

UNDERSTANDING THE MULTI-DIMENSIONAL NATURE OF RELIGIOSITY

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Abstract:

The present paper intend to explain the concept of religiosity and also analyses the dimensional structure of religiosity. The article aims to chart influential approaches to understand religious commitment and examines the different dimensions and measurement of religiosity. The main concern is to study sociology of religion scientifically which means to know the nature of religious involvement and the characteristics of the religious devotees. A major problem faced by all social scientist is trying to measure concept that have no clear “ruler”. A similar challenge is faced when trying to measure how “religious” an individual is. Sociologists study the religiosity of individuals, groups and societies. Religiosity is the intensity and consistency of practice of a person’s (or group’s) faith. Sociologists measure religiosity by asking people about their religious beliefs, their membership in religious organisations and attendance at religious services. Past studies shows that religiosity is a multi-dimensional concept consisting of behaviors, experiences, beliefs, and social or cultural tradition. Much as physical bodies are mapped under three and only three dimensions (viz. length, breadth and height) and thus become subject to analytical rigor and subject to precise meaning. So, the first and foremost step towards this goal is to explore dimensions under which empirical religious phenomenon will have to be mapped. The present study is an attempt to measure religiosity among individuals scientifically. Notion of religiosity vary greatly and religion means different things to different people. Different scholars have given different view about the dimensions of religiosity but however, there are large differences between different researchers about the number and nature of these dimensions. The present study will focus on the different dimensions of measuring religiosity and how are they interrelated with one other is also analysed in the paper. The paper is divided into different sections which constitute the main themes of the paper.

Keywords: Religiosity, Dimensions, Religion, Measurement

Introduction

Religion has been a subject of study and reflection for a very long time. The sociological study of religion is different from a religious or theological study of religion in the way that it investigates religious beliefs, practices and institutions in relation to other aspects of society and culture. The sociological perspective means that religious life can be made comprehensible only by connecting it to domestic life, economic life and political life. Religion exists in all known societies, although religious beliefs and practices vary from culture to culture. All religion seems to share some common characteristics which includes set of symbols invoking feelings of reverence or awe, rituals and ceremonies and a community of believers. Religion is about the sacred realm. Sociologists of religion, following Emile Durkheim, are interested in understanding this sacred realm which every society distinguishes from profane. Often the sacred includes an element of supernatural. Following Durkheim, Berger characterizes the sacred as ‘ a quantity of mysterious and awesome power, other than man and yet related to him, which is believed to reside in certain objects of experience.’ For him, ‘ religion is the human enterprise by which a sacred cosmos is established.’

Depending on social and cultural contexts and their mind-sets people perceive and understand religion in different ways. Even within the similar religious tradition there are variations of interpretations as to the meaning of religion and its relations to individual and society. Religions can't be perceived as monolithic belief systems because monolithic approaches to religion fails to appreciate varieties of religious experience and expressions of religious orientation. As displayed throughout human history religions are not static but dynamic forces. It is this dynamism and fluidity which enable religions to survive on personal as well as societal levels. Religion has figured prominently in human affairs throughout recorded history. For millennia, our species has looked to religion to help us understand the natural world and our place within it.

Religiosity is a term difficult to define. All the people who have approached this domain have found it difficult to define religiosity when this concept is the subject of scientific research. In Sociology, religiosity is a term used to describe the extent to which religion influences society and intersects with other areas of public life. and the practice of religion are not only integral part of one's culture, but in many situations, they define the core of a cultural belief systems of the members of the society. Religiosity has been of interest to social scientists for almost a century. It is a concrete concept. It is more of ritual and practice than of beliefs. The rituals associated with religion are very diverse. Rituals acts may include praying, chanting, singing, eating certain kinds of food (or refraining from doing so), fasting on certain days and so on. Since rituals acts are oriented towards rituals symbols, they are usually seen as quite distinct from the habits and procedures of ordinary life. Religious rituals are often carried out by an individual in his/her personal everyday life. But all religions also involve ceremonials practised collectively by believers. Regular ceremonials normally occur in special places – churches, mosques, temples, shrines. This is the visible aspect of religiosity which is very much observable in the public domain.

