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Cooper Hodges
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Religiosity and Perceived Stress Among College Students

Cooper B. Hodges¹

hodgesc@andrews.edu

¹Behavioral Sciences Department, Andrews University
Faculty Sponsors: Karl G.D. Bailey & Duane C. McBride

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Introduction

Previous Research

Previous research has shown that college students experience a vast amount of stressors (Ross, Niebling, & Heckert, 1999). However, many of these studies only took into account behavioral approaches to measuring religiosity, without considering motivational approaches. This present study proposed the possibility that college students were using religiosity to modulate stress, and that the motivational framework would be a better measure than a generalized religiosity scale.

Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) proposes that motivation can be autonomous or controlled. We used Ryan, Rigby, & King's (1993) framework to separate religiosity into two types of internalization, identified (more autonomous) and introjected (more controlled) regulation of religion. We used this framework to propose that autonomous internalization (identified) would be effective at stress modulation, but that controlled motivation (introjection) would increase stress.

Method

163 participants were recruited from the Andrews University Research Participation pool. All subjects were 18 years of age or older, and were all current Andrews University students.

Research Design

Three different instruments were utilized for this study. The Religious Self-Regulation Questionnaire (Ryan, Rigby, & King, 1993), a 12 item scale, the Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen, 1983), a 10 item scale, and the Ironson-Woods Spirituality/Religiousness Index (Ironson et al., 2002), a 22 item scale, were given to participants.

Results

Collected data was analyzed first using a Pearson's *r* correlation to determine if data was suitable for regression analysis.

After significant correlations were found, we decided to conduct a multiple regression analysis to examine the relationship of the six predictor variables, religious internalization and religiousness with the criterion variable, perceived stress.

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Total PSS	--						
2. Cris ID	-.235**	--					
3. Cris IJ	.185*	.253**	--				
4. IW Peace	-.147	.681**	.207**	--			
5. IW Faith	-.137	.620**	-.081	.706**	--		
6. IW RBeh	-.182*	.668**	.225**	.650**	.554**	--	
7. IW Comp	-.106*	.549**	.127	.506**	.414**	.494**	--
Identified Regulation	-.096	.038	-.303	-.253	.012	5.28	1.37
Introjected Regulation	.085	.025	.273	.347	.003	3.07	1.39
Ironson/Woods Peace	-.002	.077	-.003	-.020	.984	3.88	.699
Ironson/Woods Religious Behavior	-.058	.063	-.100	-.918	.360	3.92	.753
Ironson/Woods Compassionate View of Others	.032	.060	.050	-.536	.593	4.15	.672

Discussion

Our primary hypothesis predicted that religiosity would be correlated with lower levels of perceived stress. Our secondary hypothesis predicted that identified regulation of religion would be significantly correlated with lower levels of perceived stress, but introjection would be correlated with higher levels. All of these hypotheses were supported. The support of these hypotheses suggests that motivational approaches are better predictors of religiosity than behavioral approaches. Previous literature on this topic have studied behavioral approaches to religiosity without considering motivation. We believe that a better approach to measuring religiosity is by utilizing a combination of both behavioral and motivational approaches.

Upon conducting analyses by gender and ethnicity, we discovered that Whites were significantly more distressed by introjected (imposed) religiosity than any other ethnicity. African-Americans did not show any correlations between stress and the religiosity measures, suggesting that there may be another variable responsible for stress modulation. Additionally, we did not find any significant differences between genders on these scales.

While previous studies did not discover significant results between stress and religiosity (Reyes & Fernandez, 2002), we believe our improved framework that utilizes internalization measures is a better representation of true religiosity than previous measures that have been used.

References

Ryan, R.M., & Deci, E.L. (2000). Self-determination theory and the facilitation of intrinsic motivation, social development, and well-being. *American Psychologist*, 55(1), 68-78.

Ryan, R.M., Rigby, S., & King, K. (1993). Two types of religious internalization and their relations to religious orientation and mental health. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 65(3), 586.