

Faith versus practice: Different bases for religiosity judgments by Jews and Protestants

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Abstract

Jewish tradition is focused much more on religious practice than on religious belief, whereas various denominations of Christianity focus about equally on religious practice and on faith. We explored whether this difference in dogma affects how Jews and Protestants judge religiosity. In Study 1, we showed that Jews and Protestants rated practice equally important in being religious, while Protestants rated belief more important than did Jews. In Study 2, Jewish participants' self-rated religiosity was predicted by their extent of practice but not knowledge of Judaism or religious beliefs. In contrast, in Study 3, Protestants' self-rated religiosity was predicted both by their extent of practice and belief, but not knowledge. In all, the results show that Jews and Protestants view the importance of practice in being religious similarly, but that belief is more important for Protestants. Copyright © 2002 John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

From the point of view of religious dogma, Christianity (particularly Protestantism) focuses much more faith than does Judaism (Appel, 1975; Berger, 1967; Prager & Telushkin, 1981). For example, while membership in Judaism is defined by descent (for traditional Judaism, having a Jewish biological mother), membership in Protestant sects is defined by a person's set of beliefs (Morris, 1996; Neusner, 1993).

Such theological differences affect the attention that Jews and Protestants pay to mental states. Protestants consider a person's thoughts and feelings to be much more morally relevant than do Jews. For example, to a Protestant, a married person who is thinking about having an affair has already done something wrong, whereas thoughts about immoral actions are morally neutral for Jews (Cohen & Rozin, 2001).

A recently conducted series of studies on the relationships between religiosity and life satisfaction also supports the claim that religious behavior is about equally salient to Jews and Christians, while religious belief is more salient to Christians than to Jews (Cohen, 2002). In this set of studies, many

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different facets of religiosity (such as religious belief, spirituality,¹ public practice of religion, and social support obtained through religious sources) were correlated with measures of life satisfaction (ratings of happiness, the Satisfaction with Life Scale (Pavot & Diener, 1993), and the Delighted-Terrible Scale (Andrews & Robinson, 1991). A consistent and striking finding was that spirituality and religious belief each correlated about 0.5 with these various measures of well-being among Catholics and Protestants. However, among Jews, spirituality and religious belief correlated much less with life satisfaction. For Jews, Catholics, and Protestants, social support obtained through religious sources correlated modestly and to similar extents with life satisfaction.

The theological difference alluded to above, along with the empirical evidence just reviewed, comes together to suggest that the meaning of what it means to be religious may differ for Jews and Protestants. In this paper, we explored the hypothesis that judgments of religiosity are linked to both religious belief and to religious practice for Protestants, while judgments of religiosity are linked predominantly to practice for Jews. As the traditional practice of Judaism involves complicated rituals and thus requires a significant level of religious knowledge, we also measured religious knowledge in these studies on the weak hypothesis that religious knowledge would be more related to Jewish religiosity than to Protestant religiosity. (We also recognized that a motivation to gain religious knowledge could be intimately linked with some other variable besides practice, such as extent of religious belief.)

In Study 1, we asked Jewish and Protestant participants recruited from the Internet to rate the importance of religious practices, religious knowledge, and religious beliefs in being religious. In Study 2, we predicted Jewish participants' level of self-rated religiosity from their extent of religious knowledge, practice, and belief; participants were recruited from a kosher dining hall on the University of Pennsylvania campus. In Study 3, we predicted Protestant participants' level of self-rated religiosity from their extent of religious knowledge, practice, and belief. Participants in Study 3 were recruited from Dickinson College.

STUDY 1

Methods

Data Collection

Participants were recruited and run on the World Wide Web. The questionnaire was put into html format, and then the questionnaire was advertised in Jewish and Protestant related sites and on listservs for members of different religions. Web studies appear valid based on comparability of results with studies done on undergraduates (Bailey, Foote, & Throckmorton, 2000; Baron & Siepmann, 2000; Buchanon, 2000; Krantz & Dalal, 2000). Furthermore, in research on the morality of mental states for participants of different religions, the same effects of religion on moral judgment were observed with Internet participants as with college undergraduates (Cohen & Rozin, 2001).

