broken leg and walks with crutches. She tries to get a seat on the tram in three manipulation conditions, wearing: a religious habit as a Christian nun (in-group), a hijab as a Muslim (out-group), and a black shirt with the word "God" crossed out as an atheist. In Study 2, a male student simulates queue-jumping in a supermarket, wearing: a religious habit as a Christian priest, a Jewish skullcap as a Jew, and a white shirt as a secular men. The results confirmed the stated hypothesis, that helping and submissive behaviors was directed only to the in-group religious members, but not toward religious outsiders. The given findings are discussed in the context of social identity theory and have led to the conclusion that, in practice, *love thy neighbor* golden rule applies only to the religious in-group.

1. Introduction

Religion seems to be a universal dimension of human functioning and cultures. It is widely acknowledged that the construct of religion involves multiple dimensions, including cognitive, affective, and behavioral components (Saroglou, 2011), with transcendence at its core, that is, venturing beyond the ego and orientation toward the Higher Being (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson, & Zinnbauer, 2000). Haidt (2006) shows that the human mind simply perceives divinity and sacredness, whether or not God (or other Supreme Being) exists, because the perception of sacredness is a universal human (horizontal) dimension. In one experimental study Frimer, Tell and Haidt (2015) presented evidence that politically liberal mountain climbers (like conservatives), condemn the desecration of their sacred objects (e.g. drilling bolts into a revered mountain Cerro Torre) on moral grounds. In experiments using the lexical decision task paradigm it was also found that activating cognitive representations of spirituality influenced information processing for both religious and non-religious people (Różycka-Tran, Buczny, & Fila-Jankowska, 2014). Religion is also a powerful source of in-group and out-group identity for many people (Cohen, 2009). One may therefore conclude that religiosity is an important dimension in the social functioning of individuals, shaping cognition and directing actions.

The influence of religiosity on prosocial behavior appears to be particularly interesting. As stated by many researchers, religious people are thought to be "better neighbors" (see Galen, 2012 for review). In western culture, Christian religious teachings in particular, generally encourage individuals to "love thy neighbor" where "neighbor" extends to individuals *outside* of one's own in-group. A widely used example of "loving thy neighbor" is the Christian parable of the Good Samaritan in which Jesus tells the story of a Samaritan helping an injured Jew in need. Because Samaritans and Jews were known to dislike each other strongly, this story illustrates the need to be helpful toward individuals even if they do not belong to one's in-group. Allport & Ross (1967) proposed that religiously motivated individuals internalize religious values related to humility, compassion and love of neighbor. However, the empirical literature has produced mixed results regarding the role of religion in prosocial behavior, discussed below.

Most psychological theories of religion assume that the cognitive availability of omniscient and omnipresent supernatural agents contributes to prosocial behavior. In many studies (where prosociality was measured in terms of self-reports, peer-ratings, or projective behavior) it was found that religious people tend to be more prosocial (Sosis & Ruffle, 2004), agreeable (Saroglou, 2002), ready to forgive (McCullough & Worthington, 1999), valuing benevolence (Saroglou, Delpierre, & Dernelle, 2004), and interacting in cooperative ways (Sosis & Ruffle, 2004). Another series of studies demonstrate that the activation of religious concepts brings about prosocial behaviors even toward strangers, reduces egotism (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007), increases social integrity (Randolph-Seng & Nielsen, 2007), and results in an increase in charitable behaviors (Pichon, Boccato, & Saroglou, 2007) indicating that religious concepts can, even unconsciously, activate prosocial behavioral schemas.

On the other hand, some studies showed that religious people only appear to be helpful and prosocial: a high level of church attendance

* Institute of Psychology, University of Gdansk, Bazynskiego 4, 80-952 Gdansk, Poland.
E-mail address: psyjrt@ug.edu.pl.

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.11.009
0191-8869/

leads to more discriminatory attitudes (Batson, Shoenrade, & Pych, 1985; Gorsuch & Aleshire, 1974) and fundamentalists are more dogmatic than non-religious people or atheists (Kirkpatrick, 1993). Laboratory measures of altruistic behavior showed that prosocial attitudes explicitly declared by religious people are better explained in terms of general nonreligious psychological effects and egoistic motives such as seeking praise or avoiding guilt, rather than by higher level of compassion or by a stronger motivation to benefit other people. Galen (2012) directly critiques evidence regarding the "religious prosociality hypothesis", he claims that many effects attributed to religious processes can be explained in terms of the tendency of people to favor their own group compared with outsiders, which has been already found in cultures around the world (Van de Vliert, 2011). Such in-group bias based on social identity theory is displayed toward those with whom people share an identity (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and show out-group derogation toward nonreligious individuals or religious outsiders (Rowatt, Franklin, & Cotton, 2005). It seems that religious people appear to be prosocial only toward in-group members, whereas religious people seem to be discriminative and unhelpful toward out-group members (Jackson & Esses, 1997).

To find the reason for such different results in psychological literature, natural experiments "on the street" were conducted, in order to investigate real social behaviors as opposed to the subtle cognition effects of paper-and-pencil measures in laboratory. With the exception of some rare studies (e.g. Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007), research on religion and sociality has rarely investigated behavior per se, and in particular, research has only indirectly tested the *love thy neighbor hypothesis* by examining associations between multiple measures of religiosity (see Shen, Haggard, Strassburger, & Rowatt, 2013 for review).

