

Religiosity and Body Image

A comparison between Catholics, Muslims and Atheists in Italy

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Aim

Study the relationship between

- religiosity
- self-esteem
- body image (appearance, fitness, health, satisfaction)
- look modesty

in 3 Italian religious groups: Catholics, Muslims and Atheists



we define “religiosity” as the inner experience of religion that makes up the individual’s need to feel close to God. The goal of this research is to study the relationship between religiosity, self-esteem, body image (appearance, fitness, health, satisfaction) and look modesty, in three Italian religious groups.

Measures

| | Various socio-demographic question | items |
|------|---|-------|
| RSE* | Rosenberg Self-Esteem | 10 |
| SCL* | Santa Clara Streight of Religious Faith Questionnaire | 12 |
| MOC* | Modesty of Clothing Scale | 13 |
| MBS* | Multidimensional Body Self Questionnaire | 69 |

* Previously used with Muslim sample (but not in Italy)

Santa Clara Scale (item No. 5)

Original version

“I consider my self active in my faith or church”

Italian version

“I consider myself active in:”
“- my faith (religious beliefs)”
“- religious practices typical of my faith”
“- social activities related to my faith”



In addition to a series of socio-demographic variables (gender, nationality, religion reference. . .), in this research we used the Rosenberg self-esteem scale in the Italian translation; one scale for measure religiousness, another for the body image and his auto-perception and one for modesty in dressing. We choose these last three instruments because they were previously used with Catholics (or Christians) and Muslims samples. Except for the self-esteem scale, the other instruments have been translated into Italian by the authors with a subsequent back-translation. For the Santa Clara scale, we re-formulated the fifth item emphasizing: beliefs, practices and social activities. Modesty of Clothing is here seen as a way to bring respect for themselves, showing a certain dignity and not flaunting the body.

Measures, internal consistency

| Measuring instrument | N. item | Cronbach's α | |
|---------------------------------------|---------|---------------------|----------------|
| | | Original | Italian sample |
| SCL - Santa Clara Scale | 12 | 0,95 | 0,97 |
| RSE - Self-esteem | 10 | 0,84 | 0,85 |
| MOC - Modesty of Clothing Scale | 13 | 0,88 | 0,86 |
| MBS - Multidimensional Body Self | 69 | 0,85 | 0,9 |
| <i>AE - Appearance Evaluation</i> | 7 | | 0,85 |
| <i>FE - Fitness Evaluation</i> | 5 | | 0,7 |
| <i>HE - Health Evaluation</i> | 6 | | 0,67 |
| <i>AO - Appearance Orientation</i> | 12 | | 0,85 |
| <i>FO - Fitness Orientation</i> | 12 | | 0,82 |
| <i>HO - Health Orientation</i> | 12 | | 0,74 |
| <i>OWP - Overweight Preoccupation</i> | 4 | unreliable | |
| <i>SCW - Self-Classified Weight</i> | 2 | - | - |
| <i>BASS - Body Areas Satisfaction</i> | 9 | | 0,81 |



For measurement of the body image and the behaviors put in place to take care of it, we used a Multidimensional Questionnaire, divided into nine subscales. Six scales concern the evaluation and behavior to maintain and improve the appearance, fitness and health status. The other three subscales concern the physical body: the worry of being overweight, the classification of own body and the satisfaction of the body parts. The internal consistency of all the scales is quite consistent with the original one, sometimes more, sometimes less, but always above 0.60.

Sample description

| | N | % | |
|--------------------------------------|-----|------|-----------|
| Respondents | 359 | | |
| with only socio-demographic question | 47 | 13,4 | discarded |
| with partial or complete responses | 311 | 86.6 | |

| | | Age | | | |
|--------|-------|------|--------|--------|-------|
| Gender | N | % | Mean | SD | range |
| male | 94 | 30,3 | 30,37 | 10,25 | 16-68 |
| female | 216 | 69,7 | 30,77 | 11,10 | 15-77 |
| | Total | | 30,621 | 10,832 | 16-77 |



Data were collected through an online questionnaire with socio-demographic questions at the beginning and the remaining tools presented randomly. The collected sample consists of 359 people. Some participants responded to socio-demographic questions only and completely missed the rest of the questionnaires; they were discarded from further analysis. Most of the sample is female. The mean of age is 30 with a very wide range; but the majority of the sample (64.31%) are aged between 18 and 30 years.

