

Reconsidering the relationship between Parenting and Religiosity

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Summary. - This study examined the relation between religiosity and parenting. Three-hundred eleven parents from the Flemish speaking part of Belgium completed the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Fontaine et al., 2002) and reported on their style of parenting. Scores for religiosity (as measured by the Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence dimension) were not significantly correlated with parenting styles. In contrast, the way in which religious contents are processed (as measured by the Literal vs. Symbolic dimension) was significantly correlated to dimensions of parenting style.

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In a recent meta-analytic review, Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank (2001) concluded that the picture about the interplay of religion with parenting is incomplete. This would be due to the often unreliable and simplistic religiosity measures. Therefore, we aimed to reconsider this relation in a sample of 311 parents from the Flemish speaking part of Belgium (50% men; mean age = 49) using a recent multi-dimensional religiosity measure that allows to disentangle the effects of being religious or not from the way in which religious contents are processed. The questionnaires were distributed by undergraduate students who asked their parents to participate.

Participants completed four shortened parenting scales (Lamborn, Mounts, Steinberg, & Dornbusch, 1991) that were translated into Flemish by Beyers and Goossens (1999): Responsiveness (7 items; Mean = 4.11, SD = 0.58), Psychological Control (7 items; Mean = 2.06, SD = 0.62), Behavioral Control (7 items; Mean = 3.03, SD = 0.65), and Autonomy Support (5 items; Mean = 4.17, SD = 0.52). The items of all of these scales were rated on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = complete disagreement, 5 = complete agreement). Estimates of internal consistency were .82, .73, .74 and .61. A composite Authoritativeness score (= Responsiveness - Psychological Control + Behavioral Control + Autonomy Support) was also calculated (Mean = 9.25, SD = 1.31). In addition, participants completed the Post-Critical Belief Scale (Fontaine, Duriez, Luyten, & Hutsebaut, 2003; 33 items). The items of all of this scale were rated on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = complete disagreement, 7 = complete agreement). The Post-Critical Belief Scale contains items measuring Literal Inclusion of Transcendence (e.g., "Only a priest can give an answer to important religious questions"), Literal Exclusion of Transcendence (e.g., "In the end, faith is nothing more than a safety net for human fears"), Symbolic Exclusion of Transcendence (e.g., "Secular and religious conceptions of the world give valuable answers to important questions about life") and Symbolic Inclusion of Transcendence (e.g., "The Bible holds a deeper truth which can only be revealed by personal reflection"). As in Fontaine et al. (2003), a principal

component analysis yielded two factors which could be interpreted as Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence and Literal vs. Symbolic. Estimates of internal consistency were .89 for Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence (Mean = 0.00, SD = 1.00) and .85 for Literal vs. Symbolic (Mean = 0.00, SD = 1.00). A high score on Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence indicates a tendency to include transcendence and to define oneself as religious. A high score on Literal vs. Symbolic indicates a tendency to deal with religion in a personal, open and symbolic way.

Scores for Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence were unrelated to Authoritativeness ($r=.04$, ns), as well as to Responsiveness ($r=.09$, ns), Behavioral Control ($r=.06$, ns), Psychological Control ($r=.06$, ns), and Autonomy Support ($r=-.02$, ns). In contrast, Literal vs. Symbolic related to Authoritativeness ($r=.22$, $p<.0001$). This relation was due to the relation with Psychological Control ($r=-.17$, $p<.01$) and Autonomy Support ($r=.21$, $p<.0001$). No relation with Responsiveness ($r=.08$, ns) and Behavioral Control ($r=.05$, ns.) was found. These results suggest that religiosity (as measured by the Exclusion vs. Inclusion of Transcendence dimension) is not related to parenting styles. However, there is a significant relation between certain parenting styles and the way parents process religious contents (as measured by the Literal vs. Symbolic dimension). Parents that process religious contents in a symbolic way tend to be more authoritative, tend to support autonomy and tend to rely less on psychological control.

References

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