

## CHURCH PARTICIPATION AND THE OLDER ADULT An Orientational Approach<sup>1</sup>

Bill D. Bell, Ph.D.  
University of Arkansas at Little Rock

This article examines the utility of the Jacoby Instrumental-Expressive Orientation Indices in predicting the church participation of older adults (mean age 65 years). A sample of fifty-four United Methodist males was subjected to analysis. The findings indicate significant differences between orientation scores. The respondents proved more instrumentally than expressively oriented toward the church. Further, a significant relationship was noted between instrumental orientation scores and church participation. No significant relationship was observed in the case of expressive scores. The tendency was apparent to view participation in the church as a means to one or more social ends rather than as an end in itself. Twenty-four per cent of the variance in participation was explained without reference to religious antecedents.

### An Alternative Conceptual Approach

A single over-arching tradition has characterized the study of older adult religious behavior in the United States. This perspective suggests a probable causal relationship between age, religiosity, and church participation (e.g., Bultena, 1949; Lazerwitz, 1961; Lenski, 1953). Although disagreement exists on the issue (Fiske, 1961; Covalt, 1960; Barron, 1961; and Orbach, 1961), most contemporary research suggests a general increase in religious interest with age. Erskine (1965), for example, observes that older persons exhibit a stronger belief in God and in an afterlife, attend church more regularly, and read the Bible and practice private devotions more than younger age groups. In the same fashion, Taves and Hansen (1963), Lloyd (1955), Culver (1961), and Kuhlen (1962), tend to perceive the significant drop in non-church activities and the reemphasis on church and religious participation among the elderly as the result of increased concern for religion with age.

The present paper suggests an alternative and perhaps complementary methodology with respect to assessing the church participation of older persons. Rather than stress the intensification of religious beliefs relative to specific

---

<sup>1</sup>An expanded version of a paper read at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Sociology of Religion, August 26, 1973, in New York. The study from which this analysis is drawn was supported in part by research funds provided by the Midwest Council for Social Research in Aging, a Division of the Institute for Community Studies in Kansas City, Missouri.

age groups, it is proposed that the group character of the religious community be emphasized (Bell, 1973). Specifically, the writer advocates the use of a methodology which attempts to gauge the nature and importance of an associational unit (i.e., the church) to the individuals concerned. Such an approach "explains" participatory behavior in terms of the person's phenomenological orientation to an associational context, as opposed to his commitment to a given belief system.

Jacoby (1965) has argued the utility of an orientational approach to predicting social behavior in various groupings. He proposes that expressive or instrumental orientations predominate in the phenomenological appraisal of behavioral settings. By "measuring" these dimensions of cognitive awareness, Jacoby suggests it possible to relate the behavior of individuals who are "high" or "low" on either dimension to various types of activities--among these participatory behavior. The expressively-oriented individual, he argues, tends to view participation in a given setting in terms of an immediate and continuing need for social and emotional gratification; to orient or focus his activities inward with respect to a given grouping; and to regard his activities in the organization as ends in themselves. The instrumentally-oriented person, on the other hand, "engages in activities that affect persons other than group members; regards long-range, external goals as important; and is willing to take part in activities that do not provide immediate and personal gratification in order to accomplish these goals." (Jacoby, 1965:164)

The present study employs the Jacoby Indices to examine the church participation of older adults--age range 36 to 88 years. By so doing, the research seeks to determine, first of all, whether a specific orientation prevails toward the church; secondly, whether a significant relationship exists between specific orientations and participation for this age group.

#### The Respondent Selection Process

The data were derived from interviews with a stratified random sample of sixty male respondents representative of the white collar population of a large United Methodist Church (c. 2800 members) located in Northeastern Kansas in the spring of 1970. The Duncan Socio-Economic Index (Blau and Duncan, 1967) was employed to differentiate white collar from blue collar occupations. This index computes SES scores and assigns decile rankings to occupational categories. The sample in question was drawn from those whose occupations had at least a 38.5 SES score and a corresponding decile rank between 7 and 10. Two-hundred and thirty-six individuals met the necessary criteria.

