

An Examination of Proactive Coping and Social Beliefs among Christians and Muslims

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Abstract

In the present chapter, relations between religious affiliation, social beliefs, and proactive coping were examined. It was anticipated that members of different religions would have different social beliefs and would differ on Proactive Coping strategies. It was also predicted that social beliefs, specifically Reward for Application and Social Complexity, would mediate the relation between Religion and Proactive Coping. One hundred and eighty individuals who identified themselves as practising Muslims or Christians, living in three countries (Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom) participated in the study. The results indicated differences between the religious groups in their endorsement of social axioms, with Muslims scoring higher on the subscales Social Cynicism, Fate Control and Religiosity. No difference between the two religious groups on Proactive Coping was found. Findings are interpreted in the light of socio-political circumstances as well as religious belief and practice. Limitations and possibilities for further work are discussed.

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A number of studies have shown that religion and well-being are related and that a focus on coping in the context of religion adds to our understanding of people's attempts to maintain their well-being in the face of adversity (Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Graham, Furr, Flowers, & Burke, 2001; Kennedy, Davis, & Taylor, 1998). However, both religion and coping are complex constructs, and the subtle relationship between them is further complicated by the diversity of values and beliefs across (and within) different religious faiths. Most of the research to date has considered coping with samples from one religion, usually Christian (e.g., Pargament, Ensing, Falgout, Olsen, Reilly, Van Haitsma, & Warren, 1990; Pargament, Ishler, Dubow, Stanik, Rouiller, Crowe, et al., 1994; Pargament, Kennell, Hathaway, Grevengoed, Newman, & Jones, 1988; Pargament, Tarakeshwar, Ellison, & Wulff, 2001), sometimes Jewish (e.g., Zeidner & Hammer, 1992), and sometimes Muslim (e.g. Ai, Peterson, & Huang, 2003; Ai, Tice, Huang, & Ishisaka, 2005).

There are, however, few studies comparing coping across faiths and relating coping styles to patterns of belief. The present paper represents an attempt to initiate this research as a step towards a better understanding of the “interplay of religion and culture” (Tarakeshwar, Stanton, & Pargament, 2003, p. 377), and of the relationship between the beliefs of different religious traditions and the coping styles of their adherents. Such an understanding has clinical as well as theoretical significance in healthcare systems with increasingly diverse clientele (Lewis, Gold, & Thorpe, in press; Peacock and Wilson, 2004).

Coping

Put simply, coping is "the effort to manage psychological stress" (Lazarus, 1999, p.111). This is an abbreviation of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) formal definition of coping as “[c]onstantly changing cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific

external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person” (p. 141). It is not a static resilience, then, but a dynamic process, potentially subject to influence by many variables. Some authors focus on specific aspects of coping; Pargament (1997), for example, defines it as “a search for significance in times of stress” (p. 90).

A broad distinction between two general types of coping is widely endorsed (e.g. Carver, Scheier, & Weintraub, 1989; Lazarus, 1999): problem-focused (active), aimed at problem solving, and emotion-focused (passive), aimed at controlling or reducing emotional distress. Although most types of stressors elicit a combination of both types of coping, problem-focused coping is conventionally regarded as more adaptive in circumstances when the individual has the ability to do something constructive to deal with the stressor. Emotion-focused coping, often found to be a less adaptive strategy, is sometimes more appropriate when the situation is beyond the control of the individual (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus, 1999).

These types of coping can be described as reactive in that they are responses to stressful events that have already occurred, with the aim of compensating for loss or harm in the past (Greenglass, 2002). Recent attention has focused on future-oriented proactive coping, to which the passive counterpart is avoidance (Greenglass, 2002). Proactive coping refers to how one faces life, rather than how one reacts to it. It consists of efforts to build up general resources that buffer the person against future vicissitudes, enable challenges to be met, and promote personal growth. An important feature of this anticipatory proactive coping is that it often utilizes social support as a practical, informational and emotional resource (Greenglass, Schwarzer, & Taubert, 1999).

Religion

There are two common approaches to a definition of religion. One relies on the premise that religion consists essentially of belief in God(s) or spirit(s) (e.g. Beit-

Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997; Tylor, 1870). The second relies on Durkheim's (1976) dichotomy between the sacred (“that is to say, things set apart and forbidden” p. 47) and the profane. Pargament (1997), for example, defines religion as, “a search for significance in ways related to the sacred” (p. 32), a definition which also echoes Geertz (1973, see below) in its emphasis on the provision of meaning.

Neither of these approaches is definitive: Durkheim’s distinction is not always supported by the data, in other words, the distinction between sacred and profane is not applicable to all religions (e.g. the practices of the Azande and the Nuer, Evans-Pritchard, 1937; 1965; and of the LoDagaa, Goody, 1961); neither do all systems of thought referred to as religions necessarily include deities or spirits (e.g., systems based on impersonal forces, such as *mana* in Melanesia and *wakan* in Dakota; Goody, 1961, and Buddhism, at least in what has been referred to as the “great tradition”; Obeyesekere, 1963, and the more recent “Protestant Buddhism”; Gombrich & Obeyesekere, 1988; Morris, 1987; Southwold, 1978). However, both these approaches to the problem of defining religion provide good rules of thumb and, in practice, there is substantial overlap between them. There is, of course, also a social and institutional aspect to religion; Durkheim (1976) emphasised its function to “unite one single moral community” (p.47).