¹Spirituality is a very broad term that is used differently by different researchers and can be difficult to distinguish from religiosity (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, & Larson, 2000; Koenig, McCullough, & Larson, 2001; Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). In the study being discussed, spirituality was measured using a six-item scale from the 1998 General Social Survey. The items had to do with feeling God's presence, finding strength and comfort in religion, feeling deep inner peace or harmony, desire to be closer to God, feeling God's love directly or through others, and being spirituality touched by the beauty of creation. With this type of operational definition, spirituality as being used here may be similar to measures used by other researchers of moored spirituality (Koenig et al., 2001) and intrinsic religiosity (Allport & Ross, 1967).

Participants

Participants were 58 Jews (30 females and 28 males) and 53 Protestants (38 females and 15 males). Unfortunately, as participants indicated their religious affiliation or faith in an open-ended format, more detailed information about the particular denominations of the participants are not available in this study. The mean age of the Jews ($M = 24.2$, $SD = 10.65$) did not differ from that of the Protestants ($M = 22.2$, $SD = 9.90$; $t(109) = 1.03$, $p \leq 0.31$).

Participants were asked to rate their level of religiosity or spirituality. 'Not at all' was coded as a 0, 'a little' as a 1, 'somewhat' as a 2, 'quite a bit' as a 3, 'very' as a 4, and 'extremely' as a 5. The religiosity of the Jews ($M = 2.1$, $SD = 1.27$) did not differ from that of the Protestants ($M = 2.2$, $SD = 1.30$; $t(109) = 0.72$, $p \leq 0.47$). Participants also indicated their highest level of education, from an elementary school education (1) to a graduate degree (5). The education level of the Jewish participants ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 1.02$) was higher than that of the Protestants ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 0.54$; $t(108) = 4.98$, $p \leq 0.001$).

Questionnaire

Participants were given the following instructions: 'We are interested in what beliefs, knowledge and behaviors are important in being religious. Please indicate your opinion of how important each of the following things is in deciding whether a person is religious. In other words, you might consider whether a person who does or does not have that trait could be religious, or whether a religious person needs to have that trait. By "religious" we mean a good member of your religion—other words, such as "spiritual" or "devout" are also appropriate.' Participants were asked to rate each trait from not at all important (0) to extremely important (5).

We attempted to make the items equally appropriate for Jews and Protestants, while at the same time making the items representative of the range of religious practices, practice-related knowledge, and beliefs important to each religion. Generation of items was accomplished partly through interviews with religion experts knowledgeable in various denominations of Judaism and in Protestantism. There were five aspects related to belief, five to practice, and three to practice-related knowledge (knowledge that is important in religious practice).

The belief traits were: belief in God, belief that religion can answer more fundamental questions than science, belief in an afterlife, belief in a soul, and belief that the events described in the religious texts of your religion are literally true.

The practice items were: attending religious services regularly, reading religious texts of your religion regularly, not having sex outside of marriage, observing religious requirements to give charity, and raising your children with a religious background. Note that none of the items touch on some of the basic Jewish practices like Sabbath observance or observance of Jewish dietary practices, because they have no obvious Christian parallels.

The practice-related knowledge items were: knowing about the holidays of your religion, knowing the rituals of your religion, and knowing the structure and content of religious services of your religion.

Results and Discussion

Responses to the five belief items were adequately intercorrelated (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$), so they were averaged into a belief scale. The five practice items and three practice-related knowledge items were also intercorrelated (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.85$), so they were averaged into a practice scale.

