

Attitudes Towards Sexuality and Substances Among Young Canadian Baptists and Their Leaders: Exploring Personal, Psychological, and Religious Factors

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Abstract

This study explores the effect of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (psychological type and emotionality), and religious factors (intrinsic and extrinsic religious orientation) on shaping attitudes towards sexuality and substances among young Canadian Baptists and their leaders. Data provided by 181 participants attending a summer youth mission and service programme demonstrated the centrality of intrinsic religiosity in shaping stricter attitudes within both moral domains. While young Baptists and their leaders shared similar positions and attitudes towards sexuality, young Baptists held stricter views than their leaders on substances.

Keywords

Moral values; intrinsic religious orientation; psychology of religion; psychological type; prayer; youth

Introduction

Within the empirical psychology of religion there has been a long-established interest in the connections between religion and moral values. The complexity of empirical findings within the field has led to two main conclusions: that religion may impact various moral domains differently, and that religion itself is a complex phenomenon in which various components of religion may impact the same moral domain differently. The present article takes both of these conclusions seriously and proposes to discuss each in turn, first discussing moral domains and then discussing religious orientations, before introducing consideration of how personal factors and psychological factors may also interact with the association between religion and moral values.

Moral Domains

In an earlier study, Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis employed factor analysis in order to identify how moral domains were shaped among sixteen- to eighteen-year-old students.¹ A key finding from this study was that issues relating to sexuality and issues relating to substances loaded clearly on different factors. Other studies within the empirical psychology of religion have confirmed, however, that both domains are significantly related to a common measure of religious practice. For example, in a study of values among 33 982 thirteen- to fifteen-year-old adolescents, Francis explored the connections between religion and attitudes toward sexuality and attitudes toward substances, employing church attendance as a measure of religion.² In terms of sexual issues, while 10% of young people who never attended church rated sexual

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¹ Andrew Village and Leslie J. Francis, 'The Development of the Francis Moral Values Scales: A Study Among 16- to 18-year-old Students Taking Religious Studies at A level in the UK', *Journal of Beliefs and Values*, 37.3 (2016), pp. 347–356, doi:10.1080/13617672.2016.1232568.

² Leslie J. Francis, *The Values Debate: A Voice from the Pupils* (Woburn Press, 2001).

intercourse outside of marriage as wrong, the proportion rose to 28% among weekly churchgoers; while 34% of young people who never attended church rated abortion as wrong, the proportion rose to 47% among weekly churchgoers. In terms of substances, while 16% of young people who never attended church rated getting drunk as wrong, the proportion rose to 28% of weekly churchgoers; while 39% of young people who never attended church rated smoking cigarettes as wrong, the proportion rose to 49% among weekly churchgoers.

Religious Orientation

The social scientific study of religion has routinely differentiated among three core components of religion: religious affiliation, either conceptualised in terms of faith traditions (say Christian or Muslim) or conceptualised in terms of denominations (say Catholic or Presbyterian); religious practice, generally conceptualised in terms of frequency of religious attendance; and religious belief, often conceptualised in broad terms (say belief in God, differentiating among atheists, agnostics, and theists). It was the puzzling data generated by employing these broad components of religion that stimulated Gordon Allport to question their utility and precision.³ In particular, Allport confronted the puzzle that, while religious teaching generally promoted inclusion and acceptance, high levels of church attendance were found to be associated with exclusion and prejudice. Allport addressed this problem by proposing the notion of ‘religious orientation’ and differentiating between two opposing orientation styles, extrinsic religiosity and intrinsic religiosity. Allport and Michael Ross then proposed two scales designed to operationalise these two orientations: an eleven-item measure of extrinsic religiosity and a nine-item measure of intrinsic religiosity.⁴

³ Gordon W. Allport, ‘Religious Context of Prejudice’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 5.3 (1966), pp. 447–457, doi:10.2307/1384172.

⁴ Gordon W. Allport and J. Michael Ross, ‘Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice’, *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 5.4 (1967), pp. 432–443, doi:10.1037/h0021212.