A different approach was taken by Geertz, (1973) who defined religion as a system of knowledge concerned with giving meaning to experience: “a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men [*sic*] by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing these conceptions with ... an aura of factuality” (p. 90). This last approach to a definition of religion seems preferable to the (non-definitive) Tylorean or Durkheimian positions. It also makes it clear that a religion is a cultural phenomenon (i.e., a system of shared meanings, Rohner, 1984), and when considering culture, sampling by religion is a viable alternative to the more common strategy of sampling by nation state, a method which might be described more accurately as cross-national than as cross-cultural (Georgas, Van de Vijver & Berry, 2004).

In support of this position, Taylor (2003) has suggested that endorsement of values associated with Hofstede's (e.g. 2001) research correlates with religion, for example Muslim countries score relatively high on Uncertainty Avoidance and Power Distance (Taylor, 2003). Similarly, Inglehart and Baker (2000) argue that a "history of Protestant or Orthodox or Islamic or Confucian traditions gives rise to cultural zones with distinctive value systems" (p.49). Other authors (e.g., Tarakeshwar et al., 2003) have argued that cross-cultural research should give greater emphasis to religion than has been the case to date (for a recent example of cross-cultural work that does include religion, see Georgas et al., 2004).

Religion and Coping

Pargament (1997) connects religion and coping by definition (see the overlapping definitions above) and a growing body of relevant data connects them empirically (Koenig, George, & Siegler, 1988; McRae, 1984; Pargament et al., 1988; Pargament, 1997; Pargament et al., 1994). For example, it has been found that spirituality involving religious beliefs is associated with greater spiritual health and a greater awareness of resources for preventing strain (Graham et al., 2001). Ai et al. (2003) found that "positive" forms of prayer (for example, seeking God's love and care, as opposed to, for example, feeling abandoned by God; Pargament, Smith, Koenig, & Perez, 1998) were associated with optimism amongst a sample of Kosovar and Bosnian Muslim refugees in the U.S..

However, the extent to which religion is associated with active coping strategies is moot: the empirical data to date are mixed. The association of religion with passive coping (McRae, 1984) stems from the Freudian notion of religion as a defence mechanism (Spiro, 1965), but there is increasing evidence that this view is limited. Although some authors have linked religion with passive approaches (Dunkel-Schetter, Feinstein, Taylor, & Falke, 1992), some have linked it with an active coping style (Carver et al., 1989; Zeidner & Hammer, 1992) and others with both (Keefe, Caldwell, Queen, Gil, Martinez, Crisson et al., 1987). Pargament and Park (1995) review the data and

suggest that there is strong evidence that religion provides ways of re-interpreting or re-evaluating the meaning of a situation, which might constitute either an emotion-focused or a problem-focused strategy.

Pargament's and colleagues' (Pargament et al., 1988) own findings on forms of coping that are specifically religious also suggest that religious coping is not necessarily passive. When people turn to religion in the face of problems (stressors), this is not always "neurotic religion" (Pargament et al., 1988, p. 93), a dysfunctional relinquishing of control, as has traditionally been portrayed in much of the mainstream psychological literature (e.g. Allport, 1950; Ellis, 1960; Freud, 1927).

Pargament and Park (1995) noted that whether the coping mechanisms are active or passive may partly depend on which religion is being practiced. Loewenthal, Cinnirella, Evdoka, and Murphy (2001) found that Muslims in the U.K. were more likely than Jewish and Christian respondents to say that they would use religious coping behaviour and were less likely to say that they would seek social support or professional help for depression. Ebaugh, Richman, and Chafetz (1984) found that members of charismatic Catholic, Christian Scientist, and Baha'i groups reported different ways of responding to crises. By contrast, Cinnirella and Loewenthal (1999) found considerable consistency in ideas about the role of religion in coping among a variety of ethnic and religious groups, including Jews, Muslims, Christians and Hindus, in the U.K.

One way that religion can play a part in the problem-solving process is by providing a framework for understanding life's challenges (Spilka, Shaver, & Kirkpatrick, 1985). Religious beliefs and practices may guide the individual in the process of defining a problem, attributing causality for the problem, and selecting solutions to the problem (Pargament et al., 1988; Siegel & Schrimshaw, 2002). This involves making sense of events in terms of an ontological understanding that consists of deeply held views about how, at a fundamental level, the world works. An active approach to coping, therefore, implies an understanding of the world in which one may exert personal influence. Conversely, a passive approach would suggest a perceived

world in which problem resolution is beyond personal control.