It has an influence on the various aspects of life satisfaction and well-being of an individual. Religiosity represents a key component of a country's culture. Religion has played an important role in the life of human beings from ancient times. Unable to understand or explain the complexities of nature, early humanity sought answers through their religious beliefs. Over the years many different religions have emerged with their core beliefs, values, practices and rituals. However, among the social scientists, there has been a considerable debate about the conceptualization and measurement of religiosity.

The general approaches to defining and measuring components of religiosity can be eminent in the literature. The first essential attempt is to operationalize dimensions that have been conceptually derived. This approach assumes the existence of certain dimensions, then selects or constructs items believed to measure them. Included here are some of the notable work like Lenski's four dimensions (Lenski 1961), Glock's five dimensional typology (Fukuyama 1961; Glock and Stark 1965; Faulkner and DeJong 1966) and Allport's intrinsic-extrinsic typology (Wilson 1960; Feagin 1964; Allport and Ross 1967).

The paper is written in descriptive method, which means the progress of paper is based on literature studies and research within books and papers that contain the same theme with the paper. Secondary data is used which are compiled and available in any published forms including internet sources.

The Indicators and Modes of Religiosity

The three main *indicators* of religiosity with which sociologists generally recognize and holds importance in studying religiosity among individuals includes religious participation, religious values and religious beliefs. There is slight difference between the nature of these indicators. Religious participation includes the frequency of one's attending religious service and frequency of personal prayer and scripture study to God outside of religious services while religious values includes importance of God and religion in one's life and lastly religious beliefs focused on the concept like beliefs in hell, heaven, punarjanam and so on.

Religiosity also consists of two *modes* of religious involvement: the personal mode and the institutional mode. The literature on religiosity is replete with such a distinction. Dittes (1971) made a distinction between religion in a relatively explicit mode—public, social, institutionalized, and formalized—and religion in the more subjective mode—deeply held personal attitudes, values, loyalties, and commitments.

Sociologists have frequently made a distinction between these two modes of religiosity with concepts like “meaning and belonging” (Greeley 1972; Roof 1979), “private and public” (Davidson 1975, 1977), or “moral and calculative” (Etzioni 1961), and “religious group involvement” vs. “religious orientations” (Lenski 1961).

The personal mode is comprised of religious beliefs, feelings, and behaviours that find their source in personal and individualized religion. This includes the acceptance of doctrinal orthodoxy drawn from a broader cultural milieu (i.e., general Christianity as opposed to doctrines of a particular sect or denomination), feelings and commitment toward God, and religious behaviour (personal prayer, giving to the poor, and encouraging others to believe in Christ).

The institutional mode is comprised of the religious beliefs, feelings, or behaviours related to formalized and institutionalized religion. The institutional mode includes acceptance of religious beliefs which are unique to a sect or denomination, personal feelings and attachments to a particular church or congregation, and participation in religious ritual and worship services.

A classification of these two constructs i.e. the modes of religiosity (personal vs. institutional) and the indicators of religiosity provides a classification scheme for identifying distinct dimensions of religiosity. Within each mode there exists a sequential interaction among the three indicators.

Consequences of Religiosity

The positive effect of religiosity, in both the social and educational realms, are attracting the attention of many researchers. Sociologists of religion have stated that religious behaviour may have a concrete influence on an individual's life. These consequences of religiosity are thought to incorporate emotional and physical health, spiritual well-being, personal, marital, and family happiness. Poloma and Pendelton suggest, religiosity contributes to meaning and purpose to life or more generally, quality of life. Meaning and purpose in life for middle aged and younger individual centres on establishing a stable identity, forming intimate relationships, productivity and creativity. In later life, however meaning and purpose in life are focused on developing an appreciation of why and how one has lived.

Religiosity has been associated with a myriad of positive outcomes in both adults and youths. In an increasingly materialistic world where the middle-class childhood—the childhood everyone is expected to have—is synonymous with competitions and getting top grades, Play Stations and PSP's, generally excelling in all possible activities, with the eventuality of high-flying jobs and careers, youths' religiosity is continuously rising which is an interesting development. Higher level of religiosity have been related to life satisfaction, psychological well-being, positive mood, feeling of purpose, lower mortality rates. It also acts as a coping mechanism which designates cognitive and behavioural efforts to reduce, restrain or tolerate the internal or external demands which exceed personal resources. Religious involvements are also positively related to good health, leadership, school success, helping behaviour, hope, love, self-esteem and life satisfaction. It also deals with problem-solving, to prevent or diminish negative emotional consequences of stressful life situation.

