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## RESEARCH REPORT

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# Religion and Emotional Dependence

Pawel Socha  
*Jagiellonian University*  
*Krakow, Poland*

Relating emotional dependence and individual religion has to include a discussion of the meaning of dependency. In this article, I reconsider the objective versus subjective aspect of this construct. Within the subjective aspect, the consequences of applying a definition of immature versus mature religion to investigations about its relation to emotional dependence is considered. Much of the research confirms the positive nature of the relation among most of the variables of religion and emotional dependence. I also attempt to test the hypothesis that emotional dependence correlates positively only with immature religiousness and negatively with mature religiousness.

### THE RELEVANCE OF EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE TO RELIGION

Many philosophers (Feuerbach, Nietzsche, Otto, Schleiermacher, et al.) considered a feeling of dependency the fundamental reason for religion. This assumption, however, had led the theorists of religion to contradictory conclusions regarding the meaning of religion to humans: on the one hand critical and on the other apologetic. What have psychologists to say about that? According to Lindgren (1969, pp. 122-132), there are two aspects of the state of being dependent: the functional and the emotional. In the process of growth, everybody develops as functionally dependent on different persons and institutions, otherwise he or she could not satisfy his or her needs, starting from the most basic ones. All of this influences the emotional aspect

of one's dependency. However, the excessive amount of feelings of attachment and affiliation, conflicting with receptivity, passivity, anxiety, and the attitude "from people" highlight the neurotic or at least childish character of one's emotional dependence.

There seems to be a lot of misunderstanding in this matter. Some theorists do not make a clear distinction between the natural human dependency on a social environment (including the emotional feeling of dependency) and the neurotic, childish emotional attachment of an adult. The former kind of dependence is felt by every healthy and mature individual. If we had accepted a function of God's image as the prolongation of man's social nature and his existential point of reference, we would have been able to agree with the positive meaning of dependency on God for some individuals. The latter kind of dependence is felt by those who did not grow out of their submission to their mother or to another meaningful person (this feeling can be transferred from mother to any adult companion, e.g., sexual partner). This dependence manifests itself in the non-self-sufficient behavior of someone who is normally able to behave self-sufficiently and when such self-sufficient behavior is objectively justified (Reykowski, 1975, p. 803). Reykowski called this *emotional dependence*. For the emotionally dependent individual in this sense, God is a substitute for real persons, from whom the individual did not receive enough love, safety, and trust. Religious motivation of this individual is fed by the needs for security (Maslow, 1970, pp. 41–42).

The notion of emotional dependence, as accepted earlier, does not exhaust all the aspects of being emotionally dependent (one can feel emotionally dependent in a functional, progressive, or mature way); it is restricted here only to its dysfunctional, regressive meaning. This meaning also forms the basis for the measure of emotional dependence, which I used in my own research.

Considering the previous ideas, one can place the problem of the relation between *religion and emotional dependence within the tradition of the defensive-protective approach in the psychology of religion* (Spilka, 1990; Spilka, Hood, & Gorsuch, 1985, pp. 12–14). "All human life revolves around desire" (Allport, 1950, p. 10). It seems, however, that some psychologists follow the theological apologetic position, for example, Scobie (1975), who warned not to understand dependence as involving negative connotation, but rather as dependency on the Almighty, and a trust in Divine Providence in matters of life and death (pp. 27–28). This is close to the concept of an *ultimate concern* (Tillich, 1957). Proceeding down from the heavenly spheres, this is not far from Lindgren's (1969) conclusion that "the problem basically is that of being unable to accept the fact that we all are dependent on others for love and attention, and that the need for love and attention does not in itself make the receiver inferior or overdependent" (p. 132).

Other psychologists follow the position that religion gives a support to immature needs; therefore they criticize religion, or even reject it. Freud (1927/1961) equated religious defensive-protective attitudes with the im-

maturity of the child and asked if the destiny of childhood had not been to overcome it.

## DEPENDENCE AND INDIVIDUAL RELIGION IN RESEARCH

Both positions in understanding individual dependence—of a positive and of a negative value to growth—seem important. Therefore, it is not evident why the empirical research provides data dealing predominantly with the second position. I hope that this is not because of the view that “most religious systems recommend humility and submissiveness. It is a good question whether such sanctions most likely produce, attract or rationalize such personal characteristics” (Dittes, 1969, p. 638).

