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Religiosity and Prosociality

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Abstract

Religion is a phenomenon evident in every culture. Different types of religion exist depending on the group of believers, the number of gods worshiped and the representations of these gods. However, one commonality the three largest religions (Christianity, Islam and Judaism) share is prosociality. They all are based on the notion of sharing, donating and helping others. In some of them, there is actually a prerequisite to support the image of the righteous. The purpose of this study is to investigate if religiosity predicts prosociality through a structured literature review. The key-words used were “religion”, “religiosity”, “prosociality”, “prosocial behaviour”, “blood donation” and other words related to these issues. The studies retrieved are dated from 2005 to 2010. The databases used were EBSCO, Sheffield University, PUBMED, and others of psychological and sociological interest. The main hypothesis of the study is that religiosity is positively correlated with prosociality. Secondary hypothesis is that religious priming, both subliminal and direct, will affect religious and, also, non-religious individuals in promoting and enhancing prosocial behaviour. Our conclusions are that (a) religiosity predicts prosociality and (b) priming affects both groups for different reasons.

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Keywords: Religion, Religiosity, Prosociality, Prosocial Behaviour, Blood Donation

1. Introduction

Religion is a phenomenon evident in every culture. Different types of religion exist depending on the group of believers, the number of gods worshiped, and the representations of these gods. One commonality most religions share is the prosocial behaviour believers are asked to express. One of the questions raised is whether prosociality has intrinsic or extrinsic motivation, if it is done to please the deity and gain rewards. Moreover, whether believers and religious people are more prosocial than non-believers or atheists or not is another issue in the field and it is the main issue tackled in this paper. The relationship between religiosity and prosociality is the main axis of this systematic literature review.

Previous studies have mostly used economical games and situations such as dictator’s game, to explore whether religious people are more willing to donate money to strangers, hence they are more prosocial. However, in the main body of research real life prosocial events, such as invitations to blood donation or charity, were not used as often. Yet there are other researchers that used imagined scenarios- these cases have a problematic side,

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concerning the distance between intentions and actions. Some of the gaps that are identified in this research area are the focus on the major religions and their doctrines and the problems in defying religiosity. This study is to investigate if religiosity predicts prosociality, through a structured literature review that summarizes the experiments, studies and findings of the field, making it easier to identify the gaps in the literature. The main hypothesis of the study is that religiosity is positively correlated with prosociality. Secondary hypothesis is that religious priming, both subliminal and direct, will affect religious and, also, non-religious individuals in promoting and enhancing prosocial behaviour.

2. Method

A literature search of papers was carried out on the relation between religiosity and prosociality, using three electronic databases EBSCO, Star and Pubmed, between the period January 2005 to December 2011. The keywords used were: “religion”, “religiousness”, “prosociality”, “prosocial behaviour”, “blood donation”. The focus was mostly on research based on religious priming and its effect on prosociality. Systematic reviews and PhD dissertations were also including , since they offered useful information on the topic.

Papers published before January of 2005 were excluded, in order to keep the research up to date, including only recent results and theories. Moreover, only experimental papers and reviews were included, since the interest of this paper lays on more practical issues and not on the theoretical aspects. The keywords used were chosen in order to identify articles purely related to prosociality and not similar concepts, such as empathy, that are not of interest in this project.

3. Results

1	Saroglou et. al 2005	Prosocial behaviour and religion: New evidence based on projective measures and peer ratings	a)religiousness negatively associated with indirect non-physical aggression. B)religiousness positively associated with willingness to help family and close relations. c,d) confirmation of prosociality of religious targets by peers.	a) 106 participants, Rosenszweig Test. B) 111 participants, 8-item scale Hazan & Shaver's. c) altruism scale of Rusthon. D) 250 participants. Empathy: Davis, Honesty: HEXAGO, Religiousness: as study 2	a)confirmed b) confirmed for close targets. C,d) confirmed.	These results suggest that prosociality is related with religiousness but only when it comes to family or friends, but not in strangers.
2	Pichon et. al, 2006	Non-conscious influences of religion on prosociality: a priming study	a)The impact of subliminal messaging of religion on prosociality. b) The effect of subliminal activation of religion on prosociality.	a) 91 psychology students. 2x2 between subjects. Linguistic task, take pamphlets about prosocial event. b)57 participants, word search puzzle with 4 conditions. Lexical decisions tasks	a)Confirmed only for words with positive meaning . b) Neutral religious priming was used as neutral but with positive religious priming there was faster recognition of prosocial words.	There might be indications of intrinsic motivation in this research, since the positive words enhanced prosociality and not neutral or negative ones.

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