

The relationship between competitive orientation and religious orientation

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Abstract:

Previous research suggests that religious orientation relates to people's choice of activities and behaviors. Religious orientation has not been examined in relation to sport and competitive orientation. This study examined the relationship of religious orientation, along with athletic experience, college and gender, to competitive orientation in sport. Surveys were completed by male and female -athletes and athletes (N=308) from six private liberal arts colleges, three with strong religious affiliations and three with more secular orientations. Religious orientation was measured by six subscales of religious belief including extrinsic/intrinsic, external/internal, orthodoxy, and interactional. Competitiveness was assessed by the Sport Orientation questionnaire with three subscales, competitiveness, win and goal orientation. Overall MANOVA and regression analyses suggested that religious orientation does relate to competitive orientation beyond the influence of athletic experience and gender, and may affect how one approaches and interprets their involvement in sport situations.

Article:

Religious orientation has been correlated with a wide range of psychological characteristics and behaviors including those related to prejudice (Hereck, 1987); political affiliation (Koller & Retzer, 1983); prosocial behaviors (Batson, 1976); educational persistence (Lenski, 1963); sexual attitudes (Wulf, et al., 1984) and criminal behaviors (Stark, Doyle & Kent, 1982). Although usually not the major influence, religious orientation is one factor that can affect personal conduct and attitudes toward a host of social and moral entities. Given the range of variables studied in conjunction with religion, sport is conspicuous by its absence. Its neglect is even more curious given the pervasiveness of religion, especially Christianity, in organized athletics at all levels (Deford, 1976; Hoffman, 1985). This study was an initial attempt to examine the relative contribution of religious orientation, along with athletic experience and gender, to competitive sport orientation.

Of particular interest was the relationship between religious belief and competitive sport orientations of participants, with religious belief defined as adherence to traditional beliefs of the Christian religion. Previously, competitive sport orientation has been shown to vary as a function of gender and participation in competitive sport activities. Specifically, those participating in competitive sports activities consistently score higher on competitive orientation scales than those not participating in such activities (Gill & Deeter, 1988). Males scored higher than females on scales measuring competitiveness and win orientation, but not on goal orientation (Gill & Deeter, 1988). Therefore, we included gender, athletic experience and athletic status along with religious orientation in this study to see if the influence of religious orientation varied with gender, experience or status.

The competitive sport ethic, as acted out in American sport, bears a curious and paradoxical relationship to Christian beliefs. On one hand, the Protestant ethic and the ideology of sport share a significant equivalence in that the original tenets of the Protestant ethic--success, hard work and self-discipline--are the most valued qualities of an athlete (Eitzen & Sage, 1986). On the other hand, the prominence of competition in sport especially the underlying notion of proving oneself superior to opponents or gaining recognition at another's expense seem blatantly to contradict the core tenets of Protestant Christianity which stress cooperation, sharing

and mutual concern (see for example, Kohn, 1986). The tension this dual commitment creates among many athletes who claim allegiance to both sets of beliefs has been described by Hoffman (1986).

This apparent conflict in values might be reconciled by clarifying the motivations underlying competition. It is generally regarded (although not well documented) that some people approach sport competitions as interpersonal encounters for determining self-worth while others view them as occasions for self-testing. Conflict in values is more likely to occur when the Christian athlete enters a contest for the express purpose of winning or defeating an opponent than when using the competitive context for assessing and improving his/her performance. A scale, recently developed and validated by Gill and Deeter (1988), appears helpful in distinguishing these motivations for sport achievement. The Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ) identifies three separate, but related dimensions of sport achievement: Competitiveness, Win and Goal Orientations. High scores on Competitiveness indicate a desire to enter competitive sport situations, work hard for success, master skills and meet competitive challenges. The extent to which this attraction to competition is associated with a desire and a striving to win, or a commitment to attaining personal goals and standards in a competitive setting is reflected in the Win and Goal dimensions, respectively. Within the context of the present study, those who profess strong belief in the tenets of Christianity and who elect to participate in competitive sports should adopt a goal rather than a win orientation.

