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Need for closure and adult attachment dimensions as predictors of religion and reading interests

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Abstract

Interest in religion and spirituality is motivated by cognitive and affective needs. In the present study, 181 adults who were approached at the exits of bookstores evaluated themselves on the following dimensions: adult attachment (anxiety and avoidance), need for closure (preference for order and predictability), religion (classic religiosity and spirituality/emotion-based religion) and reading interests. Need for closure (but not attachment dimensions) predicted classic religiosity whereas anxiety in relationships (but not avoidance) and preference for order (but not predictability) predicted interest in spirituality/emotional religion. Finally, people high in anxiety reported high interest in reading spirituality books. Discussion questions the correspondence model (secure people are more religious) and emphasizes the need for distinguishing between anxiety and avoidance when studying religion, as well as the need to understand the religion-need for closure relation in the context of individual history.

Theoretical and empirical evidence suggests that attitudes and practices related to religion reflect cognitive and affective-relational needs. This has been particularly the case within an attachment theory perspective (Kirkpatrick, 1999, for review) and within a need for

closure approach (Saroglou, 2002a). However, as explained below, some methodological questions remain open. In addition, given the inter-relation between need for closure and attachment (e.g., Mikulincer, 1997), we know little about the unique predictability of each of these two dimensions on religion.

Need for closure and religion

Religion seems to reflect certain cognitive needs: construction of world views, asking questions about and having some answers to existential enigmas relative to life, death, and the finality of the individual and the cosmos as a whole, as well as understanding events of the internal and external world more broadly than by simply offering causal explanations restricted to "objective" reality. However, these needs are not specific to religion: they are universal. As Saroglou (2003) pointed out, what seems to be specific to religion is that

1) construction of, or quest for, meaning has to be in accordance with a certain authority-tradition (usually coming from the past or at least recognized as legitimate within a specific group);
2) world and life are considered as meaningful and as having a purpose rather than as being meaningless; and
3) unresolved conflict between different-opposite ideas, beliefs, and opinions is to be avoided, whereas harmony, connection, and integration between them are important.

With respect to this clarification, Saroglou (2002a) argued that religiosity is positively related to need for cognitive closure (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994). Need for closure reflects five domains, mainly preference for order and predictability, but also including intolerance of ambiguity, decisiveness, and closed-mindedness. This construct emphasizes a motivational dimension for structure (not necessarily a simple structure), for an answer, any answer as opposed to confusion and ambiguity, and is not restrained to a particular closure to some specific types of beliefs (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; see also Kruglanski, Atash, De Grada, Mannetti, Pierro, & Webster, 1997).

Religious people are hypothesized to be high in need for closure: they seem to give great importance to values emphasizing reduction of uncertainty (Saroglou et al., 2003; Schwartz & Huismans, 1995), they are not open to experience (except those who are interested in spirituality or are mature in religion; Saroglou, 2002b), they value self-control and self-mastery as religious ideals (Baumeister & Exline, 1999), and they are low in impulsivity (Francis, 1992) and activities favoring release of control such as risk taking (Miller & Hoffmann, 1995), non traditional sexuality (Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, & Gorsuch, 1996, for review), and spontaneous humor creation (Saroglou, 2002c; Saroglou & Jaspard, 2001).

Results from Saroglou's (2002a) study confirmed overall the hypothesis: classic personal religiosity was associated with need for closure. In addition, preference for order was the main predictor of this relation (once controlled for the overlap between the five need for closure dimensions). However, interestingly, a second construct, openness-interest in spirituality and in emotion-based religious aspects was unrelated to need for closure. In a multiple regression analysis (controlling for the overlap between need for closure facets) this construct was negatively related to closed-mindedness and decisiveness, unrelated to preference for order and predictability, and positively related to discomfort with ambiguity.

One limitation of the above study is its sample, i.e., 1st and 2nd year psychology and sociology-economics students. Does the religiosity of older adults also reflect a need for cognitive closure? On the one hand, it could be assumed that the religion-need for closure association expressed in that sample the (post)adolescent need for construction of meaning, identity, and purpose in life. On the other hand, one could argue that the above association may also be present among older adults: they also remain religious or (re)discover religion, possibly in order to find meaning and order in their life, especially after personal crises and distress (Pargament, 1997). An additional limitation of Saroglou's (2002a) study is that the measure of religiosity has been restricted to self-reported pro-religious/spiritual *attitudes*. However, it could be interesting to examine whether the need for closure is also related to specific pro-religious/spiritual *practices* reflecting quest for meaning/order in life that do not necessarily imply previous pro-religious decisions such as affiliation or other engagements. For instance, the interest in reading religion and

spirituality books may be considered as such an "explorative" pro-religious/spiritual practice.

