

Relationship between religiosity and prejudice psychology essay



The literature on the relationship between religiosity and prejudice has shown inconsistent findings. We argue that it is necessary to distinguish between different types of religiosity and that the relationship with prejudice is mediated by different values. Results of two studies conducted in Italy showed that identified religiosity and introjected religiosity predict different levels of prejudice towards Muslim immigrants. Moreover, the negative relationship between identified religiosity and prejudice was mediated by prosocial values, whereas valuing conformity mediated the positive relationship between introjected religiosity and prejudice. In sum, results showed that it is possible to better understand the relationship between religiosity and prejudice by disentangling the different ways of being religious.

Keywords: religious identity, religious internalization, values, prejudice

Religiosity and Prejudice:

Different Patterns for Two Types of Religious Internalization

Are religious people more tolerant? The question about the relationship between religiosity and prejudice always elicited opposite answers. From one side, one would expect that religious people are more accepting of minority out-groups, basing on the idea that most religions teach love for others (see Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005). From the other side, not all people describing themselves as religious have positive out-group attitudes; on the contrary, this relationship often goes in the opposite direction, with more religious people being more prejudiced (see the review by Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993).

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It is now evident that, in order to approach these conflicting answers, it is necessary to differentiate between the different ways of being religious (see also Leak & Finken, 2011), and to investigate which people, among religious people, are more tolerant and which are not. The most common distinction is between an intrinsic and an extrinsic religious orientation (Allport and Ross, 1967): according to these distinction, intrinsic religiosity is connected with low prejudice whereas extrinsic religiosity is related to relatively high levels of prejudice. However, empirical research investigating the link between religiosity and prejudice has not clearly supported these connections and, therefore, this distinction does not seem to offer a clear understanding of the inconsistent link between religiosity and prejudice (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

Another attempt to analyze the relationship between religiosity and prejudice has been to identify intervening variables. Indeed, scholars identified other constructs than can influence the positive or negative effects of religiosity on prejudice. Research showed that differences in prejudice can be explained by considering the mediating role of, for example, political ideology and right-wing authoritarianism (e. g., Rowatt et al., 2009), religious fundamentalism (e. g., Altemeyer & Hunsberger, 1992), and sense of meaning (Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

The aim of the present research is to make a further contribution to the understanding of the relationship between religiosity and prejudice, by analyzing two forms of religious internalization and by examining value endorsement as a mediating variable. In particular, we focus on the

distinction between what is called ‘identified regulated religiosity’ and ‘
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introjected regulated religiosity' (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993). In addition, we consider the role of the endorsement of prosocial values and conformity values as mediators in the relationship between religiosity and prejudice. The findings of two studies that examine the attitude towards Muslim immigrants of young adults in Italy will be presented.

Religious Identification and Introjection

Research on religiosity and prejudice has used Allport and Ross' (1967) distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation (see Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993). Recently, some scholars questioned the usefulness of this distinction (e. g., Cohen, Hall, Koenig, & Meador, 2005; Flere & Lavric, 2007) and revised it (Neyrinck, Lens, Vansteenkiste, & Soenens, 2010) by using theories of human motivation such as self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985; Ryan & Deci, 2000).

An alternative distinction has been offered by research in the field of self-determination theory, which proposed a specific conceptualization of the different ways in which religious values are endorsed and religious behavior regulated. Beliefs can be endorsed in a superficial and conditional way depending on circumstances and social pressures (' heteronomy'), or in a personal and independent way (' autonomy') (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Within this framework, two types of religiosity emerged that vary in their relative autonomy: introjected regulation and identified regulation (Ryan, Rigby and King, 1993). The former represents religious beliefs and behaviors that are predominantly based on social pressures and the approval of others. The latter represents adoption of beliefs as personal convictions and the

enactment of religious behaviors that are personally chosen and valued (Ryan et al., 1993).

Introjected and identified internalization of religion appear to be differently associated to psychological outcomes with the latter having positive and the former negative effects on mental health, psychological adjustment, and self-esteem (Ryan et al., 1993). Whereas the psychological implications of both types of religiosity have been examined, little is known about their social implications. In particular, the relation between types of religious internalization and prejudice has not been investigated. In this study we propose that identified internalization may be related to lower prejudice towards Muslim immigrants, which in the Italian context is a significant and generally negatively evaluated minority out-group (Strabac & Listhaug, 2008).