For Allport and Ross, extrinsic religiosity and intrinsic religiosity were not opposite ends of a single continuum, but two largely independent continua.⁵ As a consequence, individuals could be located in one of four positions on their two continua: high intrinsic scores and low extrinsic scores (pure intrinsic religion); high extrinsic scores and low intrinsic scores (pure extrinsic religion); high intrinsic scores and high extrinsic scores (indiscriminately pro religion); and low extrinsic scores and low intrinsic scores (anti religion). Allport's model of religious orientation was modified and augmented by Daniel Batson and Larry Ventis who introduced a third orientation styled as quest religiosity, together with a six-item scale.⁶ Subsequently, Batson and Patricia Schoenrade introduced a twelve-item measure of quest religiosity.⁷

Refining the three-orientation model further, Francis introduced the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO).⁸ Conceptually, the NIRO identified three components for each of the three orientations: intrinsic religiosity that comprised integration, public religion, and personal religion; extrinsic religiosity that comprised social support, personal support, and compartmentalisation; quest religiosity that comprised existentialism, self-criticism, and openness to change. Operationally the three scales proposed by the NIRO each comprised three items for each of the three components.

⁵ Allport and Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice'.

⁶ C. Daniel Batson and W. Larry Ventis, *The Religious Experience: A Social Psychological Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1982).

⁷ C. Daniel Batson and Patricia A. Schoenrade, 'Measuring Religion as Quest: Reliability Concerns', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30.4 (1991a), pp. 430–447, doi:10.2307/1387278; C. Daniel Batson and Patricia A. Schoenrade, 'Measuring Religion as Quest: Validity Concerns', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 30.4 (1991b), pp. 416–429, doi:10.2307/1387277.

⁸ Leslie J. Francis, 'Introducing the New Indices of Religious Orientation (NIRO): Conceptualisation and Measurement', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 10.6 (2007), pp. 585–602, doi:10.1080/13674670601035510.

While the various scales developed to measure the three components of religious orientation theory (intrinsic, extrinsic, and quest) have made important contributions to the literature, two caveats need voicing. First, the quest orientation, as introduced by Batson and Ventis,⁹ is grounded in a different conceptual framework from the two orientations originally proposed by Allport and Ross,¹⁰ with the consequence that current research often continues to focus on the contrast between the intrinsic and extrinsic orientations. In terms of explaining the associations between religious orientations and moral domains, intrinsic and extrinsic remain core. Second, while the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the intrinsic and extrinsic orientations through multi-item scales is of good scientific value, for practical research purposes there are two good proxy measures: frequency of religious attendance captures the extrinsic orientation, and frequency of personal prayer captures the intrinsic orientation. The present study employs these proxy measures because of the time constraint placed on the survey.

Personal Factors

The association between religion and moral values may be contaminated by two core personal factors, namely sex and age. Sex differences in religiosity was deemed by Michael Argyle as being, at that time, the best-established finding within the empirical psychology of religion.¹¹ More recent reviews of the evidence by Francis¹² and by Francis and Gemma Penny¹³ support that early claim, but with two caveats: the finding is mainly based on evidence from Christian and post-Christian societies;

⁹ Batson and Ventis, *The Religious Experience*.

¹⁰ Allport and Ross, 'Personal Religious Orientation and Prejudice'.

¹¹ Michael Argyle, *Religious Behaviour* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1958).

¹² Leslie J. Francis, 'The Psychology of Gender Differences in Religion: A Review of Empirical Research', *Religion*, 27.1 (1997), pp. 81–96, doi:10.1006/reli.1996.0066.