Many analyses had compared individual religion with the clinical test scores of dependence, where it has been defined apparently as a neurotic syndrome (Bazylak, 1984; Chlewinski, 1976, 1987; Domagala & Grzymala-Moszczyńska, 1979; Dreger, 1952; Graff & Ladd, 1971; Prezyna, 1969, 1973, 1977; Symington, 1935). Several analyses used the interview method, for example Maslow (1970), who established his conviction that only few self-realizing (i.e., independent, autonomous) people were orthodox, conventional believers. Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1990) applied the attachment theory of Bowlby (1969) to avoid the negative connotation of the term *dependence*. Surprisingly, they also confirmed the role of God as a substitute attachment figure for people with a history of avoidant attachment (presumably the emotionally dependent ones in a narrower meaning).

## DUALITY OF THE RELATION BETWEEN EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE AND INDIVIDUAL RELIGION

One can divide the problem considered here into two dichotomies. The first concerns objective (or socially vital) versus subjective (or emotional, regressive) dependence. It might be hypothesized that a proper index of an objective estimation of one's own dependency on the social environment will correlate negatively with most of the applied variables defining individual religion and positively with nonconventional theistic and nonconventional atheistic beliefs. Conversely, the measure of emotional (regressive) dependence will correlate positively with most of the applied variables defining religiousness and negatively with nonconventional theistic and nonconventional atheistic beliefs.

The second dichotomy concerns emotional dependence. Religion relates to emotional dependence in a quantitative or in a qualitative mode. One can hypothesize that emotional dependence correlates positively with most of

the variables defining religiousness, whereas independence correlates positively with appearing nonreligious in those variables. Second, one can hypothesize that emotional dependence correlates negatively with the degree of religious maturation, whatever concept of religious maturity would have been applied. During my own research I tried to test the second dichotomy.

### METHOD FOR MEASURING EMOTIONAL DEPENDENCE

I applied a Dependency Questionnaire, consisting of the scales developed and validated by Jasiiecki in his research (1977). He selected two 30-person groups of dependent and independent subjects (all were male, aged 19 to 30, from an introductory sample of 380 persons). The criteria of selection were the scores on the initial version of the scales and the interview, based on a diagnosis of the relationship of dependency between the subject and his mother.

Next, Jasiiecki tested the validity of this selection, using his own List of Motivational Goals and Stern's Activities Index. Jasiiecki considered the Dependency Questionnaire valid, because the high scores in this method correlated with many dependent-type goals of subjects (e.g., dependency from emotional gratification and protection from others and submissiveness) and their needs (e.g., need for support, need for avoidance of distress, a cluster called dependent-submissive, and a direction of activity from others). On the other hand, many goals (e.g., independence, positive character, and social status) and needs (e.g., need for prevention, need for independence, and a cluster called critical-independent) correlated positively with the low scores in the Dependency Questionnaire scales.

In the first two studies, the Dependency Questionnaire was applied without knowing its reliability. Therefore, only the raw scores were taken into account in the statistic comparisons. Data from the second study were used for testing the reliability of the leading scale of the Dependency Questionnaire, the Emotional Dependency Scale<sup>1</sup> (EDS). That scale highly correlated with the rest of scales: Dependency on Family, Tendency to Subordination and Submission, Need for One's Feelings, Dependency of Self-Esteem and Behavior on Others, and Lie Scale taken from Eysenck's Maudsley Personality Inventory (Eysenck, Eysenck, et al., 1969). The internal reliability of the EDS was  $r_{tt} = .74$  (20th score of Kuder-Richardson correlation coefficient of internal consistency); it did not seem high but was satisfactory. The EDS consists of 34 items (see Appendix).

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<sup>1</sup>This was the shortened and slightly reedited version of the Total Dependence scale from the Dependency Questionnaire.

## EVIDENCE FROM EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

During several investigations I tested this hypothesis about the positive relation between emotional dependency and religiousness, using the scales of the Dependency Questionnaire. In the first study (Socha, 1983), I reported the data suggesting full congruence between the emotional dependence and positive attitude toward religion, measured with the Likert-type Individual Religiousness Scale (IRS; Latala & Socha, 1981). Differences between the two groups of strongly religious and strongly nonreligious subjects (600 university and polytechnic students of both sexes) was at least  $p < .0031$ , for all scales of the Dependency Questionnaire.

