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The Williams Scale of Attitude toward Paganism: development and application among British pagans

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Abstract

This paper builds on the tradition of attitudinal measures of religiosity established by Leslie Francis and colleagues with the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (and reflected in the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam, the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism, and the Santosh-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Hinduism) by introducing a new measure to assess the attitudinal disposition of pagans. A battery of items was completed by 75 members of a Pagan Summer Camp. These items were reduced to produced a 21-item scale that measured aspects of paganism concerned with: the God/Goddess, worshipping, prayer, and coven. The scale recorded an alpha coefficient of 0.93. Construct validity of the Williams Scale of Attitude toward Paganism was demonstrated by the clear association with measures of participation in private rituals.

Keywords

Psychology, religion, attitudes, paganism, wicca.

Introduction

At the beginning of the twenty-first century the social scientific study of religion (including sociological and psychological perspectives) is enjoying something of a renaissance. At a time when the secularisation thesis of the 1960s (see Wilson, 1966) has worn thin, a growing body of empirical evidence affirms the influence (both positive and negative) of religion (variously conceived) from sociological perspectives on the well-being of society (Farnell, Hopkinson, Jarvis, Martineau, & Hein, 2006) and from psychological perspectives on the well-being of individuals (Francis & Robbins, 2005).

At its simplest the social scientific study of religion often begins with the categorical label of self-assigned religious affiliation. It is at this level that the national census held in many country rests content. In this sense religious affiliations (either in broad faith groups as included in the 2001 census for England and Wales or in denominational specificity as included in the 2001 census for Scotland) is a proper matter of public enquiry. Moreover, the predictive power of religious affiliation for matters of personal and social concern is far from trivial (Francis, 2007; Francis 2008).

The social scientific study of religion has, however, long recognised that religion is a multi-dimensional construct that can be better captured and operationalised, alongside the recording of self-assigned religious affiliation, by means of more sophisticated and subtly nuanced psychometric instruments, as well illustrated by the comprehensive compendium edited by Hill and Hood (1999) and brought up to date by Cutting and Walsh (2008). Such instruments have often (although by no means always or consistently) differentiated between such aspects of

religion as practice (what people do), belief (what people believe), attitude (how people feel about their religion), and orientation (what motivates their faith).

Different approaches within the social scientific study of religion have assessed the importance and significance of the different dimensions of religiosity in different ways. Working in the 1970s, Francis (1978a, 1978b) advanced the view that the attitudinal dimension of religion offered a particularly fruitful basis for co-ordinating empirical enquiry into the correlates, antecedents and consequences of religiosity across the life span. The attitudinal dimension appeared then (and continues to appear) particularly attractive for four reasons.

First, at a conceptual level, social psychologists have developed a sophisticated and well-established understanding of attitude as a deep-seated and relatively stable and enduring covert predisposition, in contrast with more volatile surface behaviours and opinions. To access attitude toward religion is to get close to the heart of religion in an individual's life.

Second, following the pioneering analysis of Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), Francis (1978a, 1978b) argued that attitudes are concerned primarily with accessing the affective dimension of religiosity. The affective dimension is distinguished from the cognitive dimension (concerned with beliefs) and from the behavioural dimension (concerned with practice). The affective dimension is able to transcend the divisions between denominational perspectives, while beliefs tend to polarise such divisions. In a Christian context, for example, Catholics may believe one thing about the nature of God and Protestants may believe another, but both Catholics and Protestants may agree on the assessment of the extent to which their faith exercises a positive or negative influence on their lives. The affective dimension is less likely to be distorted by personal and contextual factors, while practice tends to be subject to all kinds of

personal or social constraints. Whether an individual attends a place of worship may be influenced by personal factors (like state of health) or social factors (like pressure from parents), but negative and positive feelings about faith are much less likely to be contaminated by such factors.

Third, the affective dimension of religiosity can be accessed by instruments which can function in a comparatively stable manner over a wide age range. While the sophistication with which beliefs are formulated and tested clearly develops over the life span (see, for example, Fowler, 1981), attitudinal statements concerned with positive and negative affect can be formulated in ways which are equally acceptable during childhood, adolescence, and adulthood (Francis, 1989; Francis & Stubbs, 1987).

Fourth, at an operational level, social psychologists have developed a range of sophisticated and well-established techniques for assessing and scaling attitudes, including the pioneering work of Thurstone (1928), Likert (1932), Guttman (1944), Edwards (1957), and Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957). By testing the performance of these various methods among different age groups, Francis (1978a, 1978b) identified the Likert technique as providing the most reliable and consistent scaling properties from the age of eight upwards through childhood and adolescence into adulthood.