Attachment and religion

Applying attachment theory to the psychological study of religion, Kirkpatrick (1999) hypothesized that God may function as an attachment figure and that individual differences in child and/or adult attachment may correspond to individual differences in religiosity in general, and in religious representations (e.g., God figure) and behaviors (e.g., conversion) in particular. A series of recent studies confirms two models. According to the *correspondence* model, positive attitudes towards religion as well as a positive relation to God seem to be typical of people with secure attachment whereas, according to the *compensation* model, religion may be a "heaven of safety", and God may be a substitute figure of attachment for people with insecure, especially anxious-ambivalent, attachment style (Kirkpatrick, 1999).

Accepting simultaneously both models may lead to contradictory predictions (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999). However, the compensation model may be understood as explaining a longitudinal process whereas the correspondence model may reflect a contemporary-simultaneous situation (Kirkpatrick, 1999). In addition, as found by Granqvist and Hagekull (1999), the correspondence model describes religiosity as based on continuity with parental religion through socialization, whereas the compensation model allows for the understanding of a religiosity based on emotion-regulation needs.

An important limitation of most of the above studies is the fact that they used as attachment measure a simple self-classification of the participants' own attachment styles (or an evaluation in a Likert-format one-item scale) on the basis of one-sentence descriptions for each of the three (Hazan & Shaver, 1987) or four (Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991) attachment styles. However, recent research indicates that adult attachment variation does not fit a taxonomic model; attempts to impose categorical models on attachment can lead to serious problems in conceptual analyses, statistical power, and measurement precision (Fraley & Waller, 1998). In addition, the

almost self-definition as secure or insecure in adult relationships may be particularly problematic when focusing on religion, as substantial evidence suggests that religious people tend to score high in social desirability (Trimble, 1997). Following more general skepticism on the relation between religion and subjective well-being (religious people could be influenced by religious ideals to perceive themselves as happy), we may wonder whether religious people perceive themselves as secure by suppressing/denying, for instance, negative feelings relative to their relationships.

Recent methodological research on measurement of adult attachment seems to be in favor of dimensional rather than taxonomical models in attachment. Analyses of various multi-item questionnaires clearly suggest two dimensions in attachment: *anxiety* over relationships (concerns about love, worry about abandonment, negative representation of self) and *avoidance* (discomfort with closeness, negative representation of the other); see Brennan, Clark, and Shaver (1998); Fraley, Waller, and Brennan (2000). Brennan et al. (1998) developed a 36-item questionnaire that taps the two above dimensions and has test information functions that are clearly higher than previous multi-item scales, although there is still a possibility of improvement (Fraley et al., 2000). In addition, inspection of these questionnaire items leads us to agree with Brennan et al. (1998), who argue that their dimensional measures are close to attachment interviews in as much as, contrary to categorical self-descriptions, they do not require people to say fairly directly whether they are or are not secure. Consequently, research on attachment predictors of religious representations and behaviors could possibly gain from less direct attachment measures.

Reading interests

With the exception of some research on reading of self-help books, little attention has been paid to personality, cognitive, and affective factors that may undermine reading interests and reading preferences. However, it may be assumed that reading-related behaviors depend on specific cognitive and affective/relational needs. Popular psychology considers for instance that people that are low in sociability or feel discomfort with relationships "find refuge" in reading; that people

who are anxious and emotionally unstable are interested in popular psychology and self-help books (although Wilson & Cash [2000] found that readers of self-help books report greater life satisfaction); and that people high in active quest for meaning and intellectual stimulation may be attracted by philosophy books. With regard to religion, we may assume that being interested in and reading religion and spirituality books may be a behavior that contributes useful information to the psychological understanding of religion. People may for instance not label themselves as "religious" or "interested in spirituality", and nevertheless spend hours in bookstores looking for religion/spirituality books that may correspond to some personal interests. With regard to need for closure and to attachment, we may assume that looking for and reading religion/spirituality books may reflect, as an act of actively seeking religious meaning, cognitive order-structure, and emotional support, a high need for closure and an insecurity attachment background. In fact, readers of self-help books have strong self-control orientation in everyday life (Wilson & Cash, 2000) and may be high in neuroticism (Saper & Forest, 1987). In addition, need for affective gratification seems to be one motivation for reading in general (at least for girls; van der Bolt & Tellegen, 1995-1996).