In my second study (sample of 291 university and polytechnic students, both sexes; Socha, 1988), the evidence supported the previous statement, however, the significant correlation between the IRS measure of religiousness and emotional dependence concerned only two scales of the Dependency Questionnaire: Total Dependence,  $p < .034$ , and Dependency From Family,  $p < .005$ . Similar evidence concerned the alternative measure of religiousness, the Psychological Centrality Scale of Religious Attitude, (PCS) developed and validated by Prezyna (1977).

In contrast, there was no relation between the emotional dependence scales and the third measure of religiousness in this investigation. That was my own Christian Religiousness Scale (CRS), developed for measuring the valuation of religion despite one's denominational identification and sufficiently validated for the described research (Socha, 1988, pp. 73-74).

Note that this time the relation between religiousness and emotional dependence looks slightly smaller or even questionable despite a clear relation between religiousness and the Total Dependence and Family Dependence scales. There did not appear to be any relation between religiousness and the scales Tendency to Submission, Need for Someone's Feelings, and Dependency of Self-Esteem and Behavior Esteem From Others (despite all the scales correlating significantly with each other). Also, there were significant correlations of the emotional dependence variables and the measures of religious orthodoxy (IRS and PCS), whereas there was no correlation of those variables and the measure of positive valuation of religion (CRS).

Because I carried out the second investigation in the influential 1980s, I could interpret the previous findings as partly the effect of a decrease of subordinative attitudes and alienation feelings, which were more likely in the preceding years of the passivity of religious people in Poland before the August 1980 political events. Yet, this is only one suggestion, and I have never validated it.

In conclusion, the important portion of the subjects' emotional dependence still existed in their family relations, but only when correlated with their level of orthodoxy. This is consistent with the conclusions of Dittes (1969) that most measures of religious orthodoxy deal in fact with the consensual, conformist, or extrinsic dimension of one's religion. It is possi-

ble that subjects who score high on these measures are those whose environment brought them up in an unhealthy, oppressively authoritarian way. Therefore, their consensual attitude toward religion, and at the same time their conservatism, prejudice, and other unaccepted social settings, and also their suppressed ego and the emotional dependence, are of the same origin.

Furthermore, one can hypothesize that the level of emotional dependence is not merely a function of individual religion. However, it is still possible to produce data that account for the correlation between the general variables of orthodoxy, church attendance, or church identification, and emotional dependence. Hence, the more inventive method would be to proceed with a qualitative approach to religiousness, expressed in the concepts of religious maturity or the way of being religious.

The data from my third study (Socha, Latala, & Filas, 1991) again seem to support again only the quantitative hypothesis. I carried out these investigations with a sample of 462 high school students, aged 17 to 19 (slightly younger than those in the previous studies). I do not consider this fact relevant to the problem of the relation between emotional dependence and individual religion, however, it is apparent that the younger the subject is, the more dependent he or she is (Lindgren, 1969; Reykowski, 1975).

The empirical data were analyzed according to the pattern of differences between the two groups of dependent persons (26.2% of sample with the highest scores in the EDS, Kendall tau  $B = .207$ ,  $N = 121$ ) and independent persons (22.3% of sample with the lowest scores in that scale, Kendall tau  $B = .208$ ,  $N = 103$ ). The level of emotional dependence was the dependent variable, and the religiousness variables were the independent variables (contrary to the patterns of the previous analyses). Apart from the standard variables of IRS and CRS, the independent variables were the 19 so-called syndromes of religiousness (see Table 1), developed earlier as the result of a cluster-taxonomical analysis of 124 items of the extended inventory of IRS (Socha, 1988, pp. 78–83).

To test a qualitative hypothesis about the relation between emotional dependence and the type of one's religiousness, I applied the three scales of Batson's Religious Life Inventory (RLI; Batson, 1976; Batson & Ventis, 1982), adapted for the Polish samples. These scales measure the ways of being religious, described mostly by the level or the mode of internalization of religious norms and values as external, internal, and interactional (quest). I assumed roughly that in this order, external religiousness is less developed than its internal correlate, and internal religiousness is less developed than its quest form.

As for the quantitative hypothesis that individual religion persists in parallel with emotional dependence, there is much evidence accounting for it (Table 1). The main index of Roman Catholic orthodoxy (IRS) and also its elements (19 syndromes of religiousness) differentiate strongly between the two compared groups. All these support again the statement about the relation between emotional dependence and religious orthodoxy.