Religious orientation is a complex construct that has spawned a number of diverse assessment instruments. In this study, we were principally interested in determining the strength of expression of belief in what is generally regarded as the core doctrine of American Protestantism. Although the Protestant Work Ethic is generally regarded as a secularized version of the Protestant doctrine, significant relationships have been established between measures of the Protestant Work Ethic and church attendance, religious belief (Ray, 1982), religious fundamentalism, and an antihedonistic outlook (Fumham & Lewis, 1986), suggesting that high scores on religious orthodoxy may also be associated with a strong competitive orientation to sports.

For obvious reasons, it is important to determine the extent to which expressed religious beliefs genuinely reflect the underlying religious orientation of respondents. This can be determined by assessing the influence of external factors (family, friends, etc.) on religious beliefs relative to the influence of such internal factors as felt need for security, strength and direction in life (Batson & Ventis, 1982). Additionally, religious orientation may reflect an extrinsic mindset in which individuals appropriate religion for utilitarian purposes such as status, sociability and selfjustification as opposed to an intrinsic mindset in which individuals find their master motive in religion, internalize its precepts and follow it consistently in their lives (Allport & Ross, 1967). An intrinsic orientation to religion has been closely related to orthodox religious involvement including frequency of attendance at worship services and personal importance of religion (Hoge, 1972).

Given a population of male and female athletes and nonathletes of varying religious orientations, what relationships might one expect to uncover? If there is a high correspondence between traditional Protestant beliefs and the ethic of hard-work, striving for success and attainment of personal goals, strong associations should be observed between doctrinal orthodoxy and competitive and goal orientations of the SOQ. Evidence suggesting a close relationship between religious belief and goal orientation was collected in an unpublished study which found that individuals of high religious belief placed greater emphasis on playing fairly and playing well relative to beating one's opponent than did individuals of lower religious belief (Holfman & Luxbacher, 1983). Because both the athletic and religious ethos ostensibly function to reinforce a competitive orientation, we expected a stronger relationship between these variables among athletes professing high religious doctrine and who hold to an intrinsic as opposed to extrinsic orientation. Conversely a high intrinsic religious orientation should be negatively related to a win orientation. However, because an extrinsic orientation to religion is anchored more in pragmatic than intellectual-spiritual considerations, strong goal orientations need not characterize individuals scoring high on the extrinsic variable. Conflicts over a win orientation that owe to an expressed belief in the Christian creed should not be problematic for respondents who have not internalized the credal tenets.

Method

Instrumentation

Sport orientation was assessed via the Sport Orientation Questionnaire (SOQ; Gill & Deeter, 1988). The SOQ is a 25-item multidimensional, sport specific measure of achievement orientation that has been tested on high school, college and elite athletes. The SOQ yields scores on three separate but related dimensions of competitiveness, win orientation and goal orientation. Competitiveness is characterized as an enjoyment of and striving in competition. Win orientation is characterized as a focus on winning and striving to win in competition. Goal orientation reflects a locus on personal goals and standards within competition. The internal consistency and reliability of the instrument have been established (Gill & Deeter, 1988) and a reliability analysis of our scores confirmed the internal consistency of the scales with our sample (Alpha Coefficients for Competitiveness =.94, Win =.83, Goal =.79).

Religious orientation was assessed with three likert-type instruments which yielded a total of six subscale scores. The first, the Religious Life Inventory (Batson & Ventis, 1982) is a 25-item questionnaire with three subscales. The External scale measures the degree to which an individual's external social environment has influenced his or her personal religion, and reflects an extrinsic, means orientation presumably motivated by a self-serving desire for social approval. The Internal scale measures the degree to which an individual's religion is a result of internal needs for certainty, strength and direction. This orientation seems to be based on a need to find firm, clear answers to existential questions. The Interactional Scale reflects the basic component of a quest orientation or the degree to which an individual's religion involves an open-ended, responsive dialogue with existential questions raised by the contradictions and tragedies of life. The Doctrinal Orthodoxy Scale (Batson & Ventis, 1982), patterned after an orthodoxy scale developed by Stark and Glock (1966) is composed of 12 items designed to measure belief in traditional Christian religious doctrines and more specifically, American Protestantism. The scale has been found appropriate for use with American Catholics as well.