In fact, individuals who are deeply identified with their religion can be expected to privately endorse religious principles of prosociality and tolerance, if they feel that their religion values prosociality and tolerance. Accordingly, they should display relatively positive out-group attitudes. In contrast, individuals who mainly introject their religiosity do not privately endorse such values but rather seek approval from significant and generalized others, as they feel that to be religious is to be like the majority of people. In view of the wide-spread negative attitudes towards Muslim immigrants in Italy they, therefore, can be expected to be more prejudiced towards Muslim immigrants. Thus, our prediction is that 'identified' religious people will show significant lower levels of prejudice towards Muslim immigrants than 'introjected' religious people.

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Religiosity and Values

Research on religiosity and prejudice has tried to shed light on the reasons why religious people are less or more prejudiced by examining mediating variables (e. g., Rowatt et al., 2009). In the present paper, we consider values as possible mediators between religiosity and prejudice. Thus, we assume that the different values associated with the different ways of being religious can influence the relationship between religiosity and prejudice.

Research investigating the relationship between religiosity and values can be broadly divided into two types. A first group of studies focuses on the relationship between religiosity and conformism. For example, a meta-analysis by Saroglou, Delpierre and Dernelle (2003), including 21 samples from 15 different countries, examined the link between religiosity and Schwartz's (1992) model of human values. The analysis showed that religiosity is mainly associated with valuing the maintenance and adoption of social and cultural rules and conventions. A second group of studies highlights the association between religiosity and prosocial values. For example, in his review Regnerus (2003) found that religious adolescents are more likely to be involved in prosocial behaviours than non religious peers. Furthermore, Hardy and Carlo (2005) showed that prosocial values partially mediate the relationship between religiosity and prosocial behaviors.

These studies indicate that religiosity is associated with valuing conformity as well as prosociality and these two sets of values are likely to play a different role in intergroup attitudes. In general, the prosocial value of concern for the welfare of others tends to lead to accepting and positive behavior (Hardy & Carlo, 2005), whereas valuing conformity and respect for <https://assignbuster.com/relationship-between-religiosity-and-prejudice-psychology-essay/>

tradition tends to lead to discrimination of non-traditional out-groups, including immigrant groups in Italy (Sniderman, Peri, de Figueiredo, & Piazza, 2002). We expected conformity values to be most strongly connected with introjected religiosity because this type of religious belief is predominantly based on approval of others. In contrast, prosocial values were expected to be connected with identified religiosity. In turn, the conformity and prosocial values were expected to be independently associated with prejudice. Thus, the second prediction of the current research is that higher identified religiosity is associated with lower levels of prejudice because of the endorsement of prosocial values, whereas higher introjected religiosity is associated with higher levels of prejudice because of the endorsement of conformity values.

The Present Study

In the present study, we tested the relationship between religious internalization and anti-Muslim prejudice, and the potential mediational role of prosocial and conformity values. We predicted two paths:

identified religious people should endorse in a greater way the religious principles of prosociality and tolerance, thus, we expected a path from identified religiosity to less prejudice, via the endorsement of prosocial values

Because of the other-based-approval of introjected religiosity and because those who prize conformity will tend to yield to social pressure and have more negative attitudes toward immigrant groups (Sniderman et al., 2002),

we expected the endorsement of conformity to mediate the relationship between introjected religiosity and prejudice.

Method

Participants. Participants were 164 Italian young adults, self-identified as Catholics, of age between 17 and 30 ($M = 21.68$, $SD = 3.20$), with 64.2 % females.

Procedure. Participants were contacted by a member of the research team in schools and religious associations. They were asked to fill in an online questionnaire and participation was voluntary. Participants who completed the questionnaire had the chance to take part in a prize draw. All respondents signed an informed consent form before completing the questionnaire.

Measures. Respondents completed the questionnaire in Italian. All the measure included were translated into Italian with a back-translation procedure, as recommended by the guidelines of the International Test Commission (Hambleton, 1994).