Need for closure and attachment

People with different attachment styles also seem to behave differently on a cognitive level. Secure adults show higher cognitive openness and better recall expectation-incongruent information than insecure adults (Mikulincer & Arad, 1999); they react to a positive affect with broader categorization (Mikulincer & Sheffi, 2000); they report low need for cognitive closure (intolerance of unpredictability and ambiguity), are more likely to rely on new information in making social judgments than insecure persons, and are then more reluctant to endorse rigid beliefs (Mikulincer, 1997).

If insecurity in adult attachment relates so clearly to cognitive needs and behaviors that imply closed-mindedness, rigidity, and, more importantly for our purpose, need for cognitive closure, one could then wonder whether the predictive impact of need for closure and attachment on religion is partially undermined by the overlap between

these two predictors. For instance, such an overlap could imply that people high in classic religiosity are also high in need for closure despite the security in their attachment style (see the correspondence model in the attachment-religion relation). On the contrary, for people high in spirituality/emotional religion, such an overlap could imply that these people are insecure in attachment although they are not high in need for closure (see the compensation model in the attachment-religion relation).

The present study

The aim of the present study was to go further than previous studies and investigate need for closure (limited here to preference for order and predictability) and adult attachment as predictors of religion in adults from general population (and not only students), using different measures for attachment (two-dimensional model and not categorical taxonomy, multi-item and not single-item measures) and for religion-spirituality (reading interests as reported at the exits of bookstores and not only self-reported religious-spiritual attitudes). In addition, the present study examines whether attachment and need for closure are still unique predictors of religious dimensions once taking into account the fact that, according to previous evidence, insecurity of attachment is associated with high need for closure.

Method

Participants

Participants were 181 adults (18-58 yrs old; mean age=27.49) who were approached at the exits from bookstores and asked by a research assistant whether they would like to participate in a study for her master's thesis in psychology. Ninety-three of them had just visited a general bookstore in a Belgian city where a Catholic University is located, whereas 88 of them had just visited a general (the largest) bookstore of Brussels. In total, 64 of them were men and 111 were women (sex unknown in 6 cases). They completed the protocols in 12-15 minutes on average, seated at benches that were outside the

bookstores. At the end, the researcher thanked the participants, explained the main goals of the study, and proposed to inform those who were interested about the results.

Measures

Experiences in close relationships (Brennan et al., 1998). This 7-point Likert-format scale contains 36 items measuring two orthogonal dimensions of attachment: anxiety and avoidance. The scale is based on large analyses of previous attachment scales and taps the underlying structure of these measures that corresponds to the two orthogonal axes (anxiety about self and discomfort with contact with others) of the Bartholomew and Horowitz's (1991) classification of four attachment types. They have higher psychometric qualities in comparison with previous multi-item attachment scales (Fraley et al., 2000) and the two-factor structure has been replicated with a short version of the scale in Jewish participants (Mikulincer & Selinger, 2001). Using our French translation in our sample, when we asked for extraction of two factors, the Varimax rotation (PCA) provided a clear replication of the two dimensions. The first factor included all 18 items of the anxiety dimension (loadings: .72-.40; all second loadings were lower than .30), and the second one included all 18 items of the avoidance dimension (loadings: .70-.23; only 4 second loadings were higher than .30). Reliabilities of the two subscales were high and intercorrelation between them was low (see Table 1), but only 34 % of the total variance was explained.

Need for closure scale. As the conditions in which we asked participants to contribute to the study did not allow for long administration of measures, only the subscales of Preference for Order and Preference for Predictability of the Need for Closure Scale (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994; French translation by Gerard Gauingouain) were used. In fact, these two subscales explain a substantial part of the total variance of the scale and constitute its most representative dimensions (e.g., de Dreu, Koole, & Oldersma, 1999; Saroglou, 2002a). The subscales are in a 7-point Likert-type format and contain 18 items (10 for order and 8 for predictability).