¹³ Leslie J. Francis and Gemma Penny, 'Gender Difference in Religion', in *Religion, Personality, and Social Behaviour*, ed. by Vassilis Saroglou (Psychology Press, 2014), pp. 313–317.

while the evidence is secure, the theories advanced to account for the differences remain less secure. At the same time, there are clear sex differences in moral values as evidenced by Francis.¹⁴ Age differences in religiosity are particularly evidenced during childhood and adolescence, with significant changes in religious thinking¹⁵ and deterioration in attitude toward religion.¹⁶ At the same time, there are clear age differences in moral values.¹⁷

Psychological Factors

The association between religion and moral values may also be contaminated by psychological factors. Although there has been a long interest within the psychology of religion concerning the association between personality and religion, only recently has consensus begun to emerge in the literatures. In a second major review of the field, Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi¹⁸ concluded that the jury was still out on this issue, but by the time of their third review, Beit-Hallahmi and Argyle¹⁹ concluded that the empirical data now suggested clear links between individual differences in religiosity and the three-dimensional model of personality proposed by Hans Eysenck and Sybil Eysenck.²⁰ More recently, a series of studies has documented consistent patterns between individual differences in religiosity and the Jungian model of psychological type²¹ as operationalised by instruments like the Myers-

¹⁴ Francis, *The Values Debate*.

¹⁵ Ronald J. Goldman, *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

¹⁶ William K. Kay and Leslie J. Francis, *Drift from the Churches: Attitude Toward Christianity During Childhood and Adolescence* (University of Wales Press, 1996).

¹⁷ Francis, *The Values Debate*.

¹⁸ Michael Argyle and Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi, *The Social Psychology of Religion* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975).

¹⁹ Benjamin Beit-Hallahmi and Michael Argyle, *The Psychology of Religious Behaviour, Belief and Experience* (Routledge, 1997).

²⁰ Hans J. Eysenck and Sybil Bianca Giuletta Eysenck, *Manual of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Adult and Junior)* (Hodder and Stoughton, 1975).

²¹ Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types: The Collected Works*, vol. 6 (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971).

Briggs Type Indicator²² and the Francis Psychological Type Scales.²³ At the same time, individual differences in moral values may be impacted by personality.²⁴

Research Objective

Against this background, the present study has three primary research aims. The first aim is to explore the factor structure of the participants' views on contemporary moral issues and to test whether it is possible to develop relevant scales on the basis of this factor structure. The second aim is to test the effect of personal variables (age and sex), psychological variables (as assessed by psychological type theory and emotionality), and religious variables (intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity) on individual differences in scores on these scales concerned with moral values. The third aim is to assess whether different domains of moral values within this population relate to personal variables, psychological variables, and religious variables in the same or in different ways.

Method

Procedure

All the young people attending the week-long Tidal Impact summer youth mission and service programme sponsored by the Canadian Baptists of Atlantic Canada, held in 2023, were invited to complete a detailed questionnaire following the completion of a worship service.

²² Isabel Briggs Myers, Mary H. McCaulley, *Manual: A Guide to the Development and Use of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator* (Consulting Psychologists Press, 1985).

²³ Leslie J. Francis, *Faith and Psychology: Personality, Religion and the Individual* (Darton, Longman and Todd, 2005); Leslie J. Francis, Patrick Laycock, and Christine Brewster, 'Exploring the Factor Structure of the Francis Psychological Type Scales (FPTS) among a Sample of Anglican Clergy in England', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 20.9 (2017), pp. 930–941, doi:10.1080/13674676.2017.1375469.

²⁴ Leslie J. Francis, David W. Lankshear, Mandy Robbins, Andrew Village, and Tania ap Siôn, 'Defining and Measuring the Contribution of Anglican Secondary Schools to Students' Religious, Personal and Social Values', *Journal of Empirical Theology*, 27.1 (2014), pp. 57–84, doi:10.1163/15709256-12341294.

Following an explanation of the nature of the survey and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity, the questionnaires were distributed to the young people. Participation was voluntary, but the overall level of interest in the topic meant that few young people failed to complete the exercise. A total of 181 questionnaires were returned that provided data fully completed for the analyses reported in the present study (that means with no missing data).

Measures

Sex was assessed by the following question. Are you: male (1), female (2), other (please specify) (3), prefer not to say (4).

Age was assessed by the following question. How old are you? 12 (1), 13 (2), 14 (3), 15 (4), 16 (5), 17 (6), 18 (7), 19 (8), 20–24 (9), 25–29 (10), 30–39 (11), and 40 and over (12).

