

The Effect of Religious Activities on Boredom through the Meaning in Life: Focusing on Protestantism

¹Sohee Lee, ²Sangha Park, ³Hyomin Choi, ⁴Youjin Kim, ⁵Hyejoo Lee*

^{1,2,3,4}Dept. of Psychology, Handong Global University. Korea
^{5*}Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Handong Global University. Korea
¹fwmade85@gmail.com, ²itbgcthate0414@handong.ac.kr
³hesse@handong.ac.kr, ⁴rladbwls0718@naver.com
⁵joanna@handong.edu*

Abstract

Boredom is considered anxiety and is an experience accompanied by a lack of meaning because the need for meaning is not met. It is the pain that people feel without using their mind, and the suffering that people fall into the absence of desire. On the other hand, religious activities give people meaning in life, which reduces the tendency to feel bored. This study investigates whether there is a difference in boredom depending on whether individuals participate in religious activities, and to verify whether the meaning in life mediates the relationships between religious activities and boredom. We predicted that if individuals engaged in religious activities, the meaning in life would increase, and they would be less bored than those who did not. A total of 82 college students participated in this study. Results showed that there were significant differences in the meaning in life and boredom between the two groups according to whether they participated in religious activities or not. The group actively participating in religious activities had significantly higher meaning in life and lower boredom than the non-religious group. Second, the meaning in life significantly mediated the relationship between religious activities and boredom. We conclude that active participation in religious activities can increase the meaning in life and ultimately reduce boredom. Based on the results of this study, the implications and suggestions for follow-up studies are discussed.

Keywords: Boredom, Meaning in Life, Religious Activities, Protestantism

1. INTRODUCTION

When people face boredom in their daily life, they feel unbearable stuffiness and discomfort. Boredom is defined as ‘a feeling of regret and discomfort because one wants something but cannot participate in a satisfactory activity’ [1, 2]. Boredom is associated with low body arousal, decreased emotional response to situations, and a desire to change the current situation [3-5]. However, when responding adaptively rather than avoiding it, boredom can be an opportunity. Recently, attention has been paid to ways to increase the meaning in life to prevent and reduce boredom [6, 7].

Since boredom is inevitable in our lives, it has been studied religiously and philosophically for a long time.

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Corresponding Author: joanna@handong.edu

Tel: +82-54-260-1836, Fax: +82-54-260-1940

Professor, Dept. of Psychology, Handong Global University. Korea

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Boredom was first mentioned by the ancient Roman philosopher Seneca, who, in his book, expressed the emptiness of repetitive situations in everyday life [8]. Even in the “Old Testament” written futility of life and the world when confronted with his helplessness [9]. Existential philosophers who valued human life and inner life have systematically studied boredom and the meaning in life. In the 19th century, Schopenhauer defined boredom as a state of dreadful emptiness in which 'need and lack', the basic motivations, were removed [10]. Another existential philosopher, Kierkegaard, defined boredom as ‘evil’ and saw that when one fails to create meaning in life, one encounters a poor and incompetent self [11].

In contrast, religious activity gives direction to the lives and builds a system of meaning. Humans, historically and culturally, have applied belief in supernatural beings to concepts such as morality, misery, and world creation [12]. Religious beliefs provide people with a perceived sense of meaning as “systems that postulate the existence of supernatural entities capable of influencing changes in the natural world” [13, 14]. Religion helps people to cope with stressful situations in life and gives them the strength to cope with restrictive situations. Religion lowers the stress of life by creating a meaning system even after loss [15]. Such religiosity is applied in people's lives and becomes a standard for judgment and behavior [16]. This study intends to examine in more depth whether religious activity provides meaning to life and affects boredom.

2. THEORY

2.1 Religious Activities and Meaning in Life

About 85% of the world's population is religious, suggesting that most people are influenced by religion [17]. Religion is highly associated with psychological well-being. Levels of self-actualization, meaning in life, personal growth initiative, and positive stress coping were found to be high in the group with religious participation and spirituality [18, 19]. The meaning in life plays an important role in leading a high-quality life by providing a direction so that people can go beyond the limits of human finiteness and aim for the future. A previous study showed that the meaning in life mediates the effect of religion on life satisfaction, indicating that there is a significant relationship between religion and the meaning in life [20].

Among them, Protestants feel happier and have a higher quality of life than other religions [21]. Based on these characteristics, the Protestant group was a sample to provide meaning and boredom in life. In this study, Protestants were defined operationally as those who actively participate in religious activities instead of self-report. The most basic of Protestant beliefs is the Bible [22]. Christianity in Korea was introduced through missionaries, but based on reading the Bible, active and proactive religiosity of believers was established [23]. Also, unlike worship or Bible study, reading the Bible is an important criterion for confirming individual religiosity. Therefore, among Protestants, we targeted those who regularly and consistently engage in Bible reading activities.