As well as being multidimensional in the sense of embracing many dimensions (like belief, practice, and attitude), religiosity is also multi-faceted in the sense of embracing many traditions (like Christianity, Islam, and Hinduism). Francis (1978a, 1978b) argued that the attitudinal dimension of religion can best be accessed through the specific traditions by which it is expressed. Working within a Christian context, therefore, Francis proposed a scale of attitude toward Christianity which was

found to function reliably and validity among children from the age of eight years, among adolescents, and among adults.

The 24-item Likert scale, originally published by Francis (1978a), contains both negative and positive items concerned with an affective response to five components of the Christian faith accessible to and recognised by both children and adults, namely God, Jesus, bible, prayer, and church. Each item is assessed on a five-point scale (agree strongly, agree, not certain, disagree, disagree strongly), producing a range of scores from 24 to 120. The reliability and validity of the scale have been supported by studies among school pupils in England (Francis, 1987, 1989; Lewis, Cruise, McGuckin, & Francis, 2006; Lewis, Cruise, & Lattimer, 2007), Kenya (Fulljames & Francis, 1987), Nigeria (Francis & McCarron, 1989), Northern Ireland (Francis & Greer, 1990; Greer & Francis, 1991) and Scotland (Gibson, 1989; Gibson & Francis, 1989). Another series of studies have supported the reliability and validity of the scale among adults in Australia and Canada (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995), England (Francis & Stubbs, 1987; Francis, 1992a), the Republic of Ireland (Malbty, 1994), Northern Ireland (Lewis & Malbty, 1997), South Africa (Francis, Kerr, & Lewis, 2005), and the USA (Lewis & Maltby, 1995). In addition to the full 24-item form of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, a seven-item short form has been developed and tested among primary school pupils (Francis, 1992b), secondary school pupils (Francis, Greer, & Gibson, 1991) and adults (Francis, 1993; Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Lester, & Brown, 1995; Maltby & Lewis, 1997; Lewis, Shevlin, Lloyd, & Adamson, 1998; Adamson, Shevlin, Lloyd, & Lewis, 2000; Lewis, Cruise, & McGuckin, 2005).

The Francis scale of Attitude toward Christianity has also been translated into other languages, recognising that integration of cross-cultural quantitative studies in

the psychology of religion has been hampered by the lack of common instrumentation. Examples are provided by editions in Arabic (Munayer, 2000), Czech (Francis, Quesnell, & Lewis, in press) Chinese (Francis, Lewis, & Ng, 2002), Dutch (Francis & Hermans, 2000), French (Lewis & Francis, 2003), German (Francis & Kwiran, 1999; Francis, Ziebertz, & Lewis, 2002), Greek (Youtika, Joseph, & Diduca, 1999), Norwegian (Francis & Enger, 2002), Portuguese (Ferreira & Neto, 2002), Romanian (Francis, Ispas, Robbins, Ilie, & Iliescu, 2009), Spanish (Campo-Arias, Oviedo, Dtaz, & Cogollo, 2006), Slovenian (Flere, Klanjek, Francis, & Robbins, 2008), Swedish (Eek, 2001), and Welsh (Evans & Francis, 1996; Francis & Thomas, 2003). The short form is also available in Chinese (Lewis, Francis, & Ng, 2003), Dutch (Lewis & Hermans, 2003), French (Lewis & Francis, 2004), Norwegian (Lewis, Francis, & Enger, 2003), and Welsh (Lewis & Francis, 2002).

In order to test whether the growing body of evidence regarding the correlates, antecedents and consequences of attitudes toward religion (established in a Christian context by means of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity) also held true in a Jewish context, Francis and Katz (2007) developed a comparable instrument, the Katz-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Judaism. In order to achieve a proper comparability between the two instruments the attempt was made to translate each of the original 24 items in a way appropriate for a Hebrew speaking Jew living in Israel. The psychometric properties of the instrument were assessed on a sample of 618 Hebrew-speaking undergraduate students attending Bar-Ilan University.

The second development was the Sahin-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Islam (Sahin & Francis, 2002). The items of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity were carefully scrutinised and debated by several Muslim scholars of Islam until agreement was reached on 23 Islam-related items which mapped closely

onto the area assessed by the parent instrument. The psychometric properties of the instrument were assessed on 381 Muslim adolescents in England. Subsequently the instrument was tested among a sample of 1,199 Muslim adolescents in Kuwait (Francis, Sahin, & Al-Ansari, 2006; Francis, Sahin, & Al-Failakawi, 2008).

The third development was the Santosh-Francis Scale of Attitude toward Hinduism (Francis, Santosh, Robbins, & Vij, 2008). Scholars familiar with the study of Hinduism debated the items presented in the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity and suggested 19 equivalent translations into a Hindu context. The psychometric properties of the instrument were assessed on a sample of 330 individuals between the ages of 12 and 35 attending a Hindu youth festival in England. Subsequently the instrument was tested among a sample of 100 Hindu affiliates from the Bunt caste in the South India state of Karnataka (Tiliopoulos, Francis, & Slattery, in press).

