

Running head: THE IMPACT OF RELIGIOSITY AND LOCUS OF CONTROL

The Impact of Religiosity and Locus of Control on Academic

Achievement in College Students

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Abstract

The relationship between religiosity, academic achievement, and locus of control was examined through the use of a survey completed by 68 college students. Surveys contained Strayhorn's (1990) "Religiosity Scale," Rotter's (1966) "Locus of Control Scale," an academic achievement scale, and a religious attitude scale. A relationship was found between the academic achievement scale and religious attitude scale. No relationship was found between locus of control and religiosity using the Rotter and Strayhorn scales. It is recommended that this study be repeated with a larger sample size and different professional scales.

The Impact of Religiosity and Locus of Control
on Academic Achievement in College Students

Academic achievement is something that every parent wishes for their child. However, determining exactly what it is that causes students to achieve is not an easy task to do. Previous research by Poulson (1998) has indicated that individuals who have a high level of religiosity are less likely to engage in risky behavior than individuals who have a low level of religiosity. Students who engage in risky behavior often do not have the same level of academic achievement as students who don't engage in risky behavior. This can be due to the fact that when a student engages in risky behavior, such as drug use, it can affect the time and concentration a student is willing to give to his or her academic studies.

Religion has also been directly linked to academic achievement. A study by Oh (1999) found that high school students who had a high level of religiosity were more likely to have a higher GPA than nonreligious students.

Locus of control has also been the subject of a lot of research. A study by Murk and Addleman (1992) found that students who had a high level of moral reasoning were also more likely to have an internal locus of control. Many religious organizations feel that it is their duty to teach moral values, so one can assume that religious students are also likely to score high on a moral reasoning scale. Strayhorn (1966) has found that people who have a high need for achievement, also have a belief in their own ability or skill to determine the outcome of their efforts.

Someone with an internal locus of control would most likely believe in working to be a good person so that they can reach a higher spiritual state. This individual may also believe in

studying and working hard in order to get good grades. The goal of this research is to determine if there is a connection between religiosity, academic achievement, and locus of control. It is hypothesized that college students who have a high level of religiosity will also have a high level of academic achievement. It is also hypothesized that students with high scores of religiosity and academic achievement will also have an internal locus of control.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 68 male and female undergraduates, 18-42 years of age. The mean age of the subjects was 22.12. Five point nine percent of subjects indicated they were in their first year of college, 19.1% were in their second year, 26.5% were in their third year, 36.8% were in their fourth year, and 11.8% indicated they had been in college for five or more years. Subject's religion can be found in Table 1. Subjects were recruited from seven general education classes.

Procedure

The experimenter contacted professors of general education classes via email in order to receive permission to distribute a survey to their students. Once permission was obtained, the experimenter went to the professor's classroom in order to distribute the survey. Subjects were told that they would be completing a survey that dealt with the relationship between religiosity, academic achievement, and locus of control. Subjects filled out "The Religiosity Scale," created by Strayhorn (1990) and the "Locus of Control Scale," created by Rotter (1966). Subjects also filled out an academic achievement scale, which contained questions regarding a student's perceived academic achievement, and a religious attitude scale, which contained questions regarding satisfaction with religion and religion's impact on daily life (See Appendix).

Professors from four of the classes contacted preferred that students complete the survey in the class, while three other classes took their surveys home. The surveys that were taken home were distributed at the end of the subject's class and if they chose to participate, were picked up at the beginning of the next class period. Surveys were distributed in envelopes to ensure confidentiality.

Results

In order to assess the relationship between academic achievement, religiosity, and locus of control, correlations were done on the Strayhorn scale, Rotter scale, religious attitude scale, and academic achievement scale. Mean scores and standard deviations of these four scales can be found in Table 2. A significant correlation was found between the religious attitude scale and the academic achievement scale ($r=.26$, $p<.05$), indicating that students who have high religious attitudes, also have a high level of academic achievement. However, no relationship was found between locus of control and religiosity using the Rotter and Strayhorn scales ($p=.63$, no significance, $p<.05$), indicating that religiosity is not directly related to a person's locus of control.