Levine, Norenzayan & Philbrick (2001) have already analyzed helping behaviors across cultures in 23 large cities but they did not vary the religious identity of the victim in need. Therefore, as a contribution to the theory, we decided to investigate the effect of the religious identity of the target of intervention on helping behavior in Study 1. Taking into consideration, that in Poland 97.35% of people declare that they are Christians (National Census of Population and Housing, 2013), making Polish society a very monolithic religious group, we decided to explore behavioral reactions toward a religious in-group member or an religious outsider by varying the religiosity of the target. It was assumed that the Christian nun and priest appearance would activate the "Good Samaritan" attitude in randomly selected helpers coming from the same Christian denomination, the same as the crosses that adorn Christians' jewelry activate Christian identity (McCullough, Swartwout, Shaver, Carter, & Sosis, 2016). Based on experiments conducted by McCullough et al. (2016), it was also assumed that the Muslim and Jew appearance would activate strangers' religious identities: Muslim women's headscarves (*hijab*) and the stars of David and yarmulkes that some Jews wear all advertise their wearers' religious identities (as *badgewearers*). The assumption was also based on the earlier priming line of experimental studies, in which the activation of religious schema has been demonstrated to increase prosocial behavior (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007); where a religious priming effect was present regardless of the level of participant religiosity (see Galen, 2012 for review). Also we took into account findings that when most of the society is nominally Christian, this identity constitutes a "default", so that even those who do not disclose a religious identity are presumed to be Christian (Gervais, Shariff, & Norenzayan, 2011).

As we found, McCullough et al. (2016) examined how people incorporate visual information about strangers' religious identities (*religious badges*) into their decisions about how much to trust them, controlling two other social dimension of (facial) categorization: attractiveness and submissiveness/dominance. That is why we decided additionally to investigate the effect of the religious identity of the target of intervention on submissive/assertive behavior in the Study 2 section. It was considerate that both helping and submissive/assertive behavior constitute norm directed behavior toward others. A question has been raised regarding whether prosocial behavior toward a religious target would extend universally to all individuals or only to members of the religious in-group? It would be of interest to determine if in-group bias is stronger than activation of religious schema. Both studies conducted refer directly to the religious identity of the target of intervention and we did not measure the degree of religiosity of the participants and their exact religion. In the both experiments reported here, we tested whether observers (bystanders) use religious identities to regulate their social behavior toward anonymous social interaction partners (in-group or out-group members).

2. Study 1

Helping behaviors are influenced mainly by three factors: social, situational and dispositional; whether planned and initiated by the individual (e.g., charity) or spontaneous and elicited by the situation (e.g., bystander assistance) or assessed in controlled studies via economic behavior (e.g., sharing), (Galen, 2012).

Within this theoretical background, the parable of the "Good Samaritan" was already experimentally tested in one classic study (Darley & Batson, 1973), where results showed that the more people were put under time pressure, the less likely they were to help. This idea was also tested in another experiment on the New York subway, where several variables on helping behavior were investigated and a model for the prediction of behavior in emergency situations was presented (Piliavin, Rodin, & Piliavin, 1969). Inspired by these classic studies we decided to test experimentally the "love thy neighbor" hypothesis on a tram in Gdansk, especially toward religious outsiders.

An extensive body of research has consistently revealed a strong favoritism bias toward members of one's own group as opposed to members of other groups (e.g. Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002). What more Flippen, Hornstein, Siegal & Weitzman (1996) proposed that factors such as similarity might give rise to a sense of "we-ness", a sense of belonging to a common group (analogous to self-other merging) which facilitates empathy, and leads to more prosocial behaviors.

We chose the representation of a Christian nun as the in-group religious member and a Muslim as the religious outsider (see also Hall, Cohen, Meyer, Varley, & Brewer, 2015). Muslims together with Jews constitute two of the most negatively stereotyped religious categories in Poland (e.g. Bilewicz, Winiewski, Kofta, & Wójcik, 2013). Because it was found that the only major group disliked more than Muslims was the atheists (Edgell, Gerteis, & Hartmann, 2006), especially among Christians (Ritter & Preston, 2011), we decided to have an atheist as the completely nonreligious person as suggested by Galen (2012).

Here we ask the question "Do people take into account the religious identity of others when deciding whom to help?" We predicted that individuals would be less likely to help a stranger whose religious identity appeared to be different from theirs. In case to investigate both the frequency and immediacy of helping interventions we decided to measure reaction time. We hypothesized the Christian nun would be helped most quickly (the shortest reaction time) and the Muslim (as an out-group member) most slowly, more slowly even than an atheist.

2.1. Sample and procedure

The natural experiment took place in the center of Gdansk city in Poland. The sample consisted of 90 trials (30 in each condition) in which there was a tram full of passengers (around 3000 passengers all together) of which one or more passengers (traveling by tram in the morning between ten and eleven o'clock) could react. The participants did not realize that they were taking part in a psychological experiment.

As manipulation, the same female student simulates a broken leg (see Levine et al., 2001) and was moving with crutches into the tram in three conditions: wearing either the religious habit as a Christian nun (in-group condition), wearing the hijab as a Muslim woman (out-group condition), and wearing a black shirt with the word crossed out "God" as an atheist. Because the researcher played a physically disabled

Please cite this article as: Różycka-Tran, J., Love thy neighbor? The effects of religious in/out-group identity on social behavior, *Personality and Individual Differences* (2016), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.11.009