The religious question in the 2001 census conceptualised and expressed the religious climate for England and Wales in terms of six main established faith traditions (Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Sikhism) and allowed as the result pre-coded option the notion of having no self-assigned religious affiliation. Analyses of the additional write-in responses to the religious affiliation question suggest three main areas of expansion on the pre-coded categories. First, there are other long-established faith groups with visible presence in England and Wales (including Baha'i, Jain, Zoroastrian). Second, some Christians clearly preferred to be identified by their denominational affiliation. Third, the notion of religious affiliation has been expanded in the minds of some to embrace a range of alternative spiritual traditions. For example in the 2001 census for England and Wales, 30,569 individuals described themselves as Pagans; 7,227 as Wiccans; 1657 as

Druids; 1,603 as Pantheists; 908 as New Agers; 508 as Celtic Pagans; and 401 as Animists (Office for National Statistics, 2004).

These responses to the 2001 census are consistent with the views of several recent commentators on the changing religious climate of the UK. For example, Heelas and Woodhead (2005) contend that the contemporary religious scene in the United Kingdom has undergone a spiritual revolution. They argued that traditional religiosity is giving way to eastern esoteric traditions. Their study of the town of Kendall in the Lake District revealed the growth of such esoteric practices coupled with decline in more traditional religious practices. Partridge (2004) in the first instalment of his trilogy, coins this phenomenon as the re-enchantment of the West. He sees the rise in the popularity of such religious traditions as stemming from the immediate post-war period in the United Kingdom when more relaxed social conditions allowed for experimentation. In particular this can be seen in the 1960s when new modes of expression, especially for the youth, were emerging in terms of music, fashion and religion.

One of the new religious expressions to gain popularity during this period was Paganism, and in particular Wicca (Pearson, 2002, p.36). Wicca in the United Kingdom can find its origins in two main forms, the Alexandrian and Gardnerian schools (Hunt, 2002). Today, it is the school of Gardner that predominates, although it is the works of Scott Cunningham, Raymond Buckland and others popular writers of Wicca that have opened this mystery religion to the mass market (Schofield Clark, 2002; Ezzy, 2003).

Wicca has now become established as a religion in a number of countries. Indeed Hjelm (2006) notes that participants of Wicca legitimate it by placing it alongside other religions, say by determining who is really a practitioner (those who

follow a certain tradition) and by distinguishing such practitioners from those who only seek to have nominal affiliation mediated through popular publications. Indeed, Wiccan religion is advancing to such stages as to wish to distinguish itself from its more broad-spectrum traditional Witchcraft background (Ezzy, 2006).

The rise of Wicca as a contemporary religion has led to its integration within policies and practices related to palliative care (Smith-Stoner & Young, 2007), social work (Yardley, 2008), military psychology (Hathaway, 2006), and education (Cush, 1997). Contemporary social scientific studies of Wicca abound, mostly through qualitative methodologies such as interviews (e.g. Berger & Ezzy, 2007) or through the analysis of popular media in the creation and perpetuation of the religion (McSherry, 2002; Jarvis, 2008). Fewer social scientific studies have provided quantitative measures for the study of Wicca in particular or Paganism in general.

Although there are clear differences in beliefs and practices between the different strands within the Pagan traditions revitalised within contemporary society, these strands are united by a number of common factors including worship of the natural world, rejection of the idea of a single, all-powerful deific figure, initiation into a mystic religion, and the reciprocal relationship between divine and human.

Following procedures establishing for translating the constructs underpinning the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity into other faith traditions, including Islam by Sahin and Francis (2002), Judaism by Francis and Katz (2007) and Hinduism by Francis, Santosh, Robbins and Vij (2008), the aim of the present study has been to work with scholars familiar with contemporary branches of Paganism in order to extend this research traditions into research among contemporary Pagans. Just as the measures established to work among Christians, Hindus, Jews and Muslims were designed to reflect what is held in common between the various strands

within their faiths, so the present study focuses on what is held in common between the various strands in Paganism.

Method

Procedure

The third author attended a Pagan camp in celebration of the festival of Midsummer organised by The Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids (OBOD). This group was chosen because, as a correspondence course, the OBOD attracts members from all over Europe and a wide range of ages. This means that the group is diverse, while at the same time the members share a common belief and practice system. Members of the OBOD are active in their religion in that they participate regularly via correspondence. In the Midsummer camp they congregate with the purpose of group worship, including rituals, ceremonies, music, dance, and collective repetition of creeds. Participants were invited to complete a brief questionnaire. There was no time limit imposed on completion and participants were assured of their anonymity and right to withdraw.

