



Students' Religiosity and Study Engagement
Pusztai, Gabriella. University of Debrecen. gabriella.pusztai@ella.hu

1. Objetivos o propósitos:

Although the educational studies on academic performance generally ignore the influence of religiosity, our research into the impact of religiosity on academic career during the past decade has convinced us that the phenomenon is worth taking into consideration. At first sight the subject may seem to bear little social relevance and raising it may even appear useless as for a long time studies on the sociology of religion tended to maintain that the higher the level of education, the lower the level of religious affiliation in society. However, recent analyses have pointed out that in our region this correlation was due to socialist modernisation and state-supported secularisation (Gautier & Singelmann, 1997, Tomka, 2011).

2. Marco teórico:

Our research findings show that the issue of religiosity and education level is to be examined separately from the issue of religiosity and attitude to academic work and achievement (Pusztai, 2009). There is a large amount of research trying to find an explanation as to how the attainment of the highest qualification is distributed in society; and it comes to the conclusion with great certainty that - although the education level of the previous generation is a powerful impact factor in this matter - there are some factors that have been left unconsidered so far. Of those, we have already called attention to the structural and cultural characteristics of the context of religion (Pusztai, 2009). It is a classic idea that religiosity in itself can be beneficial to social mobility (Riesman, 1956, Weber, 2001), but empirical evidence has been sought after ever since by a whole range of analyses, some of which claim that academic success is promoted by religious practice, while others hold the view that it undermines high achievement (c.f. Pusztai, 2009).

The majority of researchers can detect the impact of individual and communal religious practice on academic work, aspirations for further studies and the individual's later social status, and several of them claim that it serves to compensate for the lack of cultural capital in the family (Darnell & Sherkat, 1997, Lehrer 1999). There are various interpretations as to the working mechanism of the impact of religious practice on one's academic career. The question is whether the correlation is direct or indirect. To put it more precisely, religiosity results in an attitude that helps achievement and what we want to know is whether this attitude is a central and organic component of religiosity such as

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conscientiousness or a side-effect of religious upbringing such as respect for authority (Iannaccone, 1998).

As for descriptions of the working mechanism, we have found the following alternatives the most interesting: firstly, the impact of religious practice may manifest itself, owing to personal contemporary relationship networks, as contemporary group pressure (Sewell et al., 1969, Darnell & Sherkat, 1997), serving as a condition of cooperation with religious friends. Secondly, through the cognitive dimension of religion, value preferences and norms exert a direct influence on the individual's everyday and crucial decisions concerning school (Lehrer, 2006). Thirdly, religion can influence one's decisions on education through their attitude to work, family and the like, as a consequence of decisions concerning those areas (Lehrer, 2006).

Since Newcomb's Bennington College study, we have been suspecting that higher education years are the formative ones with respect to the shaping of an individual's way of thinking, political and religious views. Recent research has proved that these are the years that - depending on the institutional environment - bring about more or less decisive spiritual changes (Feldman-Newcomb, 1969, Schreiner, 2000, Morris et al., 2003, Astin et al., 2011). Lately, higher education research has been giving special focus on religious students from another point of view. They have been identified as a special risk group, along with other minority student groups, family providers or students from low-status families. What these so called non-traditional students have in common is that their integration into the social milieu of higher education is only partial (Tinto, 1993). A fact noteworthy not in itself but considering the range of studies confirming the assumption that poorly integrated students have poor ambitions for continuing their studies, are less attached to the institution, more uncertain in interpreting academic objectives and more likely to change institutions, drop out or become unsuccessful (Tinto, 1993, Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005, Reay et al., 2009).

Still, the question arises whether the concept of student integration is absolutely valid in the culturally heterogeneous student society of the post-millennium years, where integration into the dominant student culture does not necessarily mean real support to everyone. In our most recent studies we have argued that external relationships can also produce such commitments that support learning-related decisions, achieving academic objectives or even identification with the institution (Hurtado, 2007, Pusztai, 2011).

Previously, we analysed the influence of religiosity on one's school career and confirmed the importance of religion-based relationship networks in promoting high achievement (Pusztai, 2009). In the world of higher education identification with the institution's value system and objectives is a complicated issue. Partly

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because the dominating world view of HE institutions, especially in our region, is secular, or rather anti-religious (Berger, 1999, Geiger, 1985), and partly because unlike in primary and secondary education, where the teacher plays a greater role in manifesting the culture of the institution, a HE student encounters it mainly in fellow-students' interpretation. As just until very recently the topic of religion was considered taboo in personal relationships with faculty, students have been driven by their needs to discuss spiritual issues towards informal relationship networks either inside or outside the institution. Meanwhile, as theories of HE involvement and integration point out, they may become distanced from the majority of the student society, the dominant behaviour patterns of which are probably not fully acceptable to a religious young person (Mahaffey & Smith, 2009).