In addition to occupational rankings, stratification criteria demanded that all respondents be: (a) United Methodists, (b) married and living with their spouse, (c) in relatively good health, and (d) owning or having access to appropriate means of transportation. Along with the interview format, information was obtained by self-scoring scales relative to the instrumental-expressive orientations of the respondents. As six of these individuals were not current participants in the church in question, orientation scales were administered only to the remaining fifty-four subjects. All interviews were conducted in the homes of the respondents.

## Major Variables and Research Focus

Instrumental-Orientation Index: The instrumental index is an indicator of the degree to which an individual considers participation in a given grouping as a means to an end. Jacoby argues that, ". . . the person who is instrumentally oriented to a given association, (1) engages in activities that affect persons other than group members; (2) regards long-range, external goals as important; (3) is willing to take part in activities that do not provide immediate and personal gratification in order to accomplish these goals. Thus . . . he would seem to be highly concerned with others and with long-range goals." (Jacoby, 1965:164)

The instrumental index was composed of six items. Examples of these items are provided below. Subjects responded "agree," "agree in part," and "do not agree" to each item of the index. Response alternatives were weighted from 2 (agree) to 0 (do not agree). The respondent's score was the sum of the weighted alternatives endorsed by him. High scores were taken to reflect strong orientations toward the church. For hypothesis-testing purposes, scores were dichotomized at the median into designations of "high" and "low" orientation. As can be seen below, the scale items utilized in the present research were modified slightly to relate specifically to the church. Even though modified, however, the instrumental index exhibited a Guttman coefficient of .93.

Item No. 1: The organization's (church's) activities may or may not be enjoyable in and of themselves, but I get a great deal of satisfaction from knowing that, in the long run, worthwhile and desirable results are accomplished.

Item No. 3: I participate in the organization (church) because it attempts to accomplish purposes for which I stand.

Item No. 5: A major reason why I participate in the activities of the organization (church) is because it (the church) seeks to bring about goals which I consider desirable.

Expressive-Orientation Index: The expressive index is an indicator of the degree to which an individual considers participation in a given grouping as an end in itself. For the expressively oriented, (1) their participation represents an immediate and continuing need for social and emotional gratification; (2) they tend to orient or focus their activities inward with respect to a given grouping, i.e., they value those activities which are confined or self-contained within the organization; and (3) they regard their activities in the organization as ends in themselves, i.e., these activities have a meaning and value in and of themselves. (Gordon & Babchuk, 1959)

The expressive index was similarly composed of six items. Examples of these items are presented below. The same response format was employed as in the case of the instrumental index. In addition, modification of items can be seen in relation to church references. Again, however, the expressive index exhibited a Guttman coefficient of .95.

Item No. 1: I take part in the organization's (church's) activities just for the sake of participating. I really enjoy doing things with the people in my organization (church).

Item No. 3: The activities of the organization (church) in which I take part are valuable in and of themselves regardless of any other purpose they may accomplish.

Item No. 6: Taking part in the activities of the organization (church) is enjoyable in itself. I get a great deal of enjoyment out of doing these things.

Church Participation: Church participation concerned the involvement of the individual in the life of his local church. Whereas 86.7 per cent of the sample did not attend the church school; 76.7 per cent held no offices in the church; and 71.9 per cent participated in no church-sponsored clubs or organizations, the only item considered indicative of church participation was the respondent's Sunday worship attendance. In relation to the latter variable, those individuals with frequencies of worship service attendance of (a) once a week, and (b) twice a month, were considered "high" church participators. Those respondents with frequencies of attendance of (c) once a month, (d) a few times a year, and (e) I do not attend, were considered "low" participators.