Sample description

| | Religion of reference | | |
|----------------|-----------------------|------|-------------|
| | N | % | |
| Catholics | 139 | 44,7 | |
| Muslims | 64 | 20,6 | |
| Atheists | 46 | 14,8 | (merged) |
| Agnostics | 39 | 12,5 | |
| Christians | 7 | 2,3 | (discarded) |
| Other religion | 16 | 5,1 | (discarded) |

Christians

- Waldensian
- Lutheran
- not recognize himself in the Roman Catholic Church

Other religion

- Buddhist
- Taoist
- "in research"
- personal religious or spiritual vision



Most of the participants are Catholics, followed by Muslims, atheists and agnostics. The few people who claim to be "Christians" specify Waldensian, Lutheran or simply do not recognize themselves in the Roman Catholic church. People that indicate other religions are Buddhist, Taoist, "in research" or have developed/are developing a religious or spiritual vision of a personal nature. For further analysis, Christians and Other religion are discarded. After comparing atheists and agnostics on the 12 independent variables (independent T-test) without finding differences (using the Bonferroni adjustment) it was decided to merge the two groups. So religious groups to consider will be only 3: Catholics, Muslims, atheists/agnostics.

Sample description

| Nationality | N | % | Living in Italy from | N | % |
|-----------------|-----|------|----------------------|-----|------|
| Italian | 259 | 83,3 | Born | 284 | 91,3 |
| Italian & other | 7 | 2,3 | Less than 10 years | 4 | 1,3 |
| Other | 40 | 12,9 | At least 10 years | 20 | 6,4 |
| Not responding | 5 | 1,6 | Not responding | 3 | |

Muslims

| Living in Italy from | N | % | Nationality | N | % |
|----------------------|----|------|-----------------|----|------|
| Born | 41 | 65,1 | Italian | 23 | 36,6 |
| Less than 10 years | 4 | 6,3 | Italian & other | 4 | 6,3 |
| At least 10 years | 18 | 28,6 | Other | 36 | 57,1 |

Most of the participants have Italian nationality and were born in Italy. 65% of Muslims was born in Italy, but only 36% has Italian nationality.

Sample description

| | Total | | Catholics | | Muslims | | Atheists/ Agnostics | |
|----------------------------|-------|------|-----------|------|---------|------|------------------------|-----|
| | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Believer and committed | 125 | 40,5 | 68 | 49,3 | 51 | 79,7 | | |
| Believer but not committed | 90 | 29,1 | 67 | 48,6 | 12 | 18,8 | | |
| Unbeliever | 94 | 30,4 | 3 | 2,2 | 1 | 1,6 | 84 | 100 |

$\chi^2(4)=291.38$; $p<.001$; Cramer's V =.714

Religion reference does not always correspond with the religious involvement. We asked to self assess the dimensions religious believer/unbeliever and religious committed/not-committed. All atheists/ agnostics have positioned themselves properly as most Muslims, but only half of the Catholics. It is quite common in Italy that some of people who claim themselves Catholic, then also affirm doesn't attend at religious services. Then, the two variable are then largely overlapping (chi-square value is very high and also the effect size).

Santa Clara Streight of Religious Faith Questionnaire

| | Religiousness | | |
|----------------------------|---------------|------|---------------------------|
| | N | Mean | |
| Catholics | 137 | 30,2 | (*) |
| Muslims | 64 | 40,6 | F(2, 281)=170.593; p<.001 |
| Ath./Agn. | 83 | 15,0 | |
| Believer and committed | 123 | 39,5 | (*) |
| Believer but not committed | 89 | 24,9 | F(2, 300)=312.738; p<.001 |
| Unbeliever | 91 | 15,5 | |

(*) each group statistically different from the others

| | F(2, 275) | sig |
|------------------|-----------|--------|
| Religious groups | 29.096 | n.s. |
| Level of belief | 3277.334 | p<.001 |
| Interaction | 51,799 | n.s. |



In literature, studies indicate that Muslims have higher indices of religiousness than Christians. Measured with the “Santa Clara Scale”, religiousness does not differ statistically by gender and age. Using two different one-way Anova, the Muslims have the highest score of religiousness, followed by Catholics, and with atheists/agnostics who have the lowest score. Basically, we get the same results using the intensity of belief: the unbeliever has the lowest score of religiousness, while the believers have the highest. But if we use two-way ANOVA, the level of belief prevails on the religious group to which they belong.