As regards relational embeddedness, these students' system of ties are multiplied by ties to a religious community or circle of friends. Membership in a religious community or denomination serves as a basis for a large number of friendships, which makes it possible for relationships to be grounded on the voluntariness of co-membership rather than institutional rationality. The probability of relationships being organised along these lines is supported by the fact that religious students consider religious homophily very important not only in their earlier friendships but also in the ones they form during their university years. Since during our research in the past few years we found that the higher educational integration of students belonging to religion-based communities produced such special features as stronger attachment to traditional academic values, in the present study we will try to find out to what extent religious students' social status and extra-institutional relationships influence their academic advancement.

3. Metodologia

Our data was collected in Hungarian-language institutions in the border region of Hungary, Rumania and Ukraine in 2014. A representative sample of third-year bachelor and students was taken at each faculty of ten higher education institutions. The sample size was proportionate to the number of students at each faculty. As we did not have a complete list of students, we did group sampling, surveying randomly chosen seminar groups (N=1850). The measurement of religiosity is precise only if it reflects its multi-dimensional character. We decided to examine the above factors because we wanted to know whether they promote students' relational (structural) and cultural embeddedness in the society of the institution. The details on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the latter concepts were presented in our book (Pusztai, 2014). Besides, our research also focused on students' choices between dominant academic goals, value systems and behaviour patterns in their institutional environment (cultural embeddedness).

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This dimension is represented here by the willingness to do self-motivated extracurricular work.

4. Discusión de los datos, evidencias, objetos o materiales

We attempted to compare demographic factors and indicators of family status with indicators of religiosity with respect to their impact on willingness to undertake extracurricular work. As we also wanted to know whether the inclusion of religiosity as a factor modifies the impact of the other factors, we created two-step models. During our analysis we learnt that of demographic and social status indicators it is mature student age and father's university degree that have the most important influence on bachelor students' extracurricular activities based on intragenerational competition. In the second step, after including various indicators of religiosity, we found that it is regular religious practice in a large community that has the most significant impact. It is remarkable that its appearance among the indicators reduces the influence of mature age; yet it does not reduce but even slightly increases the influence of father with a degree. That leads us to the conclusion that the older students of our sample must practise their religion in larger numbers, unlike the children of highly qualified fathers, as the influence of that factor does not typically decrease. Therefore it is likely that one part of bachelor students doing competitive extra work has highly qualified fathers, whereas the other part practises religion and their fathers do not have a degree. On the whole, willingness to do competitive extracurricular work is promoted by religious practice in a large community more significantly than by other indicators of religious practice. As for bachelor students' extracurricular work based on intergenerational cooperation, in the first step it was determined by a demographic factor: male students were definitely more motivated in this respect than female ones. The inclusion of the indicator of communal religious practice reinforced the impact of sex even further, so it can be stated that neither social status nor religious practice enhance the chance of intergenerational cooperation. As we pointed out in another study, there are other elements of the institutional context that may have a major influence on extracurricular work based on intergenerational cooperation (Pusztai, 2014).

In contrast, none of the demographic and status indicators show any correlation with competition-based voluntary work among master students. It may be due to the fact that the region's higher education is becoming more and more homogeneous with respect to social status, especially as we move upwards in the multi-cycle system. Personal religious practice has an even greater impact on undertaking competition-based extracurricular work than religious practice in a large community (Pusztai, 2014).

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As regards cooperation with faculty, master students do not generally seem to gain any advantage from being male, older than average or children of highly qualified fathers. Our detailed analysis proves that the chance of cooperation with faculty is greatly enhanced by regular religious practice in a large community, and even more so by personal religious practice as it was already suggested by the two-variable analysis. The conclusion is that the role of religion as a factor promoting extracurricular work is much more comprehensive and significant in the master than in the bachelor phase (Pusztai, 2014).

5. Resultados y/o conclusiones

As we were primarily interested whether any indicator of religious practice is capable of compensating for family status indicators, we constructed a multivariable regression model to examine what factors promote extracurricular student work done in order to obtain knowledge. We came to the conclusion that religious factors do increase its chance at certain points.

6. Contribuciones y significación científica de este trabajo:

In our work we analyse the question of students' institutional integration by using the conclusions of Coleman's social capital theory (Coleman 1988). In our opinion, a conceptual value of social capital is that it expands the space and possibilities – as well as the responsibilities – of the staff and students working together in a college or university.

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