Beliefs: Social Axioms

To gain an understanding of the contribution of religion to the problem-solving aspect of coping, one should consider the ontological beliefs that underpin the adoption of different coping strategies and the relation of these assumptions to different religions. Leung, Bond, de Carrasquel, Munoz, Hernandez, Murakami, et al. (2002) define social axioms as generalized beliefs that are basic and abstract, and are likely to relate to a variety of social behaviours across contexts, actors, targets and time periods. In short, they are statements about "how the world functions" (p. 289) and, as such, they are precisely the kind of ontological assumptions that should link religion and coping. Leung and colleagues have developed the Social Axioms Survey (SAS; Leung et al., 2002) as a measure of these beliefs.

The SAS consists of five dimensions: *Social Cynicism*, *Reward for Application*, *Social Complexity*, *Fate Control*, and *Religiosity* (formerly known as Spiritual Consequences). Social Cynicism includes a biased view against some groups, a mistrust of social institutions, and a disregard of ethical means for achieving an end: a fundamentally negative, or amoral, view of human nature. The Reward for Application subscale investigates a general belief that knowledge, effort, and careful planning will have positive results. Social Complexity indicates that there are no rigid rules, but multiple ways of achieving a goal, and also that human behaviour is inconsistent. Fate Control corresponds with the belief that life events are pre-determined and under the control of non-human forces, although there are ways for people to influence these outcomes. Religiosity endorses the reality of supernatural forces and the positive social and psychological functions of religious beliefs and institutions. In the present paper we anticipate that social axioms are likely to be related to religious beliefs as they are both bases for ontological understanding, and that they will also be related to coping strategies, which are founded in such beliefs about how the world works.

One strength of the SAS is that it has been developed with a particular emphasis

on cross-cultural validity, having been tested in over 40 national groups (Bond, Leung, Au, Tong, de Carrasquel, Murakami et al., 2004). This is particularly important in the context of studying different religious groups, as culture and religion are inextricably interwoven (Geertz, 1973; Pargament, 1997; Tarakeshwar et al., 2003) and easy and valid transferability of scales from one cultural context to another should not be assumed (Van de Vijver & Leung, 1997). There are few studies as yet linking social axioms and coping. Bond, Leung, Au, Tong, and Chemonges-Nielson's (2004) found that fate control was related to avoidant coping strategies and social complexity was related to active approaches among Hong Kong Chinese. Safdar, Lewis, and Daneshpour (2006) found that reward for application predicted active coping among Iranians in Iran.

There have been no studies to our knowledge specifically comparing Muslims and Christians on social axioms. Nevertheless, there are data from predominantly Muslim and predominantly Christian countries that could be used as the basis for hypothesis generation. Previous research shows that although citizens of some Muslim countries score high on social cynicism (e.g., Pakistanis, $M=3.29$), others do not (e.g., Iranians, $M=2.88$ and Indonesians, $M=2.72$). Furthermore, citizens of non-Muslim countries, such as Taiwanese ($M=3.30$) and Germans ($M=3.32$) are among citizens with high scores on social cynicism (Leung & Bond, 2004). The scores for the Americans, British, and Canadians, however, are at the lower end of the range: $M=2.65$, $M=2.75$ and $M=2.63$, respectively, lower than citizens from all the predominantly Muslim countries, as reported by Leung and Bond (2004).

The picture is similarly inconsistent for fate control. It has been reported that although some Muslims score high on fate control (e.g. Pakistanis, $M=3.15$; Nigerians, $M=3.08$; Malaysians, $M=2.96$; Indonesians, $M=2.91$; Iranians, $M=2.85$), so do some non-Muslims, such as Thais ($M=3.14$) and Georgians ($M=3.00$; Leung & Bond, 2004). However, citizens from few Muslim countries score low on fate control: the two lowest are Lebanese ($M=2.47$), from a country which is part Christian, and Turks ($M=2.68$), who come from one of the few secular Muslim states. Again, the U.K., U.S. and Canadian

citizen scores on fate control are lower than in all the predominantly Muslim countries in Leung and Bond's (2004) data set: $M=2.35$, $M=2.46$, and $M=2.43$, respectively.

Previous research shows that countries with large Muslim populations score high on religiosity. In Leung and Bond's (2004) data set, Pakistanis ($M=4.40$), Malaysians ($M=4.30$), Indonesians, ($M=4.22$), and Iranians ($M=4.15$) are citizens of the four countries where the highest scores were obtained on religiosity. By contrast, samples from secular countries such as Belgium ($M=2.58$), Norway ($M=2.55$), and France ($M=2.60$) scored low on religiosity. Safdar et al. (2006) also found Iranians to be higher than Canadians on religiosity. Again, in Leung and Bond's (2004), samples from the same four Muslim countries (Indonesia, Iran, Malaysia, and Pakistan) scored higher on reward for application ($M=4.14$, 4.12 , 4.29 , and 4.15 , respectively) than samples from the U.S.A., the U.K., Canada, and France ($M=3.66$, 3.46 , 3.74 , and 3.56 , respectively), and lower on social complexity (Indonesians, $M=3.96$; Iranians, $M=3.79$; Malaysians, $M=3.93$; Pakistanis, 3.77 ; Americans, $M=4.10$; British, $M=4.11$, Canadians, $M=4.2$, French, $M=4.08$). Safdar et al. (2006) also found Iranians scoring higher than Canadians on reward for application, but they found no difference in social complexity. In respect of the last finding, Leung and Bond's (2004) data should be given greater weight than Safdar et al.'s (2006), as the earlier study comprises a major global project rather than a single three-sample comparison.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were derived from the above review:

Hypothesis 1: we predicted that there would be a significant difference between Muslims and Christians on endorsement of social axioms. Specifically, Muslims were expected to score higher on Reward for Application, Social Cynicism, Religiosity, and Fate Control than Christians, but lower on Social Complexity.