Although internal consistency and validity have been reported at acceptable levels for all subscales, reliability analyses with our data did not confirm these results. The External, Internal and Doctrinal Orthodoxy scales demonstrated high internal consistency (Alpha Coefficients for External=.82, Internal=.92, Orthodoxy=.96), but low internal consistency was evident for the Interactional scale (.51). Due to this disparity, we have chosen not to highlight findings on the Interactional scale.

The final two subscales are derived from the 20-item Religious Orientation Scale (Allport & Ross, 1967) which produces scores on an Extrinsic and an Intrinsic dimension. Individuals with an Extrinsic orientation are disposed to use their religion for their own ends and may find religion useful in a variety of ways, such as: to provide security, solace, sociability, distraction, status and self-justification. The Extrinsic individual may turn to God, but without turning away from self. By contrast, individuals with an Intrinsic religious orientation are described as finding their master motive in religion and other needs, strong as they may be, are regarded as of less ultimate importance. Those other needs, so far as is possible, are brought into harmony with the religious beliefs and prescriptions. Having embraced a creed, the intrinsic individual endeavors to internalize and follow it fully; it is in this sense that he or she lives his or her religion. Our reliability analysis confirmed previous results and found high internal consistency on these scales (Alpha Coefficients for Extrinsic=.81, Intrinsic=.90).

A brief questionnaire was developed to collect demographic and organizational data. This included information about age, gender, year in college, athletic experience (in seasons and by sport), religious affiliation and church attendance.

Subjects

Our sample consisted of 308 students from various academic and physical education classes at six private liberal arts colleges. The colleges were selected purposely so that in three Protestant religious values had a clear influence on institutional life and three had more secular orientations. The students included 172 females, of which 100 were athletes and 72 were nonathletes and 136 males, of which 108 were athletes and 28 were nonathletes. The mean age of the sample was 20.4 years and they were approximately equally distributed across the four years of college. The students had participated an average of 3.9 seasons in high school athletics and 1.5 seasons in college athletics.

Students were asked to volunteer to complete a survey packet which included a subject consent form, a demographic questionnaire, the Sports Orientation Questionnaire, the Religious Life Inventory and the Religious Orientation Scale. 321 out of 330 questionnaires were classification of athlete and nonathlete, and athletic experience was defined as the cumulative number of seasons of interscholastic and intercollegiate athletic participation.

Results

Several analyses were used to explore various aspects of the relationship between the dependent variable of competitive sport orientation and the independent variables of religious orientation, athletic experience and gender. First, canonical analysis examined the strength of the relationship between the scores on the SOQ subscale as a set and the scores on the religious orientation subscales as a set. Secondly, a 2 X 2 X 2 MANOVA looked at the relationship of gender, athlete/ nonathlete status and college type (Christian or Secular) on sport orientation. Finally, the primary analyses were stepwise regression analyses which examined the contributions of the variables of religious orientation, athletic experience, athletic status and gender to the prediction of scores on the SOQ subscales of competitiveness, win and goal.

Canonical correlation analysis was used to compare competitiveness, win and goal to those of religious orientation, external, internal, orthodoxy, extrinsic and intrinsic. Two canonical functions were significant (see table 1). Standardized canonical coefficients for the first function indicate that orthodoxy and extrinsic religious orientation are both positively weighted with competitiveness and win. The second set of standardized canonical coefficients show that intrinsic religious orientation correlates positively with competitiveness and goal but negatively with win whereas external shows the opposite relationships to SOQ scores. Higher intrinsic scores correspond to higher scores on competitiveness and goal but lower scores on win orientation, whereas higher external orientation relates to higher win orientation and lower competitiveness and goal orientation. No further canonical functions reached significance.