Religiosity scale. This 10-item 7-point Likert-format scale measures personal religiosity. In a previous study with 239 participants (Saroglou, 2002a), two related but different dimensions emerged: a classic religiosity dimension (1. importance of God, 2.

importance of religion in life, 3. attraction by religious ritual, 4. interest in the identity dimension of belonging to a religious tradition, and 5. frequency of prayer), and a spirituality/emotion-based religious dimension (1. importance of spirituality in life; interest in/attraction by 2. meaning and values, 3. aspect of community, 4. emotional-relational dimension, and 5. personal experience in religion; see Saroglou, 2002a, for details on factor analysis).

Reading interests. Participants were asked to give, each time in a 7-point continuum, their degree of interest in reading the following nine categories of books: art and literature, history, philosophy, sociology, psychology, religion, spirituality, esotericism, and leisure. We were interested in reading interests in religion and spirituality, and the other fields were added in order not to focus on these two categories too obviously.

Results

Descriptive statistics, reliability, and intercorrelations between measures are presented in Table 1. No differences were observed between participants from the two bookstores. Only two gender differences were observed: women reported more anxiety in relationships, $t(173) = 2.15$, $p < .05$, and more interest in reading books on psychology and art/literature, $ts(173) = 2.55, 2.52, p < .05$.

Classic religiosity was positively correlated to preference for order and predictability whereas spirituality/emotional religion was, to a lesser extent, positively related to preference for order, but unrelated to preference for predictability. Spirituality (and also classic religiosity, in a marginal way) was positively correlated with anxiety in relationships. Finally, anxiety (but not avoidance) was positively related to both dimensions of need for closure.

	M	*SD*	*α*	N. Closure	Attachment		Religion	
				predicta-bility	anxiety	avoidance	classic religion	spirituality/ emot. relig.
Need for closure								
Order	47.76	14.97	.78	.59***	.14+	-.03	.28***	.17*
Predictability	33.89	13.74	.82		.24***	.00	.29***	.02
Attachment								
Anxiety	71.16	19.46	.88			.16*	.14+	.16*
Avoidance	48.79	16.17	.85				.06	-.00
Religion								
Classic religion	13.55	7.03	.80					.71***
Spirituality/ emot. relig.	19.43	8.31	.84					

Table 1. Descriptive statistics, reliability, and intercorrelations between measures

Note. N = 181.
* *p* < .05. *** *p* < .001. + *p* < .10 (two-tailed).

In order to control for overlap between variables predicting religion, we conducted two multiple regression analyses, one for classic religiosity and one for spirituality/emotion-based religion, with the two need for closure and the two attachment dimensions as independent variables (see Table 2). It turned out that classic religiosity was only predicted by high need for order whereas spirituality was predicted by high preference for order and anxiety in relationships, but also by low preference for predictability. (Results did not change when the religious dimension other than the predicted one was added as independent variable in order to control for its overlap with the predicted religious dimension).

	Classic religiosity			Spirituality/emotional religion		
	B	*t*	partial	B	*t*	partial
Need for closure						
Order	.29	3.16**	.24	.43	4.78***	.35
Predictability	-.03	-0.34	-.03	-.27	-3.01**	-.23
Attachment						
Anxiety	.11	1.39	.11	.17	2.23*	.16
Avoidance	.05	0.64	.05	-.29	-0.29	-.02

Table 2. Multiple regressions of need for closure and attachment dimensions on religion

Note. N = 181.
* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01. *** *p* < .001. (two-tailed).

Finally, some reading interests were predicted by need for closure, attachment, and religion measures. Both classic religiosity and spirituality were related to interest in both religion (*rs* = .52, .50, *p* < .001) and spirituality (.33, .46, *p* < .001) books. In addition, need for closure (preference for order and predictability) was negatively related to interest in art and literature books (*rs* = -.24, -.25, *p* < .001), as well as philosophy books (-.20, *p* < .01; -.29, *p* < .001). Interestingly, people who were attracted by spirituality and esotericism books tended to be anxious in relationships (.15, .17, *p* < .05), and people high in classic religiosity seemed to be interested in history books (.15, *p* < .05).

Discussion

Religion seems to be predicted by cognitive and/or affective needs, but differently for the two religious dimensions. In conformity with a previous study (Saroglou, 2002a), classic religiosity was related to high need for closure (preference for order and predictability); preference for order was the main important predicting factor. However, contrary to previous studies (Kirkpatrick, 1999, for review)

using self-classification following one-sentence descriptions of attachment styles and having suggested a correspondence model (secure people tend to be more religious), in our study, when multi-item and more indirect attachment scales were used (measuring two dimensions: anxiety and avoidance), classic religion was unrelated to these attachment dimensions (a marginally significant correlation with anxiety turned out to be non-significant in regression analysis).