Though the main focus of the study was not supported, there were relationships found between individual items of the academic achievement scale, religious attitude scale, and the Strayhorn scale. A correlation was found between believing that faith influences everyday life and, perception of being a good student, achieving mostly As and Bs, coming to class prepared, and working hard on assignments. See Table 3. There was also a significant relationship between age and variables, such as studying for exams ($r=-.31$, $p<.01$), studying the bible ($r=.33$, $p<.01$), believing that faith influences everyday life ($r=.26$, $p<.05$), and working hard on assignments ($r=-.31$, $p<.30$).

Finally, praying outside of church was found to have a relationship with perception of being a good student, achieving grades of mostly As and Bs, coming to class prepared, working hard on all assignments, and studying for all exams and quizzes. See Table 4.

Discussion

The present study set out to find a relationship between academic achievement, religiosity, and locus of control. Previous research indicated that students who have a high level of academic achievement are more likely to be internally controlled and have a higher level of religiosity. However, the results of this study did not support this hypothesis. This most likely had to do with the demographics of the population surveyed. A total of 36.8 percent of subjects indicated "other" on the religion question of the survey. This may be due to the fact that sometimes college students no longer attend church or partake in religious practices when they are away from home because there is no pressure from family to do so.

One reason why the Strayhorn Scale may not have yielded more significance is that it is geared more towards the Christian religion, whereas the religious attitude scale was more universal. Exactly half of the questions on the Strayhorn scale mentioned God. If an individual was a member of a religion that doesn't believe in God, they might feel uncomfortable completing the Strayhorn scale.

A possible reason why the variable of age is negatively correlated with factors such as studying and working hard on assignments may be because as a student's age increases there is a greater chance that they will have a full time job and/or a family. These two commitments can take away from time needed to study and prepare for class.

Praying and academic achievement variables are most likely positively correlated because they both involve being conscientious. In a way, praying can be related to church the

same way that homework is to school. They both involve individual effort in order to get a better understanding of a larger task at hand. Someone who takes their religion seriously will most likely pray on their own and someone who takes their education seriously will study and do their homework

A problem with the study may involve the scales used. When being surveyed, several students complained out loud that they were dissatisfied with some of the questions on the Rotter and Strayhorn scales. These complaints in of themselves may have affected the results of the study because they may have had an affect on how the rest of the students in the class regarded the survey.

Both the Rotter and Strayhorn scales are popular choices when studying questions of religiosity and locus of control, but a future study may be better served with different scales. Also, a larger sample size may provide more conclusive data in future studies. Other areas of future research to consider would be to look at other variables that influence academic achievement, such as family.

Though the results of the present study are inconclusive, finding a direct connection between religiosity, locus of control, and academic achievement could help researchers better predict what kinds of children will obtain academic achievement. This kind of information would open the door to different kinds of parenting techniques and different ways of educating in the future.

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Table 1

Religion

Religion	Frequency	Percent
Protestant	9	13.2
Catholic	32	47.1
Jewish	1	1.5
Muslim	1	1.5
Other	25	36.8

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations of the Strayhorn scale,

Rotter scale, academic achievement scale, and religious

attitude scale

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation
Rotter Scale	33.49	5.46
Strayhorn Scale	14.32	11.03
Religious Attitude Scale	37.75	17.01
Academic Achievement Scale	12.55	5.79

Table 3

Influence of Faith in Every Day Life on Academic Achievement Variables

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Perception of being a good student	$r=.28^*$
Achieving mostly As and Bs	$r=.32^{**}$
Coming to class prepared	$r=.31^*$
Working hard on assignments	$r=-.25^*$

* $(p<.05)$

** $(p<.01)$

Table 4

Influence of Praying on Academic Achievement Variables

Variable	Correlation Coefficient
Perception of being a good student	$r=.26^*$
Achieving grades of mostly As and Bs	$r=.33^{**}$
Coming to class prepared	$r=.33^{**}$
Working hard on all assignments	$r=.34^{**}$
Studying for exams and quizzes	$r=.31^{**}$

*= (p<.05)

**= (p<.01)