The importance of belief and practice scales were subjected to a repeated-measures MANOVA with religion as a predictor, setting an alpha level of 0.01. While the main effects of religion and type of scale (belief or practice) were nonsignificant, there was a significant religion \times type of scale interaction (see Figure 1), ($F(1, 97) = 36.61, MSE = 0.44, p \leq 0.001$). Consistent with our predictions, while the Jewish participants rated belief less important than did the Christian participants ($p \leq 0.001$ by Tukey HSD test), Jews and Protestants did not rate the importance of practice differently. Interestingly, Protestant participants rated belief ($M = 3.0, SD = 1.22$) more important in being religious than practice ($M = 2.3, SD = 1.06; p \leq 0.001$ by Tukey HSD test), and Jewish participants rated practice ($M = 2.5, SD = 1.03$) more important in being religious than belief ($M = 2.0, SD = 1.15; p \leq 0.002$ by Tukey HSD test).

The Jewish and Protestant samples differed in education level. The religion \times scale interaction remained significant in an ANCOVA controlling for education ($F(1, 97) = 18.58, MSE = 0.41, p \leq 0.001$). Within this interaction there was a main effect of scale ($F(1, 197) = 10.87, p \leq 0.001$). Furthermore, the interaction between education and scale was significant ($F(1, 97) = 10.33, p \leq 0.002$), which came about because education correlated negatively with ratings of the importance of belief across groups ($r = -0.38, p \leq 0.001$), but not with importance of practice ratings ($r = 0.03, n.s.$).

STUDY 2

In Study 1, we found that Jews and Protestants differed in the predicted way in ratings of the importance of belief and practice in being religious. It would also be interesting to see whether participants rating their own religiosity would do so on the extent to which they are mentally religious (i.e. believe in the teachings of their religions) as opposed to the extent to which they are behaviorally religious (i.e. practice their religions, and perhaps also know about their religions). This is what we examined in Study 2 for Jews and in Study 3 for Protestants.

The goals of this study were to determine which of these three measures would predict Jewish participants' self-rated religiosity. We predicted that religious practice (along perhaps with religious knowledge), but not religious belief, would significantly predict Jews' self-rated religiosity.

Methods

Participants

Eighty-two Jewish participants (36 females and 46 males) were recruited, primarily from a kosher dining facility on the University of Pennsylvania campus. It might be argued that soliciting participants in a kosher dining hall biases the sample toward more observant Jews. However, this facility attracts Jewish students of a range of religiosities and from different denominations of Judaism. Participants' ages ranged from 17 to 26, with a mean of 20.3 and a standard deviation of 1.42.

Questionnaire

For all scales reported in this study and in Study 3, we began with pools of items generated in consultation with religion experts in the appropriate religions, along with an examination of extant scales of religiosity (Hill & Hood, 1999). These items were subjected to principal components

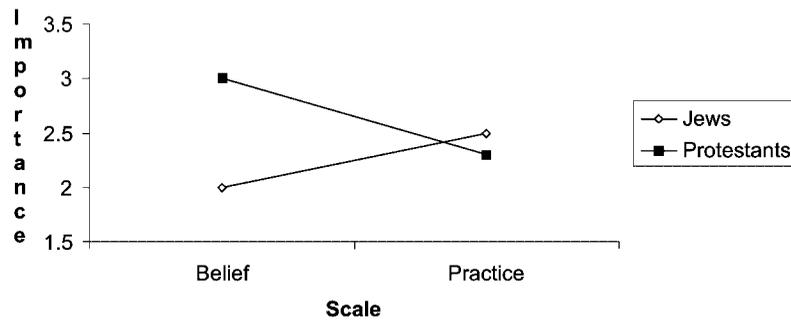


Figure 1. Ratings by Jews and Protestants in Study 1 of the importance of religious belief and religious practice in being a religious member of the participant's religion

analyses and in each case a one-factor solution emerged. Sample items are given for each scale and the items for the entire scales are available from the first author.

The practice scale consisted of 18 items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$) including, for example, the importance to the participant of living within walking distance to a synagogue, frequency of attendance at religious services, observance of the Sabbath, and observance of dietary laws. All ratings were made on 0–5 scales. This scale had a mean of 54.7 and a standard error of 1.96. Scores ranged from 7 to 80.