The Christian Religious Internalization Scale (Ryan et al, 1993) was developed for research with a Christian population and measures the reasons why a person engages in religious behavior. There are two reliable and validated subscales, Introjected Religiosity and Identified Religiosity (response scale: 1, not at all true, 7, very true). Two example items for the introjected religiosity subscale (five items) are: “ an important reason why I attend church is because one is supposed to go to church”, “ when I turn to God, I most often do it because I would feel guilty if I didn’t”. Example items
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for the identified religiosity subscale (six items) are: “ when I turn to God, I most often do it because I find it satisfying to me”, “ an important reason why I attend church is that by going to church I learn new things”. In the present sample Cronbach’s alpha showed acceptable values (introjected religiosity $\hat{\alpha} = .70$; identified religiosity $\hat{\alpha} = .86$).

Prosocial values were measured with five items adapted from Flanagan, Cusmille, Gill, and Gallay (2007). The scale prompt is the question “ When you think about your life and your future, how important is...”. Subsequently, participants are asked to respond to five items (5-point scale): “ to do something in order to build a better society”, “ helping those who are less fortunate”, “ to make a contribution to your country”, etc. ($\hat{\alpha} = .82$)

Prejudice towards Muslims. Following Verkuyten and Yildiz (2010) we focused on the acceptance of Muslim immigrants expressing their religious identity in Italy. Using five items, participants were asked to indicate their agreement (7-point scale) with Muslims’ expressive rights. Two examples are: “ to show and express their religion in public life”, “ to wear a headscarf”. The scores were recoded so that a higher score means less acceptance of Muslims’ rights and, thus, more prejudice ($\hat{\alpha} = .87$).

Conformity. Following Sniderman’s et al. (2002) research in Italy, participants were asked to rate their agreement (7-point scale) with four statement about conformity values. Two example items are: “ one should distrust those who act differently from most people”; “ rules are there for people to follow, not to try to change” ($\hat{\alpha} = .71$).

Results and Discussion

Constructs were modeled as single-indicator observed variables, by calculating the mean score of the scale items. We conducted a series of path analyses with prejudice towards Muslims as the dependent variable, using the software Amos 16.

Means, standard deviations and intercorrelations among the variables are displayed in Table 1. The mean for identified religiosity is higher than for introjected religiosity ($t = 21.22, p < .001$), and both measures are positively correlated. The mean level for the endorsement of prosocial values is also high and positively correlated with identified religiosity. The correlations between values (prosocial and conformity) and anti-Muslim prejudice show opposite signs as expected.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Correlations.

Variables

1

2

3

4

5

1. Identification

2. Introjection

. 36**

3. Prosocial values

. 44**

. 12

4. Conformity

. 06

. 18*

-. 01

5. Muslim prejudice

-. 07

-. 05

-. 27**

. 35**

Mean

4. 67

2. 51

4. 03

3. 08

3. 67

SD

1. 17

0. 94

. 73

1. 18

1. 60

* $p < . 05$ (2-tailed), ** $p < . 001$ (2-tailed).

We first tested a model in which introjection, identification, prosocial values and conformity values were independent predictors of prejudice towards Muslims. Fit indices for this model were not acceptable ($\chi^2 (5) = 34. 321$, $p < . 001$; NFI = . 63; CFI = . 64; RMSEA = . 20).

We then tested a full mediation model, whereby the influence of introjection and identification on anti-Muslim prejudice was carried respectively by the endorsement of prosocial and conformity values. The model showed a good fit with the data ($\chi^2 (5) = 2. 341$, $p > . 05$; NFI= . 97; CFI= 1. 00; RMSEA= . 00, 90% confidence interval: . 00- . 07) and accounted for 20. 0 % of variance in prejudice towards Muslims. Significant parameters from this

model are shown in Figure 1. We then calculated the indirect effects on the basis of Preacher and Hayes (2008) bootstrapping method. There was a significant indirect effect from identified religiosity via prosocial values on anti-Muslim prejudice (the standardized indirect effect was estimated as -.12; this value lies between the estimated 95 % confidence interval, -.03 to -.22). There was also a significant indirect effect from introjected religiosity via conformity to prejudice towards Muslims ($\hat{\beta}^2 = .06$, 95% confidence interval: .01 to .12).