Instrument

A set of 35 trial items had been generated to create parallels with the items included in the measures associated with Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism. The aspects of Paganism taken into account when constructing these items were: belief in the God and Goddess and in the sacred significance of nature; acts of worship and rituals; and specific aspects such as the sacred circle and the sabbats. Each item was evaluated on a five-point Likert scale: 'agree strongly', 'agree', 'not certain', 'disagree', and 'disagree strongly'.

Religious practice was assessed by two items. Frequency of public religious practice and rituals was assessed on a six-point scale: 'weekly', 'with the phases of the moon', 'full moons and solar festivals', 'full moons', 'eight solar festivals', and 'never'. Frequency of private religious practice and rituals was assessed on a five-point scale: 'more than daily', 'daily', 'weekly', 'monthly', and 'less than monthly'.

Sample

Data were provided by 75 participants at the OBOD's midsummer camp. Responses were received from 32 males and 43 females. In terms of age, one respondent was under the age of 20, four were aged 20 to 29, 16 were aged 30 to 39, 24 were aged 40 to 49, 22 were aged 50 to 59, six were aged 60 to 69, and two were over the age of 70. In relation to performance in public rituals, 8% stated that they never participated, 60% that they participated in the eight solar festivals, 1% that they participated at full moons, 20% at full moon and solar festivals, 1% with the phases of the moon, and 9% on a weekly basis. In relation to performance at private rituals, 42% stated that they took part in private rituals less than monthly, 8% on a monthly basis, 24% on a weekly basis, 23% on a daily basis, and 3% performed private rituals more than once a day.

Analysis

The data were analysed by the SPSS statistical package, using the frequency, reliability, factor and correlation routines.

Results

In the first stage of data analysis the bank of 35 trial items was reduced to a set of 21 items by means of factor analysis, and reliability analysis on the basis of maximising the internal consistency reliability of the resulting instrument. The selected items are displayed in table one together with the percentage item endorsement (the sum of the agree and agree strongly responses), the item rest-of-test correlations, and the loadings of the first factor of the unrotated solution proposed by principal component analysis. The 21 items generated an alpha coefficient (Cronbach, 1951) of .93; and the first factor accounted for 43% of the total variance. These data support the internal consistency reliability of the Williams Scale of Attitude toward Paganism.

The construct validity of the instruments following in the tradition of the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity has generally been demonstrated in the initial stages by examining the association between the attitude scores and measures of personal and public religious practice. In the case of the present study, after controlling for sex differences, there were significant partial correlations between scores recorded on the Williams Scale of Attitude toward Paganism and both frequency of public religious practice and rituals ($r = .35, p < .01$) and frequency of private religious practice and rituals ($r = .23, p < .05$). The magnitude of these correlations indicate that while attitude and practice are clearly associated they are far from providing alternative measures of the same dimension of religiosity.

Conclusion

Working within a research tradition that has contributed significantly since the late 1970s to establish the correlates, antecedents and consequences of individual

differences in religiosity within an expanding number of religious traditions (Christian, Hindu, Islamic and Jewish), this study set out to prepare and to test an instrument appropriate for use among contemporary Pagans. The findings from this initial study support the internal consistency reliability and construct validity of the Williams Scale of Attitude toward Paganism and commend the instrument for future use.

It is important to recognise that this initial study is limited by the sample being restricted to those contemporary Pagans who attended a specific event organised by The Order of the Bards, Ovates and Druids within one specific cultural context (Britain). Such limitations need to be appropriately addressed by well placed studies designed to replicate and to extend this initial study.

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Table One Scale Properties of the Williams Scale of Attitude toward Paganism

	r	factor	%
I find it hard to believe in the God and Goddess	.79	.83	11
The God and Goddess mean a lot to me	.82	.85	70
The God and Goddess are very real to me	.75	.80	66
The God and Goddess don't mean anything to me	.75	.79	10
I know that the God and Goddess help me	.77	.81	68
I know that the God and Goddess are very close to me	.71	.76	65
Worshipping in the circle is very important to me	.65	.69	59
I like to learn to learn about the God and Goddess very much	.66	.01	68
The God and Goddess help me to lead a better life	.67	.73	54
I want to love the God and Goddess	.67	.72	51
Initiation ceremonies are important to me	.60	.64	64
Being part of a coven/grove is a waste of time	.62	.66	4
I believe that the God and Goddess help people	.60	.65	58
My coven/grove is important to me	.59	.63	62
I believe that the God and Goddess listen to prayers	.52	.59	50
The sacred circle is important to me	.51	.54	82
I think saying prayers does no good	.49	.54	5
Worshipping in time with the seasons is important to me	.42	.45	92
I believe that nature guides me	.38	.42	91
Honouring all the major sabbats is important to me	.34	.38	49
Being one with nature is important to me	.29	.32	97
Alpha/% Variance	.93	43	

Note: r = correlation between the item and the sum total of the other 20 items;
factor = loading on the first factor proposed by principal components analysis;
% = item endorsements as sum of agree and agree strongly responses.