

Public Practice of Religion and Prosocial Behavior among Filipino College Students

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ABSTRACT

Individuals view helping those in need as part of being religious. However, a recent review indicated that religion has been associated with helping mostly the in-group (Saroglou, 2013) and that religious prosociality is heightened mostly during Sundays (Malhotra, 2010). There is still a need to look carefully at what is in religion that serves to facilitate helping the in-group and increase helping during Sundays. Through a survey, the present study aims to examine into the five dimensions of religion (Huber & Huber, 2012; Stark & Glock, 1968) and its influence in willingness to help an out-group. Results of multiple linear regression analysis indicated that public practice of religion predicted prosocial behavior and provided an implication to religious individuals' minimal prosociality and the Sunday effect.

Introduction

Religious individuals do not just pray. Religious individuals also help. Throughout the globe, it can be observed that religion is intertwined with helping the needy. However, Saroglou (2006) contended that religious helping is minimal prosociality – minimal in a sense that the likely targets of helping are those in-group or close others. Malhotra (2010) contended that helping is more salient after individuals attended religious services and that most religious services are on Sundays (Sunday effect). Yet, it is still wondered what is in religion that makes the individuals on Sundays more willing to help. With this, the present study looked into the five dimensions of religiosity and which of these dimensions predict/s willingness to help.

Religion includes the feelings, thoughts, and processes that arise from the search for the sacred in the presence of a community that prescribes set of religious practices, or an attempt to reach goals that are not necessarily sacred (e.g., belongingness) but are done in the religious context (Hill et al., 2000). There are different definitions about religion such as intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation (Allport, 1966), religious quest orientation (Batson, 1976), and the establishment of rituals to recognize the power of a higher being (Wulff, 1997).

Religion can be viewed as composed of five dimensions namely intellectual, ideology, religious experience, private and public practices (Glock, 1962; Stark & Glock, 1968) and can be measured through centrality of religiosity scale (Huber & Huber, 2012). Huber and Huber (2012) described these five dimensions through the interplay of sociological and psychological perspectives. Intellectual dimension refers to an individual's knowledge and social expectations about religion. Ideology dimension refers to religious beliefs and convictions. Religious experience refers to both the personal and social experience related to transcendence. Public practice involves the participation in the activities of the religious community; whereas, private practice refers to the religious activities that an individual engages into in his/her personal sphere.

On the other side, prosocial behaviors are intended to benefit others either directly or indirectly (Preston, Salomon, & Ritter, 2013). Recent studies have indicated the causal contribution of religiosity in prosocial behavior (for review, see Preston, Ritter, & Hernandez, 2010). There have been growing studies on the associations of religiosity and prosocial behaviors (Saroglou, 2013).

In terms of experimental studies, results came mostly from priming religious context and concepts. It was found that in the presence of the church and other religious infrastructures, there was decreased theft and violence toward others (Bainbridge, 1989) and an increased intention to help (Pichon & Saroglou, 2009). Also, priming positive religious words such as faith and bless led to increased prosocial intentions (Pichon, Boccato, & Saroglou, 2007). A recent review on religious priming indicated that different religious word primes also elicit different levels of prosocial behavior (Ritter & Preston, 2013).

However, recent studies have consistently found that religiosity was associated with helping only those significant others and those who belong in the ingroup (Saroglou, 2006; Saroglou, Pichon, Trompette, Verschueren, & Dernelle, 2005). An individual is considered an ingroup when there is a set of shared similarities, values, and is part of one's psychological kin (Triandis, 1994). Studies of Batson consistently showed that religious people (in Batson's term, people with religious intrinsic orientation) engaged in prosocial behaviors but only to those they perceive as similar to them and that their motivation for helping is egoistic (Batson, Denton & Vollmecke, 2008; Batson, Eidelman, Higley, & Russell, 2001).

Interestingly, Malhotra (2010) found that willingness to help is more salient when an individual is able to attend religious services, and most of these religious services occur on Sundays. He contended that this Sunday effect occurs because of the salience of religious norms to help those in need (see also Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007). Looking closely, the five dimensions of religion may provide an interesting insight to clarify this Sunday effect.

Moreover, if this Sunday effect hypothesis does apply, then it is expected that the religiosity's public practice dimension may predict prosocial behavior towards out-groups.

Methods

Research Design

The study utilized a correlational design. Specifically, a survey was conducted wherein respondents filled up a set of scales measuring their religiosity and prosocial behavior.