Hypothesis 2a: we predicted that Social Complexity and Reward for Application would be associated with Proactive Coping. This is based on Bond et al.'s (2004) and

Safdar et al.'s (2006) findings linking Social Complexity and Reward for Application to active coping.

Hypothesis 2b: we further predict that the two religious groups would differ on Proactive Coping. This assumes that the previous two hypotheses are supported. Specifically, it was predicted that Muslims would show higher levels of Proactive Coping than Christians. This would put beliefs in a mediating role between religion and coping.

Method

Design

Religious practice. This construct was operationalized using the question, “Do you practice your religion?” and only including for analysis data from those who gave an affirmative answer to this question. Enquiring about specific behaviours (e.g., mosque/ church attendance) could be flawed as a measure of religious involvement, as participants might not perform the particular behaviours enquired about and yet still consider themselves to be actively religious. Additionally, the particular behaviours could have different significance across religious groups. Participants’ subjective perception of whether they are practising Muslims or Christians was judged to be the most valid indicator in this instance.

Religion and culture are interwoven, but the intention in the present context was to address the former specifically. Sampling in only one country would risk the unnoticed influence of national idiosyncracies. However, sampling from culturally diverse societies would make it difficult to disentangle religious and non-religious cultural influences. In the present study, samples were taken in three geographically and politically distinct

nations where one would predict (on the basis of known cultural differences, e.g., Hofstede, 2001) relatively few differences in broad values, or beliefs (Leung and Bond, 2004): Canada, U.S. and U.K. Differences between the religious groups that hold true across all three locations could thus confidently be regarded as the product of religious influence, rather than a product of a pattern of inter-group relations that could be specific to one country.

It is worth noting, however, that the Muslims are living in societies that are predominantly Christian. If there are acculturation effects, this would be anticipated to attenuate any differences between the religious groups. Safdar et al. (2006), for example, found that Iranians in Canada scored in between Canadians in Canada and Iranians in Iran on all dimensions of the SAS.

Measures

After giving informed consent, participants completed a questionnaire asking for demographic information (i.e., religion, level of education, age, and gender) and including measures of social axioms and coping.

Social Axioms Survey. To measure social axioms, the 60-item Social Axiom Survey developed by Leung et al. (2002) was used. This instrument, measured on five-point Likert scales, is divided into five subscales, Social Cynicism, (e.g., ‘Young people are impulsive and unreliable’), Reward for Application, (e.g., ‘Adversity can be overcome by effort’), Social Complexity, (e.g., ‘To experience various life styles is a way to enjoy life’), Fate Control, (e.g., ‘Most disasters can be predicted’), and Religiosity, (e.g., ‘One feels safer in the world through a belief in a supreme being’). Cronbach alphas for the five subscales, and the factor structure of the SAS are presented below (see results).

Coping. Proactive coping was measured using the Proactive Coping subscale of the Proactive Coping Inventory (Greenglass et al., 1999), which has 14 items, measured

on 4-point Likert scales. Proactive Coping consists of autonomous goal-setting with self-regulatory cognitions and behaviours relating to goal attainment (e.g., 'I am a "take-charge" person') (Greenglass et al., 1999).

Participants

A total of 329 individuals participated in the study (127 males and 263 females). All were university students and they were recruited from three large universities in the U.S., Canada and the U.K. One hundred and ninety-six identified themselves as Christians, 63 as Muslim, 41 as Jewish, 4 as belonging to other religions, and 10 did not report their religion. Two hundred reported that they practiced their religion and 97 reported that they did not (eight were missing). Given that we were interested in practising Christians and Muslims, we removed participants who stated that they did not practice their religion. We also removed those who identified with a religion other than Christianity or Islam. The final sample comprised 180 participants (U.S., N = 60; Canada, N = 68; U.K., N = 52) who identified themselves as practising Muslims (N=60; 24 males, 31 females and 5 missing data) or Christians (N=120; 34 males, 76 females and 10 missing data). Sixty-three per cent of the practising Muslims were 20 years old or younger, 32% were between 21-30, and 3% above 30. Thirty per cent of the practising Christians were 20 years old or younger, 55% were between 21 and 30, and 15% were above 30.