Five items comprised the belief scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.94$), which measured the extent of belief in Jewish teaching, such as belief that the Messiah will come and that the Bible is God's word. Each item responded to on a 0 (no belief) to 5 (no exception or doubt) scale. The scale had a range of 0 to 25, a mean of 18.3, and a standard error of 0.79.

Eight items assessed participants' knowledge about Judaism (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.82$), including, for example, how well the participant claimed to understand Hebrew and Aramaic, and whether they could correctly answer factual questions about dietary habits. The scale had a range of 1 to 40, a mean of 29.7, and a standard error of 0.87.

Participants were also asked to indicate their level of religiosity from 1 (not at all) to 5 (extremely). We used a single item measure of religiosity to ensure that subjects were making a global judgment of their level of religious commitment. Religiosity ratings ranged from 2 to 5, with a mean of 3.6 and a standard error of 0.10.

Results and Discussion

All three scales (belief, knowledge and practice) were correlated with participants' self-reported religiosity, with practice having the highest correlation ($r = 0.77$, $p \leq 0.001$), belief the middle ($r = 0.50$, $p \leq 0.001$) and knowledge the lowest ($r = 0.24$, $p \leq 0.45$). Reported probabilities for these correlations were Bonferroni corrected. The fact that the belief scale had only five items may partly explain its lower correlation with religiosity judgments (relative to practice). However, the belief scale did have considerable variance. Moreover, the knowledge scale had more items than the belief scale, but a lower correlation with religiosity judgments.

Next, we performed a linear regression predicting religiosity from the belief, practice and practice scales. Only the practice scale was a significant predictor in this regression ($t(n = 69) = 7.64$, $\beta = 0.84$, $SE = 0.11$, $p \leq 0.001$). The belief scale did not significantly predict religiosity over and above the effect of practice ($t = -0.95$, $p \leq 0.35$), and neither did the knowledge scale ($t = -1.43$,

$p \leq 0.16$). This model accounted for 61.2% of the variance in religiosity ratings. Predicting religiosity from only the practice scale score accounted for 60.7% of the variance in religiosity ratings and thus the belief scale and knowledge scale did not explain any variance over the effect of the religious practice scale.

STUDY 3

Study 3 had similar methodology and goals as to Study 2 but for Protestants.

Methods

Participants

Participants were students at Dickinson College in Carlisle, PA. All students at Dickinson College ($N =$ about 2100) were emailed that the first author was doing a study on the role of religion in the lives of Dickinson students and asked to fill out an anonymous, online survey. Participants were not compensated for their participation. Over 200 responses were received the first day this email was sent out and data from this first day of data collection were used.

Analysis was limited to the data received from ninety-six Protestants (69 women, 24 men, 3 unspecified). Ages ranged from 19 to 23 ($M = 19.5$, $SD = 1.11$). Twenty participants were Methodist, 17 Presbyterian, 14 nondenominational Christians, 13 were Lutheran, and 12 Episcopalian. Small numbers of other denominations were also included, such as Baptist, Congregational, Mennonite, and United Church of Christ.

Questionnaire

Participants were asked to rate their religiosity on a 0 (not at all) to 5 (scale). The mean religiosity self-rating was 2.6 ($SD = 1.4$). A questionnaire similar to that in Study 2 was designed to measure Protestants' belief, practice, and knowledge. Items for all three scales were adapted from existing religiosity scales for Protestants (DeJong, Faulkner, & Warland, 1976; Gibson & Francis, 1996; Glock & Stark, 1966; King & Hunt, 1972). As in Study 2, all scales showed clear one-factor solutions through principal components analyses.

Fifteen items were used to create a Christian belief scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$). Examples of items included extent of belief in eternal life and in the literal truth of the New Testament. Participants indicated the extent of their agreement on a 0 (not at all) to 5 (extremely) scale. The range of the scale was 0 to 75, with a mean of 48.3 and a standard error of 2.24.

Fourteen items were used to create a Christian practice scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.93$). Examples of items included frequency of church attendance and importance of children receiving a religious education. The scale had a range of 1 to 66, with a mean of 25.8 and a standard error of 1.77.

