**Article Critique Part Three**

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The present study sought to test the hypothesis that religiousness is more prominent in socially excluded populations. In its introduction, the authors drew upon ideas dating back to Sigmund Freud, “… who argued that one of the core functions of religion is to act as a buffer against social loneliness…”  (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010, p. 742). The authors provided further support for Freud’s notion in various ways. Initially they discussed Attachment Theory, wherein God can act as a substitute attachment figure for socially excluded individuals (Kirkpatrick, 1992, p. 1-31). Accordingly, they cited statistics which demonstrate high religious involvement in marginalized populations, such as African-Americans (Coleman, 2003, p. 892-905). These arguments, and the past studies associated with them, were used by the authors to build a foundation for discussing their hypothesis. But despite using other studies as a historical background, the authors dismissed past research on exclusion and religiousness as “nonexperimental, observational, or suggestive” (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010, p. 742). They were clearly unsatisfied with its “preliminary” nature and wanted to address the topic differently. Specifically, the authors’ aim was to analyze religiousness with respect to social exclusion, to do so more empirically than past research, and to see if a connection existed between the two.

It should be noted that the present study consisted of five separate experiments. Of these, the first experiment most explicitly reflected the hypothesis. As stated by the authors, their goal was to “gather initial evidence that the socially excluded indeed report being more religious than the non-excluded” (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010, p. 743). I will focus on the methods of this first experiment.

In this experiment, the authors analyzed the effect of exclusion on religiousness as moderated by migrant status The sample was recruited in Bavaria, Germany and Anatolia, Turkey through personal contacts. It was comprised of N=457 Turkish participants, divided into a “migrant sample” living in Germany (n=167) and a “native sample” (n=288) living in Turkey. Ages were M = 40.3 (SD = 13.13) and M = 38.80 (SD = 16.00), respectively. Gender proportions were 53% female; 47% male for the migrants, and 53% male; 47% female for the natives. In person, all participants were given a translated version of Allport and Ross’s “Religious Orientation Scale” (ROS), which is a survey consisting of twelve statements about religious belief. An example statement is “prayer is for peace and happiness” (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010, p. 745). Participants then marked their agreement with each statement on a scale of 1 to 9 from least agreement to most agreement. Additionally, to confirm whether the migrant population indeed felt excluded, the authors created their own scale to measure social exclusion, which included statements like “I often feel alone” (Aydin, Fischer, & Frey, 2010, p. 745). Answers were recorded on a scale of 0 to 3 from “never feeling this way” to “often feeling this way”. Participant responses for both surveys were recorded and aggregated. ANOVA demonstrated higher levels of both self-reported religiousness and self-reported social exclusion in the migrant sample. The authors concluded that self-reported social exclusion positively correlates with increased self-reported religiousness, even when they controlled for migrant status.

There were notable positives and negatives in the research design of this study. Positives include the following. Firstly, the study was a valid measure of religiousness with respect to social exclusion. It measured exactly what it purported to measure, and did so empirically through the ROS. This was in contrast to previous studies mentioned by the authors, which they thought to be lacking in statistics Using the ROS allowed the authors to quantify religiousness, which could otherwise be difficult to measure. Secondly, the authors made sure not to rely on the assumption that all migrants felt socially excluded. Even though it seems logical that migrants would feel socially excluded, they constructed a second survey to determine whether this was actually the case. This allowed them to see if the experimental group (migrants) was in fact unique, in terms of social exclusion, compared to the control group (natives). Thirdly, the authors conducted four additional experiments to assess a causal link between exclusion and religiousness, and to replicate their findings. This helped establish that the first experiment was not an illusory correlation, but rather that a relationship may actually exist between exclusion and religiousness.

The negatives of the study seemed to outnumber the positives, however, and they include the following. Firstly, the experiment may lack reliability. Whether these results can be repeated over time, as conditions change for migrants and society becomes more or less religious in general, remains to be seen. Secondly, the study may lack external validity. Although the first experiment provided existence proof that social exclusion and religiousness can be positively correlated, the results may not apply to other populations. Just because that trend occurred in one sample does not mean it will manifest in the real world like it did in surveys. This is because the sample was an extremely specific demographic which may behave differently from other groups. Even in the proceeding experiments, small sample sizes were again used and in these cases, were selected exclusively from Germany. It is doubtful, given how narrow the samples were, that the results from Turks and Germans are completely generalizable to Asians, Africans, Americans and so forth – all with varying socioeconomic status.

Thirdly, any study which depends on self-reporting is vulnerable to response set. In other words, participants may think that religiousness is a virtue, and want to represent themselves positively by saying that they are religious. Self-report honesty is critical for these results to be accurate, because if the self-reported religiousness was not genuine, then the dependent variable is not measurable. Furthermore, self-report honesty itself could be a confounding variable. Perhaps the migrants were more likely to misrepresent their religiousness than the natives, or vice versa. If either is the case, then the subjectivity of responses can undermine the authors’ goal to be empirical.

Finally, I was really disappointed at the lack of attention to detail in this study. Certain information was not provided, which I think would be relevant. For example, it was not specified whether the sample was unanimously Muslim, unanimously Christian, or some combination of the two. Withholding this information could be detrimental. Differences in religious denomination might be a confounding variable, affecting how participants live their lives or respond to the survey. Since it was not discussed in the article, it is unclear whether the authors even considered this during their research design. Another example is that the social exclusion scale created by the authors was only vaguely described in the article. Readers have no way of knowing that such a scale was reputable, how it was constructed, or even its exact details. If it was poorly designed, the legitimacy of the research becomes suspect. Tables and datasets are likewise scarce in the article. All in all, this degree of ambiguity is alarming in professional research.

Of the many limitations mentioned above, most were acknowledged by the authors. They acknowledged that their results should not be generalized, that their samples were limited to monotheistic religions, and that their reliance on particular scales could be problematic. They also admitted that self-reported religiousness may not be consistent with active religious practice or inner devoutness. In doing so, they called for further studies to prove that their results are repeatable. Given the shortcomings of the present research, I look forward to these future studies, and in the meantime, remain unconvinced of the hypothesis.

References

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Naturalistic designs real world high in external validity low in internal validity (cause and effect)……………… existence proof (one example exists of psych penonmennon) ………….. random selection…………. Reliability (repeated over time) and validity ( measure what it pruports to measures) . …………… self report honesty, how accurate are they compared with what others notice, response sets ( paint self in positive light)……………... positive correlationnn….. illusory correlation? …………. Patients blind to study……………… confounding variable any variable besides independent variable which differes between the groups….. double blind = neither researchers nor parts know whos the exp and cont group. ……