Results

First, factor analyses using Varimax rotation were conducted on the SAS scores for each of the two samples. An examination of the scree plots and variance accounted for by five factors (versus four or six) showed that a five-factor solution was best for the two samples. This five-factor solution explained 33% of the variance for the Christian sample and 44% for the Muslim sample. In the next step, using Cronbach's alpha, items that had a low (or negative) item-total correlation were omitted from the scale. This procedure has previously been employed to identify which of the items (intended to be etc) are

applicable and meaningful in a particular culture (Kurman & Ronen-Eilon, 2004; Leung & Bond, 2004; Safdar et al., 2006). The subscales Social Complexity and Fate Control required modification (i.e., omission of items) in both samples. The same items were omitted for both samples to maintain metric equivalence. The Social Cynicism, Reward for Application, and Religiosity subscales were not improved by omission of items in either of the samples.

Cronbach alphas for all subscales are presented separately for both samples in Table 1. The reliability for two of the subscales, Social Cynicism and Reward for Application, was well within the acceptable range for both samples (Cronbach alphas between .71 and .80). For two of the other subscales, Fate Control and Religiosity, the reliability coefficients were moderate (Cronbach alpha between .63 and .69) and within the range reported by other researchers (e.g., Kurman & Ronen-Eilon, 2004). However, the reliability of Social Complexity was undesirably low for the Christian sample (Cronbach alpha .46), although it was within an acceptable range for the Muslim sample (Cronbach alpha .70). We are not clear why such a difference exists between the two samples, although the low reliability for this particular subscale is consistent with previous reports involving other samples (Safdar et al., 2006)

Comparison of Muslims and Christians on Social Axioms.

A 2 (religion) x 3 (country of residence) Multivariate Analysis of Variance (MANOVA) was conducted to predict scores on the five SAS dimensions and Proactive Coping. The results indicated significant multivariate main effects for religion: Wilks' Lambda = .84, $F(6, 155) = 5.00, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.16$, and for country of residence: Wilks' Lambda = .70, $F(12, 312) = 5.09, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.16$. No interaction between religion and country of residence was found: Wilks' Lambda = .94, $F(12, 310) = .77, p = .68$.

Consistent with Hypothesis 1, Muslim and Christian participants differed significantly on three of the five dimensions of social axioms: Social Cynicism, $F(1, 160) = 15.34, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.09$, Fate Control, $F(1, 160) = 7.26, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.04$, and Religiosity, $F(1, 160) = 6.20, p < .01, \eta^2 = 0.04$, with the Muslim participants scoring

significantly higher than the Christian participants in each case (all $ps < .01$). The two religious groups, however, did not differ on the Social Complexity, $F(1, 160) = .79, p = .38$, or Reward for Application, $F(1, 160) = 2.11, p = .15$ subscales. This provides partial support for Hypothesis 1. It was also found that the two religious groups did not differ on Proactive Coping, $F(1, 160) = 3.34, p = .07$.

There were also significant effects for place of residence on two of the five dimensions of social axioms: Social Complexity, $F(2, 160) = 12.53, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.13$ and Religiosity, $F(2, 160) = 19.80, p < .001, \eta^2 = 0.20$. Place of residence, however, did not have any effect on Social Cynicism, $F(2, 160) = .89, p = .41$, Reward for Application, $F(2, 160) = 1.91, p = .15$, or Fate Control, $F(2, 160) = 2.64, p = .07$. Furthermore, there was no significant effect for place of residence on Proactive Coping, $F(2, 160) = .15, p = .86$. Post hoc analyses using Bonferroni's adjustment indicated that British participants scored significantly lower than the Canadian and American participants on Social Complexity and Religiosity (all $ps < .001$). The means and standard deviations for the two religious groups and the three countries of residence on the five SAS dimensions and Proactive Coping are reported in Table 2.

Religion, social axioms, and proactive coping. The zero-order correlation coefficients were calculated for the five SAS dimensions and Proactive Coping (see Table 3). Reward for Application ($r = .20, p < .01$) and Social Complexity ($r = .16, p < .05$) correlated significantly with Proactive Coping. To test Hypotheses 2a and 2b, we conducted a hierarchical regression analysis predicting Proactive Coping using the five SAS dimensions in Block 1 and gender, religion, and country of residence plus the interactions of the SAS dimensions with the three demographic variables in Block 2 as predictor variables. Two dummy variables were created for the three categories of place of residence. Furthermore, to create the interaction factor in Block 2, the SAS dimensions were centred first, and then the interactions with gender, religion, and place of residence were computed. This allowed us to measure whether the effects of social axioms on coping are moderated by the demographic variables.

The results indicated that Block 1 was significant, $F(5, 147) = 2.70, p < .05$ (see Table 4), Social Cynicism ($B = -.21, p < .01$) and Reward for Application ($B = .19, p < .05$) predicted Proactive Coping. This provides partial support for Hypothesis 2a. Block 2, however, was not significant, $F(24, 128) = 1.55, p > .05$, neither was the R^2 change ($R^2 = .14, p = .25$), indicating that the effect for social axioms was robust and there was no mediation effect for social beliefs. Therefore, Hypothesis 2b was not supported. The only factor that was significantly related to coping in Block 2 was Gender ($B = -.16, p < .05$), with women reporting less likelihood of using Proactive Coping than men.