A possible explanation of this discrepancy between our study and previous ones could be that religiosity (at least socialization-based religiosity; see Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999) does indeed not reflect security in attachment. Use of direct, self-classificatory methods to describe one's own attachment style may constitute a bias, as religious people probably tend to "convince" themselves that they are secure in relationships. For example, besides the established association between religion and subjective well-being (e.g., Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999), one might wonder whether religious ideals valuing happiness as a proof of "salvation" lead religious people to perceive themselves as happy. Finally, because of the absence of association between classic religion and attachment dimensions, there is no support for the "conflict" expected on the basis of previous literature (see introduction) between a) need for closure, found to predict classic religiosity, and b) security in attachment, found to relate to low need for closure but unrelated to classic religiosity.

Interest in spirituality-emotionality in religion was also predicted by high need for order, and (when the other variables were held constant in regression analysis) by low preference for predictability, but also by high anxiety in adult relationships. In addition, people who reported to be interested in reading spirituality (and esotericism) books tended to be high in anxiety. These findings regarding attachment are consistent with the compensation model (Kirkpatrick, 1999), especially when focusing on religion based on need for emotional regulation (Granqvist & Hagekull, 1999), but they only limit the compensation model in the anxiety dimension of attachment (i.e., not in avoidance). With regard to the need for closure, the findings did not replicate (neither were they totally inconsistent with) Saroglou's (2002a) study, where this spirituality/emotion-based religion dimension was unrelated to need for closure in general (in zero-order correlations), and (once the overlap between need for closure facets was controlled for) to preference for order and

predictability, while positively related to discomfort with ambiguity and negatively related to decisiveness and closed-mindedness. These two studies, taken together, looking beyond their minor dissimilarities, may suggest for further research that openness to spirituality is not a sign of closed-mindedness towards novel and unpredictable experiences and ideas (spirituality is even positively related to Big Five Openness; Saroglou, 2002b), but a sign of a need for (at least minimal) order instead of chaos and ambiguity. Finally, the regression analysis revealed that need for order and anxiety in attachment are still unique predictors of spirituality/emotional religion, beyond the overlap between these two predictive constructs. Apparently, people may have religious/spiritual interests because of their cognitive needs for closure but this relation does not seem to be explained by insecurity in attachment.

In comparison with previous literature, the present study suggests at least two ideas. First, not only religious students but also religious adults in general tend to be high in need for order, although, as evoked in the introduction, different age-related motivations may explain this association. Second, it is the anxiety dimension of attachment and not the avoidance one that predicts interest in spirituality/emotional religion and in spirituality and esotericism books. Avoidant adults, having a negative working model of others, and thus not valuing relationships, are not likely to find in religion a substitute attachment figure (see also Kirkpatrick, 1999). In contrast, as some studies indicate that people who frequently read books tend to report high involvement in empathy and sympathy (van der Bolt & Tellegen, 1994-1995) and that some people find in reading an affective gratification (van der Bolt & Tellegen, 1995-1996), it seems as if the reading of spirituality books is a way of facing anxiety in relationships and negative representation of self (implying worry about abandonment and concerns about love). But this is not the case for people who are avoidant; perhaps other forms of religious-spiritual practices than reading relative books (e.g., affiliation with a small-size community?) may help such adults to face discomfort with closeness.

Finally, although high need for closure seemed to reflect cognitive needs of insecure (anxious but not avoidant) adults (see also Mikulincer, 1997), these cognitive needs did not simply translate affective-relational needs: both, additively, predict one or another religious-spiritual attitude-practice. With regard to attachment, it is

now established that adult attachment is partially determined by early childhood attachment (e.g., Waters, Weinfield, & Hamilton, 2000), and, thus, that adult pro-religious behaviors and attitudes may be seen as a function of parental relations and individual attachment history (Kirkpatrick, 1999). On the contrary, little is known about the origins of the need for closure as an individual differences dimension. If not because of their insecure attachment history, why is it that some people need more order and cognitive closure, and are thus more pro-religiously, pro-spiritually orientated than others?

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