

'Understanding the relationship between religion and well-being: A mixed methods investigation into the relationship between religious maturity and psychological well-being'

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Theoretical Background

Whilst recent years have witnessed a well-documented increase in interest in this research area (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005), the available body of research provides disparate results that are difficult to integrate.

Reasons suggested by literature:

- The tendency by researchers to view religion as an undifferentiated and stable construct (Hood, Hill, & Spilka, 2009).
- The continued use of global indices, such as prayer-frequency and religious affiliation (Hill & Pargament, 2008).

This has led to a growing consensus about the need to take into account multi-dimensional conceptualisations of religiosity.

Religious Maturity

- ❑ Mature religious functioning attempts to capture *how* the individual is religious rather than what one believes, practices or experiences.
- ❑ This construct strives to capture the stable tendencies within the person's religious life that underlie these overt indicators
- ❑ Whilst diverse scholars such as Fromm (1967) and Alder (1989) have speculated about overall mature religiosity, Allport is still regarded as the most influential psychologist to theorise about the features of RM (Leak & Fish, 1999).

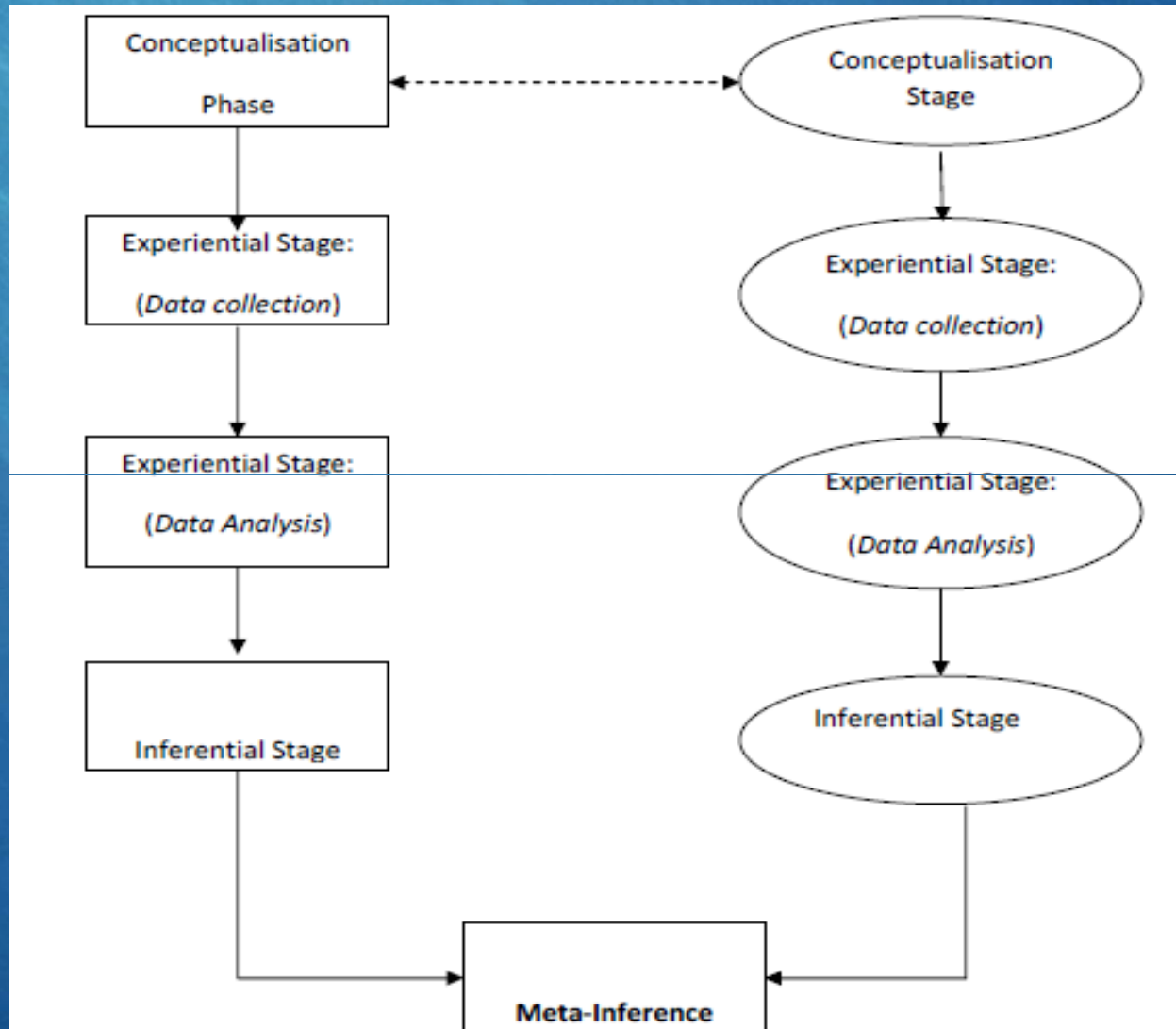
Religious Maturity

- In 1999, Leak and Fish started working on a RM operationalisation covering a broader spectrum of Allport's RM theories, eventually developing a RM Scale named CUV-4.
- This scale is composed of 4 factors:
 1. Master-motive
 2. Complexity-of-beliefs
 3. Openness
 4. Heuristic quality
- To my knowledge there has been no investigation to date into the relationship between RM, as conceptualised by Allport and operationalised by Leak and Fish, and PWB.