A 2 X 2 X 2 MANOVA was used to examine the relationship of gender, athlete/ nonathlete status and college type (Christian or Secular) to the dependent variables of sport achievement orientation as measured by the SOQ and religious orientation measured by the religious scales.

The college by gender by athlete/nonathlete MANOVA yielded significant main effects for college, gender and athletic status but no interactions. Univariate results revealed college differences on the religious subscales with Christian college students scoring significantly ($p < .001$) higher on the religious dimensions of external (M for Christian = 50.8; M for secular = 47.4), internal (M = 67.8; M = 49.8), orthodoxy (M = 100.9; M = 71.2) and intrinsic (M = 61.2; M = 47.3) whereas students from more secular oriented colleges scored significantly ($p < .01$) higher in extrinsic religious orientation (M = 40.8; M = 46.0).

Gender differences were most pronounced on competitiveness with males scoring higher (M = 54.2) than females (M = 45.4). Males also scored higher (M = 21.5) than females (M = 18.8) on win orientation but there were no significant differences on goal or any religious measures.

Univariate athlete/nonathlete differences were significant ($p < .001$) for all three subscales of the SOQ with athletes scoring higher than nonathletes on competitiveness (M = 53.0; M = 39.9), win (M = 21.0; M = 17.4) and goal (M = 26.6; M = 25.2) and the primary discriminator was competitiveness. No significant differences were found on any of the religious scales.

Multiple regression analyses entering the predictor variables of religious orientation, athletic experience and status and gender were significant for all three SOQ dimensions ($p < .001$). Stepwise regression analyses (see Table 2) indicated that the combination of athletic experience, gender, Orthodoxy and Extrinsic religious orientation significantly predicted competitiveness ($R^2 = .314$, $p < .001$). Experience, gender, orthodoxy and extrinsic orientation entered the prediction equation in that order. Higher scores on competitiveness were associated with a greater number of seasons of athletic experience, and males scored higher than females. In addition, individuals stronger in traditional Christian beliefs, as measured by Doctrinal Orthodoxy, were higher in competitiveness, as were those exhibiting an extrinsic religious orientation.

The strongest predictor of Win Orientation (Table 3) was athletic experience, followed by an extrinsic orientation, gender, orthodoxy and an intrinsic religious orientation. These variables accounted for approximately 20% of the variability in Win orientation. Athletic experience and gender replicated earlier results (Gill & Deeter, 1988) with experience positively related to a win orientation and males showing a stronger win orientation than females. Those higher in the extrinsic religious dimension, which uses religion for utilitarian purposes, and the orthodoxy dimension, were also higher on win orientation. It is interesting to note that the internalization of beliefs characterized by an Intrinsic religious orientation, weighted negatively with win when in combination with the other predictor variables.

Doctrinal Orthodoxy and athletic experience together significantly predicted goal orientation (see Table 4) ($R^2 = .084$, $p < .001$). Those scoring higher on orthodoxy were also disposed toward an orientation that emphasizes personal standards and goals in competition. Greater athletic experience also yielded higher goal orientation.

Discussion

As might be expected in an analysis of such a complex construct as achievement orientation, the results leave a major portion of the variance unaccounted for. Nevertheless, the study has shown religious orientation to be one of a number of variables that may affect how one approaches and interprets their involvement in sport situations.

As anticipated, significant differences in sport achievement were associated with gender and competitive sport experience. Both variables proved to be strong predictors for competitiveness and win orientation. These data are consistent with findings of Gill and Deeter (1988): males scored higher than females on competitiveness and win, but not on goal, and those participating in competitive sports had higher scores on all three measures of sport achievement, especially on competitiveness.

Religious orientation was not as strong a predictor of sport achievement orientation, although much of the data confirmed expectations. Students attending Christian colleges scored higher than students attending secular colleges on all five scales of religious orientation except on the extrinsic scale on which they scored significantly lower. Also, they were marginally, but significantly higher on SOQ dimensions of competitiveness and goal orientation. Contrary to expectations, religious belief and athletic experience did not interact to produce a more pronounced competitive and goal orientation among Christian college athletes. Neither did Christian college athletes score significantly lower than athletes from secular colleges on the scale measuring win orientation.