Rosenberg Self-Esteem

| | Self-esteem | | |
|------------|-------------|------|----------------------------|
| | N | Mean | |
| Male | 93 | 33,7 | $t(215,251)=3.302; p<.001$ |
| Female | 215 | 31,4 | |
| 18-25 y.o. | 129 | 28,3 | $F(2, 298)=6.788; p<.001$ |
| 26-45 y.o. | 139 | 31,0 | |
| >45 y.o. | 33 | 32,8 | |

Gender and Age are independent ($\chi^2(2)=.285$ n.s.)

| | | Does you do physical activity? | | | |
|-----|-------|--------------------------------|---------|---------|----------|
| r | RSE | Mean | | Sig | |
| | | Yes | No | | |
| SCL | 0,009 | Self-esteem | 33,0466 | 30,8592 | $p<.001$ |



Self-esteem (self-assessment considered a positive or negative about themselves) is very influenced by external factors such as the rules of the group of belonging, the culture and the subjective socio-demographic factors (socioeconomic status, gender, etc.). In fact, the males in our sample have a higher score than females and younger a score lower than older, while the intermediate age group does not differ from the other two. In the literature review we found the existence of links between feel themselves more close to God and self-esteem. But self-esteem does not differ statistically by religious groups and beliefs. There is not a general correlation between Religiousness and Self-esteem. Instead self-esteem is higher for people who do physical activity.

Modesty of Clothing Scale

| | N | Mean | | |
|----------------------------|-----|------|------|--------------------------|
| 18-25 y.o. | 115 | 34.6 | | |
| 26-45 y.o. | 126 | 31.7 | =↑=↓ | F(2, 271)=5.007; p<.01 |
| >45 y.o. | 33 | 28.8 | | |
| Catholics | 129 | 30.3 | | |
| Muslims | 55 | 42.6 | ≠ | F(2, 259)=40.402; p<.001 |
| Ath./Agno. | 78 | 29.6 | | |
| Believer and committed | 112 | 37.2 | ≠ | |
| Believer but not committed | 82 | 29.5 | | F(2, 277)=20.719; p<.001 |
| Unbeliever | 86 | 29.5 | | |

=↑ mean equal to previous (↑), next (↓) group; ≠ group mean different

With the “Modesty of Clothing Scale”, we asked how often the person holds covered various parts of the body when they comes out in a partially hot day (higher scores indicate high modesty). There are no gender differences, while there are differences in age, religious group and type of belief. Apparently, modesty decreases with age; the Muslim group and committed believers are also the most modest.

Multidimensional Body Self

| | Male (N=87) | Female (N=195) | |
|--------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------|
| | Mean | Mean | sig |
| Evaluation | | | |
| <i>Appearance</i> | 23,9 | 21,7 | p < .01 |
| <i>Fitness</i> | 18,0 | 15,8 | p < .001 |
| <i>Health</i> | | | |
| Orientation | | | |
| <i>Appearance</i> | 35,7 | 41,0 | p < .001 |
| <i>Fitness</i> | 37,9 | 33,9 | p < .001 |
| <i>Health</i> | 35,5 | 37,5 | p < .05 |

Body image is very related to gender. Males have a score a little higher on Fitness and evaluation Appearance while women are higher on appearance and health orientation.

Multidimensional Body Self

| | | Health scale | | |
|------------|-----|--------------|---------------|-------------------|
| | | Evaluation | | Orientation |
| | | N | Mean | Mean |
| 18,25 y.o. | 117 | | | 36,0 |
| 26-45 y.o. | 126 | | | 37,1 |
| >45 y.o. | 33 | | | 40,6 $\neq p<.01$ |
| Catholics | 130 | 21,6 | | |
| Muslims | 54 | 19,5 | $\neq p<.001$ | |
| Ath./Agno. | 81 | 22,0 | | |

The health scale shows significance with age for orientation and religious groups for evaluation. So older people are more oriented to worry about their own health, while the Muslim group is less likely to assess their health.

Symbols, accessories and clothes

| Wear regularly . . . typical of your religion? | | | | |
|--|--------------------------------|--------|---------------------|--------|
| | Accessories/symbols % (yes) | | Clothing % (yes) | |
| | Male | Female | Male | Female |
| Catholics | 25 | 23,5 | 0 | 1,1 |
| Muslims | 9,5 | 32,5 | 4,8 | 72,1 |
| Ath./Agno. | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Believer and committed | 27,5 | 36,6 | 2,6 | 40,8 |
| Believer but not committed | 8 | 12,5 | 0 | 1,6 |
| Unbeliever | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

| | Accessories/symbols | | | Clothing | | |
|-----|---------------------|------|--------|----------|-------|--------|
| | Mean | | sig | Mean | | sig |
| | No | Yes | | No | Yes | |
| SCL | 29,9 | 40,3 | p<.001 | 30,14 | 43,76 | p<.001 |
| MOC | | | | 31,33 | 49,02 | p<.001 |



The wearing of traditional symbols and accessories of their religion, is not widespread; among Catholics there are differences between males and females, while among Muslims, prevails in women. As for the religious traditional clothing are most commonly used by Muslim women, probably because religious and traditional customs coincide. A similar pattern is also found in practicing believers. The mean score of religiosity is statistically different according to the use of accessories, symbols and traditional dress. Modesty is statistically different only for the use of traditional dress.