Discussion

The present study measured social beliefs and proactive coping in two religious groups across three countries. Hypothesis 1 was supported in part: Muslims scored higher than Christians on Religiosity, Social Cynicism and Fate Control, as had been predicted, but not on Reward for Application. Furthermore, we did not find the predicted difference on Social Complexity (i.e., Muslims did not score lower than Christians). This last result, however, matches the results obtained by Safdar et al. (2006) comparing Iranians and Canadians in which this was the only subscale where there was no difference between groups.

The preliminary results indicated that country of residence exerted some influence on responses and therefore, it was included in the analyses along with gender. In the present data, the British participants scored significantly lower than the Canadian and American participants on Social Complexity and Religiosity. This indicates that country of residence has some influence on expressed beliefs, as the acculturation literature might lead one to expect (Berry, Phinney, Kwak, & Sam, 2006; Safdar et al., 2006). These

Muslim groups, as acknowledged above, are largely from immigrant communities, and are in the process of adjusting to three culturally close, but not identical cultures and social systems.

The differences in the present data echo those of Leung and Bond (2004), in which a British sample scored lower than the American and Canadian samples on Religiosity, and lower than the Canadians, but not the American sample, on Social Complexity. This would appear to reflect a process of acculturation, with differences between groups of immigrants, with a common religion, to three countries, resembling the pattern of differences between national samples from those three countries. These differences appear to be relatively minor in the present context, as there were no interactions between religion and country of residence, and the lower score for the British sample on Religiosity did not obscure an overall difference between Muslims and Christians. The strategy of sampling across three culturally close societies was intended to buffer the overall findings against such local effects, and the strategy justified the view that religion would contribute to belief more than country of residence. In the present context, the finding of higher religiosity among Muslims than Christians is a robust difference between the religious groups, consistent across different countries.

The findings that Muslim participants were more inclined than Christian participants to endorse beliefs indicating Religiosity accords with previous research using social axioms (Leung & Bond, 2004; Safdar et al., 2006) and other measures of

religiosity (Martin, Kirkcaldy, & Siefen, 2003; Saroglou, & Galand, 2004). It also makes intuitive sense, for to be a practising Muslim may involve more of a day-to-day commitment (e.g., praying five times a day) than to be a practising Christian, particularly in countries where Islam is a minority religion, and in the context of the perceived Islamophobia that is felt by some Muslims living in “the West”, post-9/11 (Inayat, 2002).

Muslims also scored higher than Christians on Social Cynicism and Fate Control, as predicted on the basis of Leung and Bond’s (2004) and Safdar et al.’s (2006) findings. It may be plausible to interpret the higher scores on Social Cynicism, and to some degree on Fate Control, in light of the Muslims’ minority status in the three countries from which samples were drawn, and their corresponding sense of disempowerment. If one perceives a social environment where one’s effort is not rewarded (and the Muslim group did not score higher on Reward for Application as had been hypothesized) because of a negatively valued minority status, one may well become inclined towards social cynicism. USA Today and the British Broadcasting Company (BBC) have both reported on the improved responses from potential employers, in the U.S. and U.K. respectively, to Muslims who changed their names to sound non-Muslim (BBC, 2005, USA Today, 2002). Such a climate could explain a degree of social cynicism, and also a perception of the influence of fate.

However, Leung and Bond’s (2004) research shows that, although respondents in some non-Muslim countries have produced high scores on Social Cynicism (e.g. Taiwan,

$M=3.30$; Germany, $M=3.32$), citizen means for predominantly Muslim countries (e.g. Pakistan, $M=3.29$; Iran, $M=2.88$) are higher than those for the countries from which our samples were drawn (U.S., $M=2.65$; U.K., $M=2.75$; Canada, $M=2.63$; Leung & Bond, 2004). Therefore, the difference observed here between Christians and Muslims on Social Cynicism is not just to do with minority status. One cannot argue that Muslim respondents generally tend to score high relative to non-Muslims on Social Cynicism. They do, however, appear consistently to score higher than citizens from the cluster of English-speaking nations. Leung and Bond (2004) do not report Australian data, but the New Zealand citizen scores are consistent with this observation ($M=2.77$).

One might speculate that Muslims, whether they are individuals from immigrant communities in predominantly Christian countries, or national samples from predominantly Muslim countries, express Social Cynicism as a product of perceived disempowerment. One might also speculate that there is something about Islam, or the history of democracy in Muslim countries, that inclines people and nations to social cynicism. It is associated with lower life-satisfaction (Leung & Bond, 2004), and with no evidence to cite for either of the latter speculations, we would tentatively interpret these higher Social Cynicism scores as reflecting an inequitable perceived social reality for our three Muslim samples.

The case is similar with Fate Control. Leung and Bond (2004) reported that some Muslim and some non-Muslim countries are high scoring on this scale, although there are few predominantly Muslim countries with a low national mean. Leung and Bond (2004)

also report that difficult socio-economic conditions are associated with stronger beliefs in Fate Control and Religiosity, and they suggest that these beliefs represent ways of coping with adverse environments. This association of religiosity with difficult circumstances has been observed before. For example, Hood, Spilka, Hunsberger, and Gorsuch (1996) noted that, "People turn to their gods in time of trouble and crisis" (p. 386), and the idea is not a new one. Hume wrote of religion that it arose 'from a concern with regard to the events of life, and from the incessant hopes and fears which actuate the human mind' (Hume, 1757, p. 27, cited in Morris, 1987). Morris (1987) traces the idea back to Euripides.