Extrinsic religiosity was assessed by the following question. How often do you attend a worship service (other than youth group): nearly every week (5), at least once a month (4), sometimes (3), once or twice a year (2), never (1).

Intrinsic religiosity was assessed by the following question. How often do you pray by yourself: nearly every day (5), at least once a week (4), at least once a month (3), occasionally (2), never (1).

Psychological variables were assessed by the Adolescent form of the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales.²⁵ This is a fifty-item instrument comprising five sets of ten forced-choice items related to each of the four components of psychological type theory: orientation (introversion and extraversion), perceiving process (sensing and intuition), judging process (thinking and feeling), and attitude toward the external world (judging and perceiving), and augmented by

²⁵ Leslie J. Francis, Bruce Fawcett, and Ursula McKenna, 'Exploring the Factor Structure of the Adolescent Form of the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales (FPTETSAs) among Canadian Baptist Youth: Full Form and Short Form', *Mental Health, Religion & Culture*, 1.1 (2023), pp. 1–13, doi:10.1080/13674676.2023.2256676.

emotionality (calm and volatile). In the foundation paper, Francis, Bruce Fawcett, and Ursula McKenna²⁶ reported the following alpha coefficients²⁷ for these scales: orientation, $\alpha = .78$; perceiving process, $\alpha = .71$; judging process, $\alpha = .73$; attitude toward the external world, $\alpha = .74$; emotionality, $\alpha = .75$. In the present study, the following alpha coefficients were reported: orientation, $\alpha = .80$; perceiving process, $\alpha = .59$; judging process, $\alpha = .70$; attitude toward the external world, $\alpha = .63$; emotionality, $\alpha = .75$.

Views on contemporary moral issues were assessed by a battery of twenty-three items assessed on a five-point scale: always right (1), usually right, sometimes wrong (2), don't know (3), usually wrong, sometimes right (4), always wrong (5). While covering a range of issues, multiple items concentrated on the use of substances and on sexuality.

Participants

Of the 181 participants who provided full data, 78 were male and 103 female; 21 were twelve years of age, 27 were thirteen years old, 19 were fourteen years old, 19 were fifteen years old, 15 were sixteen years old, 12 were seventeen years old, 6 were eighteen years old, 4 were nineteen years old, 24 were in their twenties, 14 in their thirties, and 20 were aged 40 and over; 75% attended church nearly every week, 7% at least once a month, 11% sometimes, 3% once or twice a year, and 4% never attended; 50% prayed nearly every day, 19% at least once a week, 4% at least once a month, 15% occasionally, and 6% never prayed.

Data analysis

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

²⁶ Francis, Fawcett, and McKenna, 'Exploring the Factor Structure Adolescent Form of the Francis Psychological Type and Emotional Temperament Scales (FPTETS) among Canadian Baptist Youth'.

²⁷ Lee J. Cronbach, 'Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests', *Psychometrika*, 16.3 (1951), pp. 297–334, doi:10.1007/BF02310555.

Results

Table 1: Rotated Factor Solution

	factor 1	factor 2	factor 3
Drinking alcohol		.71	
Vaping		.74	
Using cannabis (marijuana) below the legal age		.59	
Using cannabis (marijuana) above the legal age	.43	.63	
Smoking cigarettes		.70	
Sexual intercourse prior to marriage	.89		
Oral sex prior to marriage	.85		
An unmarried couple living together	.77		
Abortion	.69		
Sexual relations between two individuals of the same sex	.79		
Viewing pornography	.66		
Sexting (sending nude images by texting)	.58		
Putting to death people convicted of violent crimes			.79
Placing violent prisoners in solitary confinement			.83

Note: loadings below .30 suppressed
 N = 181
 Cumulative variance explained, 60.4%

The first step in data analysis was designed to explore the factor structure of all diverse twenty-three items concerning views on contemporary moral issues. Using an iterative process, the two sets of items concerning substances and sexuality emerged as distinct factors, with a third factor attracting two items on the treatment of criminals. The final rotated three factor solution is presented in Table 1. Together from this set of fourteen items, the three-factor solution explained 60.4% of the variance. Although one item concerning using cannabis above the legal age cross-loaded on the sexuality factor, this item was retained to increase the number of items in the substances factor.