Overall, the outcomes of all the past studies probing religiosity generally indicates that people who express stronger religious faith and involvement also report fewer stressful life events and greater life satisfaction. Other studies also includes the positive outcome of religiosity on individual's life like that of Walker (2003) which analysed that the religious experience is important in moral functioning while Roccas (2005) concluded that there is a high correlation between religiosity and moral value.

Identification of Dimensions of Religiosity

As almost everything real, religion is far from being a monolithic, homogeneous whole. The observation that individuals and groups are highly religious in one respect but rank low in other respects strongly indicates that religion, at least in the loose sense in which the term is used in a nontechnical sense, is a multidimensional phenomenon. Religious commitment involves more than one dimension. One's acceptance of and position towards a supernatural being, towards an ultimate reality and its manifestations, involve a multidimensional process such as attitudes, beliefs, emotions, experiences and rituals. Research on religious commitment indicates that religiosity is not a unidimensional experience in individuals' lives. This means that religious orientation has various dimensions. Researchers generally agree that religiosity is a multi-dimensional construct, but there is still no consensus on the number and types of the dimensions that make up this construct. After two decades of research attention, it is now generally accepted that the concept of religiosity is best treated as a multidimensional phenomenon. While some still argue against this conceptualization (e.g., Clayton and Gladden 1974), the weight of available evidence strongly supports it. However, in spite of this general agreement, there has been considerable variation in the content and number of reported dimensions. Such variation appears to be the product of different approaches to defining and measuring relevant dimensions, of different analytical methods, or of different populations examined.

Most research tends to focus upon one or two dimensions to the exclusion of others. The difference between the number and nature of these dimensions as explained by different scholars is discussed in this section.

Fukuyama (1960) examined four dimensions of religiosity that he identified as cognitive, cultic, creedal, and devotional, which are summarized in Cardwell (1980): The cognitive dimension is concerned with what individuals know about religion, i.e., religious knowledge. The cultic dimension makes reference to the individual's religious practices, i.e., ritualistic behaviour. The creedal dimension is concerned with a personal religious belief, and the devotional dimension refers to a person's religious feelings and experiences, i.e., the experiential dimension.

Lenski (1963) identified four diverse ways in which religiosity could be expressed: associational, communal, doctrinal, and devotional. In agreement with Glock and Stark (1965), Lenski felt that it is possible to be religious in one way without being religious in other ways and found data to support this claim. A person could be highly visible within a church community but not truly accept its doctrines; or one could be extremely devotional in private. A religious person might not allow some dimensions of religiosity to invade daily life; a person may know or believe, but not live accordingly.

The most notable and popular distinction is made by **Glock and Stark**. Glock and Stark (1965) have been influential in defining religious orientations, origins, and dimensions. In doing so, Glock and Stark identified five dimensions of religiosity: experiential, ritualistic, ideological, intellectual, and consequential. The experiential dimension focuses on the personal faith experience, perhaps a transcendent encounter, while the ritualistic domain

involves the worship experience that is involved in community. The ideological dimension is “constituted by expectations that the religious will hold to certain beliefs” (i.e., professed doctrines), and the intellectual dimension “has to do with the expectation that the religious person will be informed and knowledgeable about the basic tenets of his faith and sacred scriptures” (i.e., history, sacraments, morality). Glock and Stark admitted that these latter two dimensions are closely related, “since knowledge of a belief is a necessary condition for its acceptance.” However, they also acknowledged that belief does not necessarily flow from knowledge, nor does all religious knowledge accompany belief.

Allport (1959) elaborated the difference between extrinsic religiosity (the outward signs of religious socialization, such as churchgoing) and intrinsic religiosity (inward depth of feeling). He concluded that they were two distinct parallel constructs. This differentiation has won widespread acceptance. **Allport and Ross** (1967) stated that: Based on the Allport-Ross Religious Orientation Scale, the following two items are examples of the extrinsic orientation: “What religion offers me most is comfort when sorrows and misfortune strike,” and “The purpose of prayer is to secure a happy and peaceful life.” Examples of the items to assess intrinsic orientation are as follows: “My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach of life,” and “I try hard to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.” Therefore, intrinsic religiosity means the placement of faith at the center of the person’s life. This is the most important component of religiosity.

