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Rejection of Christianity and Self-Esteem

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A sample of 279 13- to 16-year-old secondary school pupils in Wales completed the *Rejection of Christianity Scale* and the *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory*. After controlling for sex differences a small but significant correlation was found between the two variables, indicating that low self-esteem is associated with the rejection of Christianity.

Much of the work that measures religiosity uses items that are specifically designed to determine positive valency. For example, the *Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity* (Francis, 1978; Francis & Stubbs, 1987) assesses how positively people feel about God, Jesus, the Bible, prayer and church. Using this instrument, a number of studies have demonstrated a positive association between a positive attitude toward Christianity and a range of positive psychological categories, such as happiness (Francis, Jones, & Wilcox, 2000), general psychological health (Francis, Robbins, Lewis, Quigley, & Wheeler, 2004) and life satisfaction (Lewis, 1998). In particular, several studies have now confirmed the link between a positive attitude toward Christianity and better self-esteem (Jones & Francis, 1996).

By way of contrast, the *Rejection of Christianity Scale* proposed by Greer and Francis (1992) was designed to assess negative valency. The authors of the measure presented 32 negatively phrased questions to a sample of 875 fourth- and fifth-year secondary school pupils attending ten Catholic and ten Protestant schools in Northern Ireland. The questions that received the lowest item-rest-of-test correlations were rejected, leaving a scale of 20 items generating alpha coefficients of 0.94 for the Protestant sample and 0.90 for the Catholic sample. This scale has been shown to have internal consistency reliability among Northern Irish undergraduate students (Lewis, Maltby, & Hersey, 1999) and Welsh undergraduate students (Robbins, Francis, & Bradford, 2003).

Little research has been done to examine the relationship between the *Rejection of Christianity Scale* and more general psychological measures. The aim of the present study, therefore, is to examine the

relationships between this measure and self-esteem. Since previous research has shown that there is a positive correlation between self-esteem and indices of religiosity designed with a positive valency (Jones & Francis, 1996), it is hypothesised that a negative relationship will be found between self-esteem and this measure of religiosity designed with negative valency.

METHOD

Participants

A total of 279 secondary school pupils in Wales from years 9, 10 and 11 completed the 20-item *Rejection of Christianity Scale* (Greer & Francis, 1992) and the 25-item *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory* (Coopersmith, 1981). One quarter (25%) were aged 13, one third (32%) were aged 14; 30% were aged 15, and 13% were aged 16. Males comprised 56% of the sample and females 44% of the sample.

Measures

The Rejection of Christianity Scale (Greer & Francis, 1992) is a 20-item Likert-type instrument, employing a five-point response scale ranging from 'agree strongly', through 'agree', 'not certain', and 'disagree', to 'disagree strongly'. The scale measures negative valency toward Christianity. This scale is designed so that higher scores indicate a higher tendency to reject Christianity.

The Coopersmith Short-Form Self-Esteem Inventory (Coopersmith, 1981) is a 25-item instrument, employing a dichotomous response scale of 'yes' and 'no'. The possible range of scores for this form of the *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory* is 0-25, with higher scores indicating higher self-esteem.

RESULTS

Both measures achieved satisfactory Cronbach alpha coefficients (*Rejection of Christianity Scale*, .88; *Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory*, .80). After controlling for sex differences by means of partial correlations, the data demonstrated a small, but significant, correlation (r= -0.14, p <.05) between self-esteem (M = 15.3, SD = 4.9) and rejection of Christianity (M = 62.7, SD = 13.2) indicating that as teenagers' endorsement of negative statements concerning Christianity increases, their scores of negative self-esteem also tend to increase.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The present study has explored the relationship between rejection of Christianity and self-esteem among adolescents in Wales. After controlling for sex differences a small but significant negative

correlation is found between high-self esteem and rejection of Christianity, as hypothesised. This finding strengthens the conclusions drawn from studies like that of Jones and Francis (1996), which demonstrated a positive correlation between high self-esteem and a positive attitude toward Christianity by demonstrating that the association is not a function of the valency of the measure of religiosity. Evidence of this nature appears to be suggesting that the Christian tradition is supportive of the development of self-esteem among young people rather than detrimental to it.

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