#### The Hypotheses Tested

While Jacoby found social class and/or occupational ranking to be significantly correlated with orientation scores, an interaction effect was observed with respect to associational memberships. Although discussed briefly, no clear or concise statements were predicated relative to the church. On the other hand, Glock & Stark (1965), Lenski (1961), Herberg (1967), and Dressler (1969), have emphasized the expressive character of the church by suggesting the church to be a primary source of informal social relations for many older people. These authors point out that even though the church represents a formal organization (in the bureaucratic sense of the term), it places few demands on the individual and stresses the aspect of friendly and warm relationships (i.e., fellowship). Moberg (1962:133-134) proposes that, "as society becomes increasingly secularized the demands of people for primary group relationships may be met increasingly in and by the church and its organizations."

Because of the exploratory nature of the present research, the following hypotheses were advanced with some degree of tentativeness. It is assumed, however, that one orientation will be more in evidence than the other. Specifically,

Hypothesis No. 1: The respondents in the present study will be more expressively than instrumentally oriented with respect to the church.

Secondly, it is assumed that if the orientation indices measure the "motivational potential" of participation as Jacoby suggests, higher scores on these measures should be associated with greater church participation. In line with hypothesis one, it is proposed that,

Hypothesis No. 2: Expressive orientation scores will be more significantly associated with church participation than will instrumental scores.

## The Results of Analysis

Considering the instrumental-expressive indices independently, it can be observed in Table 1 that the respondents generally obtain higher scores on the instrumental than on the expressive measure.

Table 1: Comparative Respondent Performance Relative to the Instrumental and Expressive Indices

Expressive Orientations				Instrumental Orientations			
High	(%)	Low	(%)	High	(%)	Low	(%)
27	50.0	27	50.0	33	61.0	21	39.0
N = 54				N = 54			

Sixty-one per cent of the respondents scored "high" on the instrumental scale, whereas results were evenly distributed on the expressive scale. This is clearly contrary to the relationship suggested in hypothesis one. Subsequently, mean scores were calculated for each scale and a t-test computed to evaluate the significance of the findings. The results are presented in Table 2. It becomes apparent that a significant difference does exist between the mean values on the respective scales. Instrumental scores are significantly greater than expressive scores at the .001 level.

Table 2: Mean Orientation Scores as Measured On Both Instrumental and Expressive Indices

Orientation Scales	Mean Values	t-Value	Significance Level
Expressive Scale	7.35	-12.508	.001
Instrumental Scale	8.80		

These findings are to be viewed with some degree of skepticism. It must be remembered that an assumption guiding the test of the above hypothesis was that we were dealing with two independent scale quantities. Jacoby and Babchuk have argued, however, that just as different groupings often demonstrate a "mixed" (i.e., instrumental and expressive) character, it is not inconceivable that

orientations will exhibit this same aspect. That is to say, a given individual may be both instrumentally and expressively oriented toward a given grouping. In this case, we would expect some interrelationship to be in evidence relative to the two scales under investigation. Table 3 illustrates the respondent's relative performance on the Instrumental-Expressive Indices.

Table 3: The Respondents' Relative Performance on Both the Instrumental and Expressive Indices

Instrumental Orientation Scores	Expressive Orientation Scores				Totals
	High	(%)	Low	(%)	
High	23	67.6	11	32.4	34
Low	4	20.0	16	80.0	20
Totals	27		27		54

Chi Square = 25.123\*

Pearson's  $r = +.527^*$

\*Significant ( $p < .001$ )

As can be seen, a significant relationship is observed with respect to the respondent's performance on the two scales. The zero-order correlation coefficient (Labovitz, 1967) also points to a high degree of interrelationship between these two scalar quantities. It becomes clear that these scales are not independent of one another. An individual's performance on one scale is significantly associated with his performance on the other. These findings make difficult a definite conclusion relative to hypothesis one. Although, clearly, expressive scores are not higher per se than instrumental scores, the significant interrelationship observed precludes any definite statement regarding the instrumental orientation of white collar Methodist males. It is with some degree of reservation that hypothesis one must be rejected.