Research Questions

1. Is religious maturity related to psychological well-being?
2. What is the nature of this relationship?
 - 2a. Are meaning in life, self-esteem and self-actualisation mediators of this relationship?
 - 2b. What other factors and process might help explain this relationship?

Research Methodology & Design



Graphical illustration of parallel mixed design.

Methodology: Research Sample

- The population of interest for this study consisted of adult UK residents from a Catholic or Protestant religious background.
- Study-1 utilised a combination of convenience and volunteer sampling to garner a sample of 138 participants.
- Study-2 employed maximum variation sampling to select a sub-set of 4 participants from the quantitative sample.
- A range of possible combinations involving RM and PWB were used as a blueprint for selecting the most diverse and meaningful sample



Case-1: High RM, low PWB



Case-2: Low RM, high PWB



Case-3: High RM, high PWB



Case-4: Low RM, low PWB

Summary – Results Study 1

In summary the statistical results seem to indicate that:

- Master-motive is to some extent positively related to higher emotional wellbeing and life satisfaction, mainly through life regard.
- Openness is to some extent negatively associated with depression-happiness and life satisfaction, mainly through self-esteem.
- Certain RM components, i.e. master-motive and openness, have an opposing relationship with the PWB indicators.
- All religiosity measures have a more pronounced relationship with affective well-being than life satisfaction

Results – Study 2

- The use of constructivist GT analysis led to the development of 8 themes and a theoretical model:

Theme-1: Multi-faceted Nature of Individual's Religiosity

- Analysis highlighted that participants differed in their way of being religious. These differences are captured by the following facets
 - Degree of discernment
 - Degree of religious doubting
 - Religion's role in life: pervading influence vs. tool
 - Understanding of and identification with religiosity and spirituality labels
 - The importance attached to forming a relationship with God

Results – Study 2

Theme-1: Multi-faceted Nature of Individual's Religiosity

“I try to get to know God better, to have a kind of relationship with him.”(I.4, L.95-96)

- Narratives also differed in their rendition of changes occurring in participants' religiousness over the years (differed in terms of degree of concern with personal growth and relating with God).

Results – Study 2

Theme-2: Interpersonal Life being enriched through Religiosity

- Captures the impact religiosity seems to exert over the interpersonal domain, seemingly acting as a positive tool in participants' efforts to establish and maintain relatedness to others and the environment:

“Relationships within families can sometimes be strained...But, through belief in trying to put the other person first that sort of influences the way that I would try and respond to situations, the way that I would act and speak in a way that is hopefully not self-motivated, but motivated by either the happiness of the other person or to establish a good relationship within the family.” (P.1,L.407-417)

Results – Study 2

Theme-3: Seeking to Connect with the Inner Dimension of Life

- Participants emphasized that religion's spiritual focus and promotion of reflection and introspection helps them connect with their 'inner self':

*“I think I definitely have developed a greater self-knowledge because I think an important part of any religious life is that one examines one's...motives; conscious; behaviour”
(P.1,L.218-220)*

Results – Study 2

Theme-4: Accessing a Framework of Relevance to Higher-order Pursuits and Existential Fulfilment

- Describes religiosity's potential in providing a framework that gives structure and direction to:
 - The way individuals deal with existential issues
 - The pursuits they choose to ascribe a higher-order importance to

“I always feel that I have to help people...which is sometimes a handicap as well. You can't always help everybody. But I do feel terrible if I can't help someone.” (P.3,L.214-216)

Results – Study 2

Theme-5: Religion's Potential as a Beacon

- Encapsulates participants' portrayal of religiosity's potential role as a source of guidance and inspiration that impacts behavioural choices, aims and decision-making.

“You can compare it with a road, with a traffic signs, with traffic lights and all. And if you are going in one direction, you know that this is the road that will take you, so, you will reach your destination.” (P.4,L.345-349)

Results – Study 2

Theme-6: Salutary Benefits of Religious Practices

- Depicts participants' focus on the varying beneficial effects of prayer & the Christian liturgy.

“I think on occasions it (prayer) gives me a sense of peace and wholeness....I also use it within a decision making process if I have to make major decisions in my life.” (P.2,L.219-221)

Results – Study 2

Theme-7: The Complex Role of Religiosity in the Individual's Economy of Well-being

- Captures the complexity and two-sided nature of the religiosity-well-being relationship as portrayed by narratives:

“I would feel frustrated I suppose very depressed, sometimes negative because I knew that I was falling short of what I'd been taught as God's ideal.” (P.1,L.602-605)