Orthodoxy, reflecting an adherence to traditional doctrinal teachings of American Protestantism, entered as a predictor on all three dimensions of sport achievement, especially competitiveness and goal orientation where its contribution rivaled that of gender. The relationship of orthodoxy to win orientation was neither strong nor negative. Coupled with the finding that athletes from Christian colleges--students clearly differentiated on the basis of religious orientation--did not score significantly lower on the win orientation scale than students from secular institutions, this suggests that the conflict between an orientation that values winning and an affirmation of Protestant doctrines may be more imagined than real.

However, when religious orientation is partitioned into extrinsic versus intrinsic with the latter revealing an internalization of religious beliefs, the expected negative relationship between win orientation and orthodoxy

appears, although not as strong as anticipated. Thus, adoption of a win orientation seems unrelated to mere expressions of belief in a religious doctrine (orthodoxy), but the way one is religious seems to be important. A similar phenomenon has been reported in studies analyzing the relationship between prejudice and religious belief. Generally the more religious the individual is, the greater the tendency to be prejudiced, but more detailed analyses have shown consistently that intrinsically religious individuals are less prejudiced than the extrinsically religious (Batson & Ventis, 1982).

Conversely, an extrinsic, self-serving, pragmatic approach to religion was shown to make a relatively large contribution to win orientation. In light of the compatibility of this type of religious orientation with a competitive ethic that emphasizes winning above attaining personal goals, its prevalence in popular sports can be more clearly understood (Deford, 1976). Keeping in mind the fact that our analyses of religious orientation has left much of the variance unaccounted for, the data, nevertheless, suggest that those coaches, general managers and team owners who prefer their athletes to be sufficiently religious to inculcate the pragmatics of the Protestant ethic (extrinsic orientation) but not too religious (intrinsic orientation) lest their zeal dampen their competitive spirits, have perceived events with remarkable clarity.

Table 1 Canonical Correlation Between SOQ and Religious Orientation Measures Standardized Canonical Coefficients for the SOQ

	V1	V2
Competitiveness	0.511	0.641
Win	0.532	-0.984
Goal	0.113	0.645

Standardized canonical coefficients for Religious Orientation

External	-0.145	-.642
Internal	-0.049	0.321
Orthodoxy	1.100	0.199
Extrinsic	0.642	-0.214
Intrinsic	-0.296	0.889

Canonical R 0.349 0.275

F 4.37[a] 3.09[a]

a p < .001

Table 2 Stepwise Regression for Competitiveness Orientation

Legend for Chart:

A - No heading

B - Predictors

C - Mull R

D - R²

E - F

F - Final Beta

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Step I Experience		.427	.183	68.30	.317	
Step 2 Gender		.509	.260	53.18	.286	
Step 3 Orthodoxy		.553	.306	44.69	.247	
Step 4 Extrinsic		.570	.324	36.26[a]	.137	

a p < .001

Table 3 Stepwise regression for Win Orientation

Legend for Chart:

A - No heading

B - Predictors

C - Muir R

D - R²

E - F

F - Final Beta

	A	B	C	D	E	F
Step 1	Experience	.288	.083	27.62	.203	
Step 2	Extrinsic	.355	.126	21.97	.195	
Step 3	Gender	.399	.160	19.15	.186	
Step 4	Orthodoxy	.430	.185	17.21	.269	
Step 5	Intrinsic	.450	.203	15.37[a]	-.174	

a p < .001

Table 4 Stepwise regression for Goal Orientation

Legend for Chart:

A - Predictors

B - Muir R

C - R²

D - F

E - Final Beta

	A	B	C	D	E
Step 1	Orthodoxy	.231	.054	17.31	.212
Step 2	Experience	.286	.082	13.54[a]	.169

a p < .001

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