King (1967) also developed a framework for the analysis of religious commitment and proposed nine dimensions to measure religiosity. These dimensions are delineated as 1- ‘Credal Assent and Personal Commitment’ which refers to the acceptance of the ultimate tenets of a religion such as belief in God, the Scriptures, eternal life, salvation etc. ; 2- ‘Participation in Congregational Activities’ which is about taking part in organised religion such as participating in Church activities regularly and actively; 3- ‘Personal Religious Experience’ which encompasses prayer, repentance etc.; 4- ‘Personal Ties in the Congregation’ which includes church membership and frequency of meeting fellow-believers and organizing social events with them; 5- ‘Commitment to Intellectual Search Despite Doubt’ which relates to critical stimulation and search for meaning; 6- ‘Openness to Religious Growth’ which includes moral growth and continuous struggle to understand religion better; 7- ‘Dogmatism’; 8- ‘Extrinsic Orientation’; 9- ‘Financial Behaviour and Financial Attitude’ which refers to donations to church or financial contribution to religiously inspired events; and lastly, 10- ‘Talking and Reading about Religion’ which refers to the frequency of reading Bible and other religious text and discussing about religion.

Verbit (1970) was among the sociologists of religion to explore the theoretical analysis of the sociological dimensions of religiosity, his contribution includes measuring religiosity through six different "components" and the individual’s behaviour vis-à-vis each one of these components has a number of "dimensions", making it a twenty four-dimensional measure of religiosity.

Verbit's six components of religiosity are ritual, doctrine, emotion, knowledge, ethics and community. Further Verbit gave four dimensions for measuring the six components which includes:

- content, refers to the elements of one's religious repertoire.
- frequency, refers to the 'amount' of involvement of a person in religious behaviours and practices.
- intensity, refers to the degree of determination or consistency in relation to one's position towards religion.
- centrality, refers to the importance that a person attributes to religious tenets, rituals and sentiments.

Verbit theorized that each of the six components could be measured along the four dimensions (e.g. ritual is measured by ritual content, ritual frequency, ritual intensity, ritual centrality). This model is popularly known as The Twenty Four-Dimensional Religiosity Measure.

Similarities exist in the dimensions of cognitive and intellectual; communal is similar to denominational ties and religious attendance; social integration is similar to the dimensions of intrinsic/extrinsic religiosity. Many researchers placed an emphasis on the dimension of religiosity that deals with religious knowledge like Chumblor, Fukuyama, Glock & Stark and Lenski while only a few focused on the application of that knowledge which includes Allport & Ross and Ellison.

So far, I have discussed the most widely cited approaches to the measurement religiosity which support the view that religious commitment is a multidimensional human experience and its variety cannot be understood within the framework of unidimensional interpretation of religious belief and behaviour. Those who take this view argue that it is now self-evident and taken for granted reality that religion is a multifaceted phenomenon. However, against the near-dogmatic status of multidimensional understanding of religion, Clayton and Gladden (1974, 142) argued that 'religiosity is primarily a commitment to an ideology and the other so-called dimensions are merely expressions of the strength of that core commitment.'

Conclusion

Religiosity is a complex and a multi-dimensional construct. Differing numbers of dimensions and differing content in lower and higher order dimensions of religiosity are not logically inconsistent in that they are derived from variant orders of abstractions. These dimensions are certainly associated with one another. Religiosity has been long considered to be a major determinant in achieving happiness and wellbeing, as well as a source of happiness, wellbeing, and better mental and physical health for the majority of people.

Analysis of leading theories as presented and in this article indicates that religious commitment and involvement are multidimensional phenomena. The core dimensions of a

religious commitment include belief, knowledge, practice and experience. It should be acknowledged that every dimension of a religious orientation may have numerous sub-dimensions because of the nature of religious experience. Therefore all the theories and explanatory frameworks for the analysis of religious commitments are liable to omitting some of the dimensions and sub-dimensions of religiosity. Nevertheless, they are a useful means of identifying the general patterns. As Glock puts in, 'the real challenge lies in the cross-cultural study of religious commitment.' At this juncture, it becomes clear that more research is needed to test the reliability and applicability of theories and approaches developed by psychologists and sociologists of religion for the measurement of religiosity. Comparative research will also facilitate the development of more inclusive and coherent methodological approaches to study 'the varieties of religious experience.'

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