Number of correct responses to seventeen factual questions about the Old and New Testaments were used to create a knowledge scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.87$). One item, for example, assessed whether participants could correctly attribute the following quote to the book of Job: 'And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered my servant_____, that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God, and escheweth evil?' Other items asked participants

whether a book was in the Old Testament, the New Testament, or not in the Bible. This scale had a mean of 7.1, a range of 0 to 16, and a standard error of 0.43.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with our hypotheses, the correlations between practice scale score and religiosity ($r = 0.84$, $p \leq 0.001$) and between belief scale score and religiosity ($r = 0.73$, $p \leq 0.001$) were high and of similar magnitude, and both greater than the correlation between the knowledge scale score and religiosity ($r = 0.34$, $p \leq 0.002$). We examined through multiple regression whether practice, belief and knowledge made independent contributions to religiosity ratings. Both practice ($t = 8.05$, $\beta = 0.06$, $SE = 0.007$, $p \leq 0.001$) and belief ($t = 2.92$, $\beta = 0.015$, $SE = 0.005$, $p \leq 0.005$) significantly predicted religiosity, while knowledge predicted religiosity only marginally ($t = -1.77$, $\beta = -0.043$, $SE = 0.024$, $p \leq 0.08$). This model accounted for 74% of the variance in religiosity ratings.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

In prior work, based on analysis of Scripture and religious dogma, we predicted and found that mental states figure more prominently in the moral judgments of Protestants as compared to Jews (Cohen & Rozin, 2001). The present results complement such results, displaying another domain (religiosity) in which mental states are more important or salient for Protestants than for Jews. Study 1 showed that in ratings of what it means to be religious, using items common to Judaism and Christianity, Protestants and Jews rated practice equally important, but Protestants rated belief more important than Jews. In Studies 2 and 3, using items tailored to the particular religious affiliations, religious practice predicted religiosity self-ratings for both Jews and Protestants, whereas religious belief predicted religiosity self-ratings (over the effect of practice) only for Protestants.

One shortcoming with the current set of studies is that it paid too little attention to denominational differences within Judaism and Protestantism. It is our sense that the issue being investigated herein represents clear differences between Jews as a group and Protestants as a group. Nevertheless, both Judaism and Protestantism are composed of many denominations or sects with meaningful differences between them. There are many sects of Protestants with variations in doctrine and practice (Guth, Green, Smidt, Kellstedt, & Poloma, 1997). One major dimension along which one might characterize different Protestant sects (again, not to obscure important differences between specific denominations) is orthodox as opposed to modernist (also referred to as private and public, or evangelical and mainline, or liberal and fundamental; cf. Marty's, 1970 discussion of the two-party system in American Protestantism).

Likewise, denominations of Judaism differ in relationship to the Jewish legal tradition (*halakhah*), and in other important ways. Although the word 'orthodox' means correct belief, Orthodox Judaism '... is based on a *halakhic* (legal) system which legislates precise modes of behavior for virtually any situation in which a person finds himself' (Telushkin, 1991, p. 241). At the time of its founding, Reform Judaism saw social activism as the most central part of Judaism and considered the Torah's ritual laws outdated and no longer binding (Telushkin, 1991) though in recent years Reform Judaism has begun to expect more adherence to Jewish ritual. Conservative Judaism considers itself bound by almost all Torah rituals in addition to the ethics but also allows innovations in Jewish law, such as the inclusion of women in many aspects of ritual life that Orthodox Judaism considers open only to men (Telushkin, 1991).

It would be interesting to explore issues related to the relative importance of behavior and mental states in the context of other religious traditions and other ethnic groups. It may turn out that emphasis on practice may go along with whether the group in question is an identifiable ethnic group more than on religious dogma as articulated in the religious tradition, to the extent that these are dissociable. If this is so, then we would expect a parallel emphasis on practice in the other major religion of descent, Hinduism, and a parallel emphasis on thought or faith in the other major religions of descent, Islam and Buddhism (Morris, 1996).

AUTHORS' NOTE

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