To further examine our mediational hypotheses we tested an alternative model in which the endorsement of prosocial and conformity values predicted the outcome measure indirectly through identified and introjected religiosity, respectively. The fit indexes for this model were not acceptable ($\chi^2(6) = 52.763$, $p < .001$; NFI = .40; CFI = .40; RMSEA = .24).

.44**

Prosocial values

Identification

-.28**

-.12*

Prejudice towards Muslims

.36**

.06*

. 36**

. 18*

Introjection

Conformity

Figure 1. Results of the path analysis showing the empirical mediation of prosocial values and valuing conformity. Solid lines represent direct effects and dashed lines represent indirect effects. Numbers are standardized regression weights. ** $p < .001$, * $p < .05$

In sum, the findings confirm the prediction of the independent associations of identified and introjected religiosity with prejudice. Besides, they also confirm the mediational hypotheses about the role of values endorsement. In particular, there appeared to be two pathways: one from identified religiosity via the endorsement of prosocial values to lower prejudice towards Muslims, and the other from introjected religiosity to valuing conformity to higher prejudice.

General Discussion

The research aimed to test the prediction that different forms of religious internalization are independently associated with prejudice, and that these associations are mediated by the endorsement of different types of values. Thus, we selected a religious sample in order to shed light on the different ways of being religious. Results showed that higher identified religiosity was related to stronger acceptance of Muslims' rights (i. e. lower prejudice) and

that this was connected to the endorsement of prosocial values. Conformity values which accounted for the indirect relationship between introjected religiosity and prejudice.

A first interesting finding is that religious identification and religious introjection were independently and in contrasting ways related to prejudice. They emerged as two dimensions of religiosity that are indirectly associated with prejudice, one with a positive sign and the other one with a negative sign. To our knowledge, this is the first time that such a clear pattern emerge. Therefore, this conceptualization of religiosity could be a useful model that is able to overcome some of the problems with Allport and Ross (1967) distinction, that was not systematically and consistently related to prejudice (see Hunsberger & Jackson, 2005).

A second finding is that, in agreement with research on values and religiosity (Saroglou et al., 2003), we found a relationship between religiosity and conformity and with the endorsement of prosocial values. Additionally, we were able to identify which form of religious internalization predicts the association with which set of values. Prosocial values were clearly connected with identified religiosity, whereas valuing conformity was associated with introjected religiosity.

A third result that contributes to the literature relates to self-determination theory (Ryan et al., 1993). The findings enrich Ryan et al. (1993) conceptualization because they empirically show that the difference between identified and introjected religiosity not only has consequences for individual well-being but also for value endorsement and thereby for prejudice. In fact,

the different ways of being religious are strongly associated to different values and this lead to opposite outcomes.

Conclusion

In the present study, we aimed at investigating the relation between different types of religious internalization and different levels of prejudice.

The study indeed presents some limitations, first because of the correlational nature of data and second because of the composition of the sample. In fact, participants are of young age and all live in Italy, making it difficult to generalize the findings to other countries, maybe where religiosity has a different distribution among the population. Similarly, we need to examine other targets of prejudice (e. g., Jews, homosexuals) before reaching general conclusions.

Nevertheless, we think that some interesting directions for future research a can be drawn from these findings. A first one refers to the internalization of religion: identified internalization turned out to be a form of religiosity that has the potential to encourage prosocial orientations and out-group tolerance. Thus, it would be interesting, for future research, to look at the factors that promote identified religiosity among religious groups and families (e. g., Assor, Cohen-Malayev, Kaplan, & Friedman, 2005). A second suggestion is that future research should investigate other determinants of individual differences in religiosity and try to identify the different ways of being religious with their specific consequences (Pargament, 2002): for example, it is possible that not only identified and introjected internalization have effects on prejudice, but also religious practices and participation in

religious organizations and groups(e. g., prayer, church attendance, volunteering, etc.).

To sum up, our research add to the investigation of religiosity and prejudice by showing that two forms of religious internalization have independent and contrasting associations with prejudice, and that these associations are accounted by the endorsement of different values. This means that religiosity can both promote and hinder positive intergroup relations, depending on the way religion is internalized and the related values that are endorsed. This seems to indicate that more research is needed about the different ways of being religious and the mediational mechanisms that intervene in the religiosity-prejudice link.