An interpretation that combines religious motivations and socio-political circumstances, then, appears most appropriate to the interpretation of Muslims' higher scores on Religiosity, Fate Control and Social Cynicism. The absence of a difference between Christians and Muslims on Social Complexity is in line with some previous research (Safdar et al., 2006); the fact that the Muslims in our sample did not score higher than the Christians on Reward for Application may be because they live in societies where they perceive that, for them, as Muslims, application is sometimes not rewarded as it might be (BBC, 2005; Inayat, 2002; USA Today, 2002).

Hypothesis 2a was supported only to the extent that there was some linkage between social beliefs and coping. However, the specific predictions made for hypothesis 2a based on previous findings (that Social Complexity and Reward for Application would be associated with active coping; Bond et al., 2004a; Safdar et al., 2006) were only partially supported. Reward for Application predicted Proactive Coping but Social Complexity did not. Higher scores on Social Cynicism, however, predicted less Proactive Coping. No links were evident between the other SAS dimensions and coping. Neither was there a difference between the two religious groups on Proactive Coping (no support

for Hypothesis 2b). Although Muslims scored higher than Christians on Social Cynicism, and Social Cynicism was inversely related to Proactive Coping, the link was not sufficiently strong for Muslims to report less Proactive Coping.

It may be the case that differences between our findings and the limited previous research on axioms and coping may reflect the fact that we are measuring proactive rather than reactive coping. In this context, the finding of an inverse relation between Social Cynicism and Proactive Coping, makes intuitive sense. If one is more inclined to mistrust social institutions and expects negative outcomes, as is the case for those high on social cynicism, proactive strategies are likely to seem less attractive (because, potentially, less fruitful) than for those who are less cynical.

It is noteworthy that for both religious groups, a higher level of expressed social cynicism was associated with less Proactive Coping. This simply means that social cynicism is associated with less Proactive Coping for both Muslims and Christians, rather than having different implications for the two groups, there are elements of shared tradition, of course, between the two religions, so their adherents should not be expected to differ in every regard (Lewis et al., in press). Also, perhaps social cynicism generalizes to cynicism in other domains, in this case the value of different coping strategies. Leung and Bond (2004) refer to it as a negative worldview, so it is a generalised construct.

Reward for Application was also associated with Proactive Coping, as had been hypothesized. It has now been found to be associated with both (re)active (Safdar et al., 2006) and proactive coping. This is not a consistent finding, however, as Bond et al. (2004a) did not find it among Hong Kong Chinese. In that post-Confucian context, it is the acknowledgement of Social Complexity that is associated with active coping strategies. In our data, collected in countries known to be individualistic (Hofstede, 2001), and where, therefore, individual agency is given greater value, there was no association between Social Complexity and coping for either group. However, Reward for Application, the dimension of beliefs asserting the value of individual agency, is the relevant dimension in this context. The associations between Social Complexity and

active coping in a Confucian context, and between Reward Application and active coping in an individualistic context, are plausible and interpretable associations.

Limitations and Further Work

In broad terms, some relationship between beliefs and coping is still a hypothesis that commends itself, but there is no reason why religion should necessarily interact with beliefs. In other words, Christian Social Cynicism and Muslim Social Cynicism are similar, at least in their relation to coping. However, consideration of a more multi-faceted model of coping, perhaps specifically of religious coping (Pargament et al., 1990), would be instructive. Pargament et al. (1994) also advocate the examination of separate religious coping strategies. Further study could also be directed toward the context in which religious individuals practice both proactive and avoidant coping. Loewenthal et al. (2001) suggest that the efficacy of different religious coping strategies is context-specific.

It would also be desirable to look at outcomes such as well-being, to consider the appropriateness of differences in coping styles. In the present study, those who report more Social Cynicism also report less Proactive Coping, and those who report a belief in Reward for Application report more Proactive Coping. To what extent these reflect adaptive strategies is not clear with no outcome measures, although, in a recent study, (Lai, Bond, & Hui, 2007) social cynicism has been associated with lower life satisfaction.

One possible confound is ethnicity: Muslims and Christians may not be homogeneous across the three national samples. To some extent this renews the

discussion as to the validity of sampling by religion rather than nationality, or ethnicity, but they are approaches that augment rather than preclude each other. It would be desirable to match samples in terms of ethnicity, but our sample size does not permit this. There are no anomalous results by nation of residence that might be interpretable in these terms, however. The only national differences (the British respondents scoring lower on Social Complexity and Religiosity) are entirely consonant with previous findings (Leung & Bond, 2004).

Conclusion

The present study is the first to consider the links between different religious groups across different countries of residence. It is also the first, to our knowledge, that attempts to link social axioms, and coping behaviour to religious affiliation. This study has important implications for cross-cultural research where culture is usually operationalized in terms of nationality. It highlights the importance of slicing global culture in other ways, supporting the argument of Tarakeshwar et al. (2003) that religion is somewhat “overlooked” in cross-cultural research, despite its manifest importance in the lives of many people.