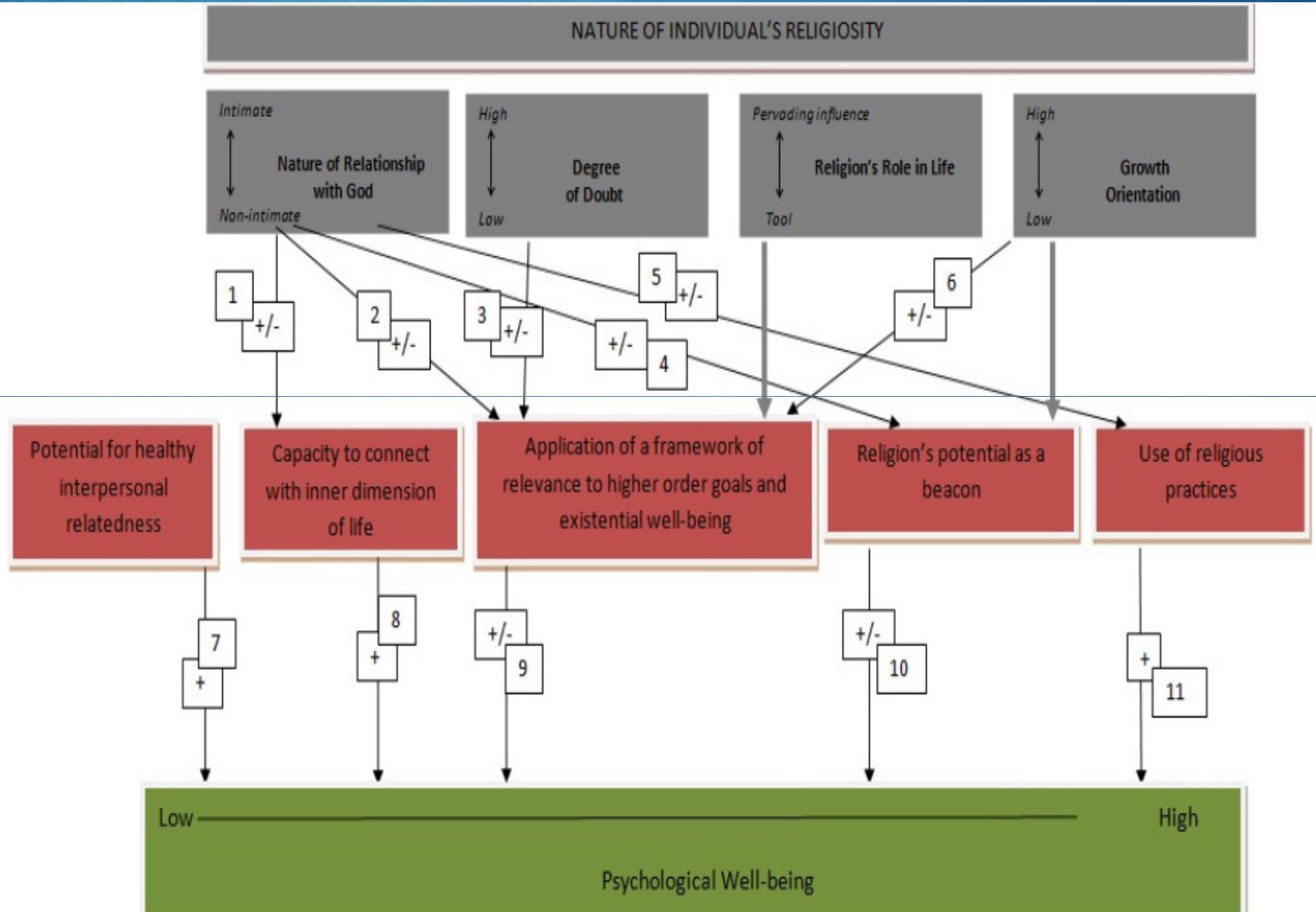
Results – Study 2

Theme-8: Religiosity Change: Process and Consequence

- Summarises participants' narratives about religiosity change and the seemingly similar consequences of this phenomenon in terms of well-being.

“I try to elaborate. Only sense of guilt which is terrible. I still have it sometimes of course, because it follows you...but it doesn't affect me negatively any longer.” (P.3,L.414-416)

Theoretical Model



Conclusion

- **This research seems to indicate that religiosity is probably best understood as a dynamic phenomenon, with positive and negative potentials for individual well-being, which is prone to change throughout the lifespan.**
- **In terms of influence on PWB, both studies seemed to point towards affording religiosity a central and pervasive role in life as having a salubrious effect.**

Conclusion

- Furthermore, this research proposes that religiosity facets concerning the nature of the individual's relationship with the divine and the importance afforded to personal growth in one's religious approach be taken into consideration as potential RM dimensions.
- Results also appear to indicate that a broader RM conceptualisation encompassing these facets could serve to explain the multitude of salutary and deleterious pathways through which religiosity might influence PWB.

Conclusion

- **Both strands seemed to offer tentative support for the explanatory benefits of a humanistic-existential theoretical frame and place special emphasis on meaning-making playing a primary intermediary role.**
- **Moreover, Study-2 suggested that a set of factors/processes extrinsic to this theoretical frame may be implicated in the RM-PWB relationship. This may indicate the need to apply broader theoretical approaches within this field (e.g. exploring religion's capacity as integrative force serving to unify life's disparate concerns).**

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