Hypothesis two suggested a greater expressive than instrumental orientation with respect to church participation. As Table 4 reveals, however, instrumental scores are more significantly associated with church participation than are expressive scores. Clearly, those individuals with "high" instrumental orientations participate more frequently in the church than is the case with "high" expressive individuals.

Table 4: Tests for Association Between Dichotomized Church Participation Scores and the Dichotomized Instrumental and Expressive Scale Values for all Respondents

Church Participation	Instrumental Orientation Scores					Expressive Orientation Scores				
	High	(%)	Low	(%)	Total	High	(%)	Low	(%)	Total
High	27	75.0	9	25.0	36	19	52.8	17	47.2	36
Low	6	33.3	12	66.7	18	8	44.4	10	55.6	18
Total	33		21			27		27		
Chi Square = 7.101*						Chi Square = 0.083 (n.s.)				
Gamma = +.714						Gamma = +.166				
Pearson r = +.485**						Pearson r = +.184 (n.s.)				

\*Significant ( $p < .01$ )

\*\*Significant ( $p < .001$ )

Considering the interrelated nature of the Jacoby scales, a multiple and partial correlational analysis was undertaken to further examine the hypothesized relationships. Tables 5 and 6 illustrate that once again the instrumental orientation is most significantly associated with church participation. Its effect is clearly seen over and above that of the expressive orientation and it alone accounts for almost 24 per cent of the variance in the dependent variable. Adding the expressive score does not increase significantly the explained variance in church participation. It would appear that hypothesis two must likewise be rejected, but with more certainty than in the case of the previous hypothesis.

Table 5: Partial Correlation Analysis of Instrumental and Expressive Orientation Scores in Relation to Church Participation

Dependent Variable	Variables Independent Variable	"Controls"	Values		Significance Levels
			r	r <sup>2</sup>	
Church Participation	Expressive Orientation	Instrumental Orientation	-.097	.009	.245
Church Participation	Instrumental Orientation	Expressive Orientation	+.465	.216	.001

Table 6: Multiple Correlation Analysis of Instrumental and Expressive Scores in Relation to Church Participation

Dependent Variable	Variables Independent Variable	Values		Significance Levels
		R	R <sup>2</sup>	
Church Participation	Instrumental Orientation Score	.485	.236	.001
Church Participation	Instrumental and Expressive Scores	.184	.243	n.s.

#### Discussion, Limitations, and Research Suggestions

While the present research is limited in terms of sample size and general applicability, it is such as to point up many of the weaknesses of utilizing seemingly independent measures to predict the church participation of older adults. In the current study, the instrumental and expressive scales were found to be highly interrelated. A respondent's performance on one scale was often indicative of his performance on the other. This finding argues against a uniquely instrumental or expressive orientation with respect to the church. Instead, as Jacoby and Babchuk (1963) suggest, an individual's orientation toward any given grouping may exhibit a "mixed" character. Orientations may exhibit an AND rather than an OR quality. Based on this suggestion, it might be more productive of research to conceptualize instrumental-expressive orientations along a single continuum. In this manner, the association of orientation and participatory behavior might be more meaningfully assessed.

A second implication of this study derives from the rather persistent relationship observed between instrumental scores and church participation. One suggestion related to this finding is that white collar Methodist males may look upon the church in a somewhat utilitarian fashion. That is, these individuals may value their participation in the church because it functions as a means to one or more desired ends rather than representing an end in itself. In the present instance, all respondents, regardless of age, were quite active in community organizations and indicated instrumental criteria for their continuing participation in such groupings (Bell, 1973). It is well to suggest at this point that one's general life style may condition his behavior in any and all settings -- including the church. In this study over 50 per cent of the reasons offered for church participation were of an instrumental nature, i.e., subjects described the church as an agency for bringing about a better community atmosphere -- one characterized by improved relations between man and man rather than between man and God.