There are also links between social beliefs and coping. Findings to date suggest that Social Cynicism is inversely related to Proactive Coping (this study), that Reward for Application (this study and Safdar et al., 2006) and Social Complexity (Bond et al., 2004a) are positively associated with active coping, and that Fate Control is related to

passive coping (Bond et al., 2004a). These relations are not consistent across studies, although some of the differences found to date are plausible and interpretable. Clearly, there is considerable scope for more research here as the cross-cultural variation in the associations of social beliefs, religion, and coping is an intriguing emergent area.

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Table 1
Cronbach's Alpha for each of the SAS Dimensions and Proactive Coping for Muslim and Christian Samples

	Muslim Alpha	Christian Alpha	Total Sample Alpha
Social Cynicism (19-item)	.74	.73	.75
Reward for Application (16-item)	.80	.71	.75
Social Complexity (11-item)	.70	.46	.56
Fate Control (6-item)	.68	.69	.64
Religiosity (12-item)	.63	.63	.65
Pro-active Coping (14-item)	.82	.78	.79

Note. Two of the above subscales, Fate Control and Social Complexity were modified to improve the scale reliability. Metric equivalence was maintained, however, across the two samples.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations, for each SAS Dimension and Proactive Coping for Muslim and Christian samples

	Muslim (N = 56)	Christian (N = 116)	Canada (N = 66)	U.S.A. (N = 56)	U.K. (N = 50)
S o c i a l Cynicism M SD	2.84 .43	2.59 .41	2.71 .44	2.64 .41	2.65 .46
Reward for Application M SD	3.73 .48	3.60 .40	3.70 .46	3.69 .44	3.52 .37
S o c i a l Complexity M SD	3.73 .49	3.78 .36	<u>3.88</u> <i>U.K.</i> .39	<u>3.87</u> <i>U.K.</i> .42	<u>3.50</u> .27
Fate Control M SD	2.71 .68	2.30 .66	2.35 .58	2.64 .74	2.33 .73
Religiosity M SD	3.77 .55	3.49 .48	<u>3.79</u> <i>U.K.</i> .41	<u>3.74</u> <i>U.K.</i> .50	<u>3.13</u> .38
Proactive Coping M SD	2.97 .41	3.08 .36	3.00 .39	3.04 .39	3.10 .37

Note. Significantly different means comparing Muslim and Christians are in bold and significantly different means comparing Canadian, American, and British participants are in italic and underlined, $P < .01$.

Table 3

Correlation Coefficients between All Variables (N = 178)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Social Cynicism	-							
2. Reward for Application	.21**	-						
3. Social Complexity	-.03	.45***	-					
4. Fate Control	.46***	.12	-.04	-				
5. Religiosity	.03	.49***	.53***	.04	-			
6. Proactive Coping	-.15	.20**	.16*	-.001	-.002	-		
7. Religious Affiliation+	-.28**	-.13	.06	-.26**	-.25**	.13	-	

8. Place of Reside nce++	.07	.02	.04	-.15*	.06	-.05	.12	-
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Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

+ Religious affiliation (1=Muslim, 2=Christian)

++ Place of residence: (1=U.S., 2=U.K., 3=Canada)

Table 4

Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Variables Predicting Proactive Coping

Variable	Proactive Coping	
	R^2	B $Beta$ standardized
Model 1	.08*	
Social Cynicism		-.21** -.23**
Reward for Application		.19* .22*
Social Complexity		.12 .13
Fate Control		.07 .13
Religiosity		-.14 -.19
Model 2	.23	
Social Cynicism		-.70 -.76
Reward for Application		-.29 -.33
Social Complexity		.83 .85
Fate Control		-.10 -.18
Religiosity		.43 .57
Gender		-.16* -.20*
Religion		-.001 -.003
Country of Residence, dummy1		.001 .002
Country of Residence, dummy2		.02 .02
Social Cynicism x Religion		.16 .47
Reward for Application x Religion		.17 .50
Social Complexity x Religion		-.03 -.09

Fate Control x Religion	-.05	-.26
Religiosity x Religion	-.26	-.92
Social Cynicism x Location	.08	.21
Reward for Application x Location	-.18	-.49
Social Complexity x Location	-.08	-.19
Fate Control x Location	.001	.003
Religiosity x Location	.08	.23
Social Cynicism x Gender	-.08	-.14
Reward for Application x Gender	.21	.41
Social Complexity x Gender	-.29	-.48
Fate Control x Gender	.21	.61
Religiosity x Gender	.02	.05

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Endnotes

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Religion, Beliefs, and Coping

Religion, Beliefs, and Coping

Three items were omitted from Social Complexity subscale. These items were:

“One’s appearance does not reflect one’s character.”

“To experience various lifestyles is a way to enjoy life.”

“Acting according to principles prevents the need to make troublesome decisions.”

Two items were omitted from Fate Control subscale. These items were:

“A person’s talents are inborn.”

“All things in the universe have been determined.”