Table 2: Scale of Attitude Towards Substances

	<i>r</i>	Yes %
Drinking alcohol	.45	25
Vaping	.55	72
Using cannabis (marijuana) below the legal age	.47	80
Using cannabis (marijuana) above the legal age	.59	30
Smoking cigarettes	.56	60
alpha	.74	

Note: *r* = correlation between the item and the sum of the other four items
 yes % = proportion answering as 'always wrong'
 N = 181

Table 3: Scale of Attitude Towards Sexual Practice

	<i>r</i>	Yes %
Sexual intercourse prior to marriage	.83	56
Oral sex prior to marriage	.78	58
An unmarried couple living together	.71	24
Abortion	.67	29
Sexual relations between two individuals of the same sex	.67	54
Viewing pornography	.63	71
Sexting (sending nude images by texting)	.56	69
alpha	.89	

Note: *r* = correlation between the item and the sum of the other six items
 yes % = proportion answering as 'always wrong'
 N = 181

The second step in data analysis was designed to explore more fully the scaling properties of the two emerging scales concerning attitude towards substances and attitude towards sexuality. Tables 2 and 3 discuss each of these scales in turn in terms of the correlations between the individual items and the sum of the other items in the scale, the proportion of the participants endorsing the 'always wrong' response, and the alpha coefficient.²⁸ The five-item scale of attitude towards substances reported a satisfactory alpha coefficient of .74; each item correlated well with the sum of the other four items; the five items displayed a good range of discrimination, varying from 25% who rated

²⁸ Cronbach, 'Coefficient Alpha and the Internal Structure of Tests'.

drinking alcohol as always wrong to 80% who rated using cannabis (marijuana) below the legal age as always wrong. The seven-item scale of attitude toward sexuality reported a satisfactory alpha coefficient of .89; each item correlated well with the sum of the other six items; the seven items displayed a good range of discrimination, varying from 24% who rated an unmarried couple living together as always wrong to 71% who rated viewing pornography as always wrong.

Table 4: Bivariate Correlations

	Sexual	Substances
<i>Psychological variables</i>		
Thinking	-.17*	-.23**
Judging	.30***	.29***
Emotionality	.21**	.01
Extraversion	.01	.06
Sensing	.01	-.13
<i>Personal variables</i>		
Age	.22**	-.17*
Sex	.07	.16*
<i>Religious variables</i>		
Church attendance	.19**	.17*
Personal prayer	.51***	.31***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$
 Correlation between sexual and substances = .50

The third step in data analysis was designed to examine the bivariate correlations between the three groups of predictor variables (psychological, personal, and religious) and each of the two scales (sexuality and substances). In terms of the religious variables, the data presented in Table 4 demonstrated that both personal prayer and church attendance are statistically significant predictors of higher scores on both scales, and that of these two, personal prayer is the stronger predictor. In terms of personal variables, the correlations suggested that both sex and age function differently in relation to the two scales. Older participants recorded statistically significant higher scores on the scale of attitude toward sexuality and statistically significant lower scores on the scale of attitude to substances. While females recorded higher scores on the scale of attitude towards substances, there were no statistically significant sex differences on the scale of attitude towards sexuality. In terms of psychological factors, thinking types reported lower scores than feeling types on both scales, and judging types reported higher scores than perceiving types on both scales. Higher emotionality scores were associated with higher scores on the scale of attitude towards sexuality ($r = .21, p < .01$), but unrelated to scores on the scale of attitude towards substances ($r = .01, ns$).

In terms of the bivariate correlations, there was a statistically significant correlation between the scale of attitude towards sexuality and the scale of attitude towards substances ($r = .50, p < .001$). A correlation of this strength indicates that the two measures follow similar trajectories but are far from identical. The independence of the two measures is confirmed by differences in association with some of the predictor variables.