Once again, however, the findings are limited on several fronts. First of all, due to the exploratory nature of the research no comparisons exist with respect to white collar respondents be they Methodists or otherwise. This fact alone not only calls for a careful interpretation of the data, but suggests a strong need for corroborative research. Secondly, the small N and limited nature of the sample does not admit of extensive generalization. The absence of blue collar respondents as a separate group, for example, limits the conclusions which can be drawn from this work. Finally, no "patterns" of participation relative to orientation scores can be concluded from this brief study.

It must be kept in mind, however, that the Jacoby scales were able to account for 24 per cent of the variance in participation for this age group. To this extent, it was possible to predict the church participation of older adults without direct reference to religious antecedents. Although much of the variance in participation was not explained through utilization of the present measures, their utility in subsequent studies dealing with the religious behavior of older adults has been demonstrated. It is clear that one's phenomenological orientation to an associational context represents a useful indicator of present and perhaps future behavior relative to that setting. In this regard, it would seem appropriate to suggest the combination of orientational indices and belief measures in future research efforts of this nature.

#### References

- Barron, M. L.  
1961 *The Aging American: An Introduction to Social Gerontology and Geriatrics*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell.
- Bell, B. D.  
1973 "The family life cycle, primary relationships, and social participation patterns." *The Gerontologist* 13:78-81.
- Blau, P. M., and O. D. Duncan  
1967 *The American Occupational Structure*. New York; John Wiley.
- Bultena, L.  
1949 "Church membership and church attendance in Madison, Wisconsin." *American Sociological Review* 14:384-389.
- Covalt, N. K.  
1960 "The meaning of religion to older people." *Geriatrics* 15:658-664.
- Culver, E. T.  
1961 *New Church Programs with the Aging*. New York: Association Press.
- Dressler, D.  
1969 *Sociology: The Study of Human Interaction*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.
- Erskine, H.  
1965 "The polls: personal religion." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 29:145-157.

- Fiske, M.  
1961 "Geriatric mental illness: methodologic and social aspects." *Geriatrics* 16:306-310.
- Glock C. Y. and R. Stark  
1965 *Religion and Society in Tension*. Chicago: Rand McNally & Company.
- Gordon, C. W. and N. Babchuk  
1959 "A typology of voluntary associations." *American Sociological Review* 24:22-29.
- Herberg, W.  
1967 "Religion in a secularized society." In J. Brothers (ed.), *Readings in the Sociology of Religion*. New York: Pergamon Press.
- Jacoby, A.  
1965 "Some correlates of instrumental and expressive orientations to associational membership." *Sociological Inquiry* 35:163-175.
- Jacoby, A., and N. Babchuk  
1963 "Instrumental and expressive voluntary associations." *Sociology and Social Research* 47:461-471.
- Kuhlen, R. G.  
1962 "Trends in religious behavior during the adult years." Pp. 3-45 in L. C. Little (ed.), *Wider Horizons in Christian Adult Education*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Labovitz, S.  
1967 "Some observations on measurement and statistics." *Social Forces* 46: 151-160.
- Lazerwitz, B.  
1961 "Some factors associated with variations in church attendance." *Social Forces* 39:301-309.
- Lenski, G.  
1953 "Social correlates of religious interest." *American Sociological Review* 18:533-544.
- Lenski, G.  
1961 *The Religious Factor*. New York: Doubleday and Company.
- Lloyd, R. G.  
1955 "Social and personal adjustment of retired persons." *Sociology and Social Research* 39:312-316.
- Moberg, D. O.  
1962 *The Church as a Social Institution*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Orbach, H. L.  
1961 "Aging and religion: a study of church attendance in the Detroit metropolitan area." *Geriatrics* 16:530-539.
- Taves, M. J. and G. D. Hansen  
1963 "Seventeen hundred elderly citizens." Pp. 135ff. in A. M. Rose (ed.), *Aging in Minnesota*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.