Respondents

Most of the survey forms were distributed among college students in Cebu City, Philippines. There were a total of 212 respondents who participated in the survey with 93 males (43.9%), 118 females (55.7%), and only one respondent (0.5%) did not indicate his/her biological sex. The mean age of the respondents was 18.98 years old (SD = 5.6 years).

Measures

Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber & Huber, 2012). CRS is a 15-item scale measuring the five dimensions of religiosity. Responses are measured through a 5-point Likert scale, with higher scores indicating a high level of religiosity. Reliability value of each dimension ranged from .80 to .93, and for the whole CRS-15 is .92 to .96 (Huber, 2007).). In the present study, total religiosity yielded strong reliability ($\alpha = .902$) as well as intellectual dimension ($\alpha = .737$), ideology dimension ($\alpha = .614$), public practice ($\alpha = .781$), private practice ($\alpha = .690$), and religious experience ($\alpha = .801$). CRS-15 was also correlated with religious identity and the importance of religion in daily life (Huber & Krech, 2009).

Vignettes on the willingness to help. The dependent variable of the study was the willingness to help. The researcher created 21 situations wherein an outgroup needs help (see Appendix A). Most of the cases the researcher created were based on the items of the altruism personality scale (Rushton, Chrisjohn, & Fekken, 1981). The respondent rated his/her willingness to help by responding to a rating scale of 1 (not willing) to 4 (very willing). Higher mean score for these vignettes indicates more willingness to help. This researcher-made scale yielded strong reliability coefficient ($\alpha = .902$).

Procedure

After filling up the informed consent and the required demographics, respondents filled up the Centrality of Religiosity Scale (Huber & Huber, 2012) and questions regarding their willingness to help an out-group. After completing, a debriefing was done either verbally or through referring the respondent to the contents of the informed consent. No deception was used in gathering the data. Incentives were given after completing the form.

Results

The present study aimed to look into the predictive capacity of the five dimensions of religion in an individual's willingness to help an out-group.

Table 1 below shows the mean and standard deviation of the respondents' prosocial behavior towards out-group, their overall religiosity and its five dimensions. As shown, the prosocial behavior of the respondents are relatively high ($M = 2.86$, $SD = .51$). Based on the

suggestion of Huber and Huber (2012), their overall religiosity was very high ($M = 4.03$, $SD = .67$), and the corresponding dimensions were also high which include intellectual dimension ($M = 3.62$, $SD = .82$), ideology dimension ($M = 4.21$, $SD = .76$), public practice ($M = 3.90$, $SD = .99$), private practice ($M = 4.47$, $SD = .69$), and religious experience ($M = 3.97$, $SD = .88$).

Table 1. Mean and standard deviation of prosocial behavior towards out-group, overall religiosity and its 5 dimensions (N = 212)

| | M | SD |
|---------------------|------|-----|
| Prosocial behavior | 2.86 | .51 |
| Overall Religiosity | 4.03 | .67 |
| Intellectual | 3.62 | .82 |
| Ideology | 4.21 | .76 |
| Public Practice | 3.90 | .99 |
| Private Practice | 4.47 | .69 |
| Religious Exp. | 3.97 | .88 |

Multiple regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive capacity of the five dimensions of religiosity towards prosocial behavior among out-groups. Results suggest that the dimensions of religiosity significantly predict prosocial behavior, $F(5,206) = 4.07$, $p < .01$, $R^2 = .09$). However, only public practice (see table 2) showed significant coefficient value ($\beta = .265$, $t = 2.675$, $p = .008$), which indicates that only public practice predicts prosocial behavior towards out-group. Thus, willingness to help an out-group is more salient when a religious individual is practicing his/her faith with others, such as attending mass, religious services, and the like. This finding is consistent with Malhotra's (2010) Sunday effect.