Table 5: Regression Models

	Sexual	Substances
<i>Psychological variables</i>		
Thinking	.03	-.14*
Judging	.15*	.14*
Emotionality	-.14	-.07
Extraversion	-.01	.05
Sensing	-.06	-.09
<i>Personal variables</i>		
Age	.03	-.29***
Sex	.05	.08
<i>Religious variables</i>		
Church attendance	.06	.10
Personal prayer	.40***	.26***
r^2	.29	.25

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

The final step in data analysis was designed to employ multiple regression to assess the overall impact of the three sets of predictor variables (personal, psychological, and religious) on individual differences in attitudes towards sexuality and attitude towards substances. In this analysis, the predictor variables were entered in three steps in the order of psychological variables, personal variables, and religious variables. The first and clearest conclusion from these regression models is that the strongest predictor of individual

differences in both attitudinal domains is intrinsic religiosity. Participants committed to personal prayer adopt stricter moral absolutes in terms of sexuality and substances. When personal prayer is taken into account, no additional variance is explained by church attendance. The second conclusion is that young Baptists and their leaders adopt similar attitudes towards sexuality and that young Baptists adopt stricter attitudes than their leaders towards substances. Once these two variables have been taken into account, statistically significant sex differences do not emerge in either attitudinal domain, and only two of the five psychological variables now record statistical significance: judging predicts significantly higher scores in terms of attitude toward sexuality and attitude towards substances; thinking predicts significantly lower scores in terms of attitude toward substances.

Conclusion

Drawing on theory suggesting that religion may impact various moral domains differently, that intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity may relate to moral domains differently, that personal variables (age and sex) may interact with the association between religion and moral domains, and that psychological variables (personality) may contaminate the association between religion and moral domains, the present study set out to address three specific research aims. The first research aim was to explore the factor structure of the views on contemporary moral issues held by young Canadian Baptists. From the wide range of moral issues included in the survey, two clear factors emerged, one concerned with sexuality, and one concerned with substances. Each of these two factors displayed good scaling properties. The five-item scale of attitude towards substances reported an alpha coefficient of .74, with the items displaying a good range of discrimination varying from 25% to 80%. The seven-item scale of attitude towards substances reported an alpha coefficient of .89 with the items displaying a good range of discrimination varying from 24% to 71%. The satisfactory performance of these two scales allowed the other two research aims to be addressed.

The second research aim was to test the bivariate effect of personal variables (age and sex), psychological variables (as assessed by

psychological type theory and emotionality), and religious variables (intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity) on individual differences in scores on the scale of attitudes towards substances and the scale of attitudes toward sexuality. The statistically significant bivariate correlations confirmed that some personal variables, psychological variables, and religious variables, considered individually, were associated with individual differences in the two moral domains. This finding paved the way for transition from bivariate analyses to multivariate regression analyses to address the third research aim.

The third research aim was to assess whether the two different domains of moral values (substances and sexuality) within this population related to personal variables, psychological variables, and religious variables in the same or different ways. Three key conclusions emerged from the regression models. The first conclusion is that intrinsic religiosity (as measured by frequency of personal prayer) was the strongest predictor of stricter moral absolutes in terms of both sexuality and substances. When personal prayer was taken into account, extrinsic religiosity (as measured by frequency of church attendance) added no further predictive power. The second conclusion is that there were no statistically significant sex differences in either of the two moral domains. However, age was reflected differently in the two domains. On the one hand, age was not statistically significant in respect of attitudes towards sexuality. In other words, Baptist youth and their leaders shared similar views in this domain. On the other hand, age was statistically significant in respect of attitudes towards substances. In other words, Baptist youth held a more proscriptive position on substances than their leaders. Third, when personal variables and religious variables were taken into account, only two of the five psychological variables emerged as statistically significant.

The limitations with the present study include the restricted range of moral issues included in the inventory, the assessment of intrinsic religiosity and extrinsic religiosity by the proxy measures of prayer frequency and attendance frequency, and the number of participants. These are issues that may be addressed by future studies.