Attitudes healthy / unhealthy

| | % (yes) | | | |
|----------------------------|---------|------|------|--------|
| | Smoking | Wine | Bear | Alcool |
| Male | 36,9 | 62,8 | 69,3 | 66,3 |
| Female | 29,8 | 57,9 | 53,2 | 51,4 |
| Catholics | 31.7 | 69.5 | 68.6 | 66.7 |
| Muslims | 16.6 | 5.0 | 5.0 | 5.0 |
| Atheists | 39.2 | 78.7 | 76.3 | 74.4 |
| Believer and committed | 13.1 | 40.5 | 38.3 | 40.0 |
| Believer but not committed | 36.4 | 62.8 | 64.2 | 60.4 |
| Unbeliever | 39.6 | 80.3 | 75.6 | 70.8 |

The committed believers and Muslims say that they are more careful to maintain healthy attitudes, no drinking, no smoking. We found no statistically significant differences in gender or age groups in this respect.

Correlation: Self-esteem and Body image

| | Total | Catholics | Muslims | Atheists |
|--------------------|--------|-----------|---------|----------|
| Evaluation | | | | |
| - Appearance | .414** | .398** | .441** | .372** |
| - Fitness | .252** | .318** | | .276* |
| - Health | .372** | .440** | .293* | .266* |
| Orientation | | | | |
| - Appearance | -.128* | -.210* | | |
| - Fitness | .214** | .334** | | |
| - Health | .229** | .261** | .386** | |

Only statistically significant correlations

In the total sample, self-esteem correlates statistically with all aspects of evaluation and orientation. In a negative way with the appearance orientation and positively with the other. The interesting part is the correlation split by religious groups. In atheists all correlations orientation disappear, they seem more interested in evaluating own body. For Muslims, all correlations related to fitness disappear.

Correlation: Self-esteem, Religiousness, Modesty

| | RSE/SCL | SCL/MOC | RSE/MOC |
|-----------|---------|---------|---------|
| Total | 0,009 | 0,432 | -0,1 |
| Catholics | 0,089 | 0,154 | -0,071 |
| Muslims | 0,09 | 0,473 | -0,076 |
| Atheists | -0,246 | 0,384 | -0,267 |

In literature, we find that there is a positive correlation between religiousness and self-esteem. In our sample, no, in fact, the only significant correlation (but not very high) is for atheists. Instead religiousness is related to modesty, but is very low in Catholics. Self-esteem is negatively correlated with modesty, but only in Atheists.

More complex view

| Variable | influenced by |
|-----------------------------|--|
| RSE - Self-esteem | - |
| SCL - Religiousness | Believer(.845), Not committed(.313), Muslims(.234) |
| MOC - Modesty | Muslims(.344), SCL(.226) |
| AE - Appearance Evaluation | RSE(.436) |
| AO - Appearance Orientation | Gender(f,.321), Age(-.186) |
| FE - Fitness Evaluation | Physical activity(.292), RSE(.191), Gender(m,-.185) |
| FO - Fitness Orientation | Physical activity(.553), RSE(.123), Gender(m, -.113) |
| HE - Health Evaluation | RSE(.384), Alcohol(.160), SCL(-.127) |
| HO - Health Orientation | RSE(.245), Age(.182), Gender(f,.165) |

RMSEA = .035 CI(.000-.055); CFI=.984; TLI=.972



Finally, we can look at a summary from a more global perspective. The structural equation model is graphically complex, for which we expressed it in terms of simplified equations (parameters are shown in order of importance). Self-esteem has been considered as an explanatory variable for the other variables. Religiousness increases in the Muslim group, in believers and also in non-committed believers. Modesty in clothing is related to the score of religiousness and is higher among Muslims. The appearance evaluation depends only on self-esteem, while the appearance orientation depends on the age (decreasing with age) and is higher in women. Both fitness variables depend on self-esteem, the male gender and physical activity. Both health variables depend positively on self-esteem, but the evaluation is also influenced by religiousness and the use of alcohol, while the orientation on age and being female.