TABLE 1  
Differences in Religious Measures Between Emotionally  
Dependent and Independent Subjects in the Third Study

Variable	M		Difference Between Groups	
	D+	D-	Student t	p <
IRS (1 to 10)	4.42	5.69	5.800	.001
I: Basic religious beliefs (1-9)	2.18	3.65	5.029	.001
II: Elementary prayer (1-9)	1.99	3.16	4.733	.001
III: Mature prayer (1-9)	3.89	5.66	4.733	.001
IV: Faith creed about the relation between God and man (1-9)	2.03	3.33	5.533	.001
V: Once a life practice (1-9)	1.92	3.04	4.720	.001
VI: Church as a model of conduct (1-9)	3.93	5.55	6.789	.001
VII: Basic religious beliefs (1-9)	1.81	2.69	4.025	.001
VIII: Acceptance of religious dogmas (1-9)	2.00	2.98	4.210	.001
IX: Church affiliated activity (1-9)	4.75	6.23	4.687	.001
X: Aesthetic needs in the religious cult (1-9)	3.47	4.48	4.191	.001
XI: Attitude toward church organizations (1-9)	4.27	5.18	3.456	.001
XII: Notion of God-Lawmaker(1-9)	2.42	3.97	6.180	.001
XIII: Beliefs in human origins (1-9)	1.96	3.07	4.041	.001
XIV: Unshakeability of religion (1-9)	1.66	2.62	4.520	.001
XV: Salvation through goodness (1-9)	2.64	4.19	6.015	.001
XVI: Beliefs in life after death (1-9)	2.13	2.95	3.575	.001
XVII: Issues of sexual activity (1-9)	3.71	5.27	5.001	.001
XVIII: Catholic traditionalism (1-9)	3.14	4.12	5.235	.001
XIX: Reading of religious literature (1-9)	3.27	4.59	4.312	.001
CRS (1-7)	2.53	3.32	3.308	.001
RLI				
External scale (0-9)	3.00	5.02	6.736	.001
Internal scale (0-8)	3.03	4.24	5.239	.001
Quest scale (0-9)	4.41	4.46	.221	n.s.

*Note.* D+ = dependent group; D- = independent group; IRS = Individual Religiousness Scale; numbers in parentheses = number of categories or the range of scores suppressed after coding the data; Roman numbers = numbers of so-called syndromes of religiousness; CRS = Christian Religiousness Scale; RLI = Religious Life Inventory. All scores are reversed, with low scores meaning high religiousness and similarly with the other dimensions or syndromes.

The second, qualitative hypothesis was that as religiousness develops, the more mature—that is, less dependent—a given person is failed to be supported. In both RLI scales, external and internal, the findings differentiate groups along the “dependent-independent” pattern in the same way. Moreover, there is no difference between the dependent and independent subjects on the interactional (quest) religious orientation scale. By way of conclusion, independent persons are less religious along both dimensions of the external and internal religious orientation. Moreover, dependent persons are at the same point of the quest dimension as the independent ones.

This evidence suggests that dependent and independent subjects do not differ in their level of religious development. The difference between depen-

dent and independent persons seems to lie in their level of religiousness, understood in terms of indiscriminate and orthodox religious faith. Looking at the means reported in Table 1, note that the investigated sample seems to believe in an undifferentiated (or indiscriminate) religion. This may explain the finding that there is a significant difference between the level of emotional dependence regarding the nonorthodox index of religiousness (CRS).

There is, however, some evidence in the third study that suggests the possible importance of religious orientation dimensions for the assessment of emotional dependence of the individuals. As I reported in another article (Socha, 1990), there is a significant difference in the level of emotional dependence between two of the four groups of subjects, selected according to the criteria of the development of their religious orientation, with mean scores for Group 2 = 5.07, Group 3 = 4.24, Student  $t = 3.418$ ,  $p < .001$ . I considered the high or low scores in the external, internal, and quest RLI scales, applied together, as the criteria of selection to the developmental sequence of religious maturation. These particular groups of subjects met the criteria by obtaining high scores on all the scales (Group 2), low scores on the external and internal scales, and high scores on the quest scale (Group 3).

It is presumably the interaction of the two variables, external and quest (or, as I assumed, doubting) dimensions, that account for a significant decrease of emotional dependence of the subjects. In other words, one cannot exclude the relevance of changes in religious orientation as regards emotional dependence. This suggestion supports the qualitative hypothesis, although it apparently needs further research.

## DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The research I have done does not support the assumption that emotionally dependent religious persons are only those whose religiousness is orthodox, less developed, or declarative/consensual. There is, however, some doubt about the methodological validity of these findings. The principal components factor analysis of the applied EDS revealed as many as 12 factors, despite its internal reliability of  $r_{tt} = .74$  (20th score of Kuder-Richardson correlation coefficient for the assessment of internal consistency). This finding suggests the multiplex content of emotional dependence included in the measured variable. Therefore, an important task for future research is to clear up the theoretical meaning and the methodological validity of emotional dependence before one can define that variable more properly.

A second methodological reservation should be expressed about the qualitative measures of the dimensions of religiousness. Batson's external and internal scales cannot be considered sufficient measures of religious orientation in the acknowledged sense. Both scales belong simply to one—End—component of religion (Batson et al., 1993, pp. 172–175), also confirmed for



the Polish version of the scales (Socha, 1994). They can be considered only as measures of a hypothetical dimension of "social versus individual's own support" in dealing with religion.

Therefore, because externally and internally religious persons are more dependent than persons not being religious in that sense, one can see it in the light of a pattern described by Kirkpatrick (1992) with regard to parenting styles preceding the type of one's attachment. The conclusion coming from that pattern is that the religiousness of the subjects originated from the less secure parental relationships, not from nonreligiousness. It is suggested that to be nonreligious in Poland one should have a more secure relationship with one's parents, producing a less avoiding (therefore, as it is suggested here about the relation between dependency and attachment, less emotionally dependent) style of attachment. For many individuals, this may be the condition that allows for nonconformist thinking, with the relationship with one's parents being the initial impetus. This hypothesis should be tested.

The research did not describe the qualitative aspect of religiousness to a satisfactory degree. It is therefore impossible to expect there to be qualitative differences in religious involvement between dependent and independent persons. To test the qualitative hypothesis about the relation between emotional dependence and the level of religious maturity, one should first carefully choose the subjects to attain the expected differentiation within their religiousness. Nevertheless, even the reported research has been valuable, confirming the relevance of emotional dependence in the psychology of religion.

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## APPENDIX

### Emotional Dependence Scale

1. I give up the plans I have as soon as my family considers them irrelevant.
2. So far, I have felt most secure in my family home.
3. My relatives treat me more like a child than an adult person.
4. I am always ready to give up my desires in return for another's real feelings.
5. I do not hesitate to ask my parents for help, if I need it.
6. I cannot experience joy unless others share it with me.
7. I had been losing, usually by not relying on my close associates' advice.
8. I ought to be more obedient to my girl/boy friend.
9. My relatives know better what I should do in a given moment in my life.
10. I feel dependent on my closest environment.
11. I believe my parents very much, so I follow them entirely.
12. I feel more safe, when somebody whom I trust takes responsibility for me and leads me.
13. Even considering all the bad points of my girl/boy friend, I know that I could not cope without her/him.
14. I welcome with relief any generosity and advice of a proven friend.
15. From all the people, it is only my mother whom I trust entirely.
16. When I feel helpless, I look for support from somebody.
17. I put up with being directed and governed at home in order to get support and friendship.
18. I regret that nobody else in my life bestowed on me such an affection as my mother did.
19. I never make any important decision without the approval of more experienced people.
20. If I had found more support from others, I would have been a more self-sufficient person.
21. I submit to the influence of my parents on my private life.
22. I would hardly cope with my life without the support that I have from my parents.
23. Sometimes I feel that my girl/boy friend treats me like my mother treats me.

24. I approach with appreciation even the smallest gestures of friendship and generosity, and I try to reassure myself that I deserved that favor.
25. I am trying to accommodate the requirements of my girl/boyfriend to deserve her/his gratitude.
26. I consider very often that I would like to be given more human cordiality and concern than I give myself.
27. I know that it is unwise, but when I should oppose my parents, I feel so uneasy that I prefer to give in.
28. I always worry that I hesitate excessively, thereby almost losing somebody being very close to me.
29. I prefer to make plans by asking my close friends for advice.
30. I was never demanded to show any greater self-concern at home.
31. I am not able to be self-sufficient and to go on without my family support.
32. Sometimes I would like to criticize my girl/boy friend, but I prefer to put it off considering she/he will carry her/his point through nevertheless.
33. I can trust and lean on myself in difficult situations, when my relatives do not trust me.
34. When I am far from the family home I feel some odd sorrow and anxiety.