Table 2. Regression coefficients of the 5 dimensions of religiosity as predictors of prosocial behavior towards out-groups

| | Unstandardized | | Standardized | t | Sig. |
|--|----------------|----|--------------|---|------|
| | B | SE | β | | |

| | | | | | |
|------------------------|--------|-------|-------|--------|-------|
| (Constant) | 50.406 | 5.018 | | 10.044 | .0003 |
| Intellectual Dimension | .351 | .443 | .080 | .793 | .429 |
| Ideology Dimension | .417 | .425 | .088 | .982 | .327 |
| Public Practice | .958 | .358 | .265 | 2.675 | .008 |
| Private Practice | -.670 | .492 | -.128 | -1.362 | .175 |
| Religious Experience | -.137 | .422 | -.034 | -.326 | .745 |

Discussion

It can be observed in an individual's everyday life that part of the decisions can be linked to religious reasons (Martos, Kezdy, & Horvath-Szabo, 2011). Moreover, one of the dimensions of religious experience is the involvement in the religious community (Marks, 2006). With these in mind, individual decisions and religious involvement may be reflective of the different dimensions of religion. Engaging in prosocial behavior may thus be influenced by one's religiosity. In the present study, the aim was to look into the five dimensions of religion and its predictive capacity towards prosocial behavior.

Results of the study indicated that among the five dimensions of religion, public practice significantly predicted prosocial behavior towards out-group. Participation in religious activities such as attending mass and religious services facilitates prosocial behavior towards strangers or the out-group in general. This indicates that most of the time individuals engage in prosocial behavior to people whom they have frequent contact with, specifically those within their religious community reflecting what Saroglou (2006) called minimal prosociality. Minimal prosociality, based on the present result, occurs because engaging in public practice (e.g., going to mass and other religious services) facilitates prosocial behavior and most of the time the likely targets of this prosocial behavior are those individuals who were also engaging in the

same public practice. Thus, a plausible explanation by Saroglou (2006) found that religious prosociality is more leaning towards the in-group is that most of the time religiosity is practiced within the religious community, and those people needing help are (as the situation creates) those with whom the individual has frequent contact.

Another side of the coin may also suggest that because religious people are somehow stereotyped as prosocial people (Saroglou, Yzerbyt, & Kaschten, 2011), then it may also be plausible that those who need help approach the religious people or the religious institution to seek assistance. Furthermore, it may be inevitable that those who ask help are those coming from the same religious community thereby creating the situation to help the in-group.

More interestingly, the present study provides an insight that serves to complement Malhotra's (2010) Sunday effect. Malhotra (2010) contended that Sunday effect occurs because religious norms (i.e., part of religious norms is helping others) is being activated. An alternative explanation for Sunday effect is the idea that on Sundays, an individual's thought of a supernatural monitoring agent (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007) after attending religious services is salient and thus acting prosocially is desirable. Based on the present study's result, an alternative explanation for Sunday effect is that the public practice dimension of religion is a facilitator of prosocial behavior. Put simply, engaging in religious services and the like influences an individual's willingness to help. Thus, even on other days, as long as the individual is participating in religious activities, a heightened prosocial behavior may still be observed. Because the religious community imposes the idea that a religious individual has to help those in need and such social pressure is present in participation in religious activities, then that

individual has to comply to avoid sanctions from the religious community (Johnson & Bering, 2006).

Because of being institutionalized, religion is viewed by several scholars as putting borders on an individual's freedom (Pargament, 1997; Pargament, 1999; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Ironically, based on the results suggesting that public practice predicts prosocial behavior, it is also religion's institutionalization which provides more opportunities for the religious individuals to offer their help at least to those people in their religious community. One can imagine if these religious practices are done outside the same religious community and extended to those who need help, and then religious prosociality is not only towards the in-group members but also to those out-groups who are in need of help.

A few limitations of the study have to be noted. The respondents in the survey are young adults, and different developmental stages may help clarify and further our understanding of the dynamics of religiosity and prosocial behavior. The study is correlational, and future studies may be able to establish a causal link between religion and prosocial behavior through experiments. Lastly, it has to be noted that scholars also have varying definitions of religion (for review, see Hill et al., 2000). Thus, results and inferences extracted from these diverse conceptualizations and measures may also vary. As Rusu and Turliuc (2011) suggested, a researcher needs to contextualize (and find a fitting definition on this specific context) the definition of religiosity and its related constructs into the goals and purpose of the study. Despite these limitations, the present study was able to further our understanding of

religious prosociality which is directed mostly towards in-group and the dimension of religion (i.e., public practice) that may facilitate prosocial behavior.

Conclusion

Religion influences the different aspects of our lives (e.g., Ading, Seok, Hashmi, & Maakip, 2012). Partly because of religion's being institutionalized (Pargament, 1999), a common misconception is that it has been seen to be wrong (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). However, in the present study, a religion's institutionalization optimizes the tendency of an individual to act in helpful ways. Thus, engaging in religious activities may benefit not only the individual but also those who need help.

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