2.2 Boredom

Boredom is a dull and boring emotion that is monotonous, repetitive, and lacks specific or various kinds of stimuli [24]. Boredom can be divided into situational and internal factors [25, 26]. The boredom state is viewed as an unpleasant emotional state caused by a lack of challenge and stimulation from the activity or surroundings [27]. This suggests that the state of boredom can be reduced by quitting activities that cause boredom (e.g., activities that are not fun or cannot exercise one's ability) [28, 29].

On the other hand, boredom is viewed as a characteristic of an individual who easily feels bored [30, 31]. People prone to boredom have relational difficulties, such as being more impulsive, more assertive, and more often left out [32, 33]. In addition to depression and anxiety, it is also associated with a decrease in happiness,

indicating that life satisfaction is low [34-36].

Although numerous research on boredom has been conducted recently, there is a lack of research with the Korean population. In Korea, correlational studies such as game addiction, anger, and antisocial tendencies have been conducted by focusing on negative aspects related to boredom [37, 38]. Educational psychology also tried to provide an environment conducive to students by considering the factors that cause boredom in academic situations [39].

This study investigates positive factors that lowered the tendency to boredom based on studies conducted abroad. We tried to examine whether religious activities that affect the meaning in life play a role in lowering boredom. In addition, this study is aimed at Protestants who actively participate in religious activities rather than calling themselves Protestants.

2.3 Research Question and Hypotheses

Research Question: Does the meaning in life mediate the relationship between religious activities and boredom proneness?

1. The group participating in religious activities will have a higher meaning in life than the non-religious group.
2. The group participating in religious activities will have a lower boredom than the non-religious group.
3. The meaning in life will mediate the degree of boredom of the group participating in religious activities.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted with 109 Korean university students. A total of 82 students' data were analyzed excluding 27 of incomplete responses. Looking at the demographic characteristics of Korean college students included in the analysis, the average age was 21.6 years ($SD = 2.16$), and 52% of them were male. Participants' majors were Engineering (39.0%), Social Sciences (14.6%), Business Administration and Humanities (8.5%). There were no significant differences between demographic variables between religious and non-religious groups.

3.2 Research Tools

3.2.1 Boredom Proneness

The boredom proneness scale developed in 1986 by Farmer and Sundberg and adapted by Kim (2012) was used [36, 40]. The boredom proneness scale consists of 6 sub-factors, such as interest in work, stimuli seeking, time perception, and patience, and consists of a total of 28 items (e.g., "I am easily absorbed in my activities", "If I want to be really happy, it requires a lot of change and stimulation"). This questionnaire consists of a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree), and a higher score indicates a higher boredom proneness. In this study, the reliability (Cronbach's α) was .755.

3.2.2 Meaning in Life

Steger, Frazier, Oishi and Kaler developed in 2004 and used the meaning in life scale adapted by Won, Kim, and Kwon (2005) [41, 42]. The Meaning in Life Scale consists of two sub-factors, the existence of meaning

and the pursuit of meaning, and consists of a total of 10 items (e.g., “I understand the meaning of my life”, “I have a clear sense of purpose in life”). This questionnaire consists of a 7-point Likert scale of 1 (strongly disagree) and 7 (strongly agree), and a higher score indicates a higher meaning in life. In this study, the reliability (Cronbach's α) was .901.

3.2.3 Religious Activities

Reading the Bible of Protestants shows active and proactive religiosity [23]. In order to measure the religious activities of college students, the researchers collected responses from the group who read the Bible. In particular, through the Public Reading of Scripture program, college students who read 3-4 chapters of the Bible a day were selected and surveyed. The specific conditions for religious activities include meditating on the Bible for at least 15 minutes a day, at least four days a week, and at least 10 weeks. This study was conducted with college students who answered “yes” to both self-report questions (Example: Are you participating in Public Reading of Scripture?”, “Have you participated in Public Reading of Scripture four or more times a week and more than 10 weeks?”). The non-religious group was those who reported that they had no affiliation with any religion.

3.3 Statistical Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using SPSS 28.0. First, descriptive statistics and chi-square tests were performed on demographic variables to confirm that there was no significant difference between the two groups. In addition, an independent sample t-test was conducted to analyze whether there was a difference in meaning in life and boredom proneness between the religious group and the non-religious college student group. Finally, using the Baron and Kenny method, we tested whether the meaning in life mediates the relationship between college students' religious activities and boredom.

4. RESULTS

4.1 Differences in boredom proneness and meaning in life for Christian college students and non-religious college students

Table 1. Result of t-test on boredom proneness and meaning in life between Protestants and non-religious university students

Variable	Religious Activity	N	M	SD	t
Meaning in Life	Protestants	41	5.8	0.8	3.33***
	No Religion	41	5.1	1.09	
Boredom Proneness	Protestants	41	3.38	0.6	-2.16*
	No Religion	41	3.71	0.76	

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

Table 1 shows the result of differences in boredom proneness and meaning in life between the Protestants group and the non-religious group. It was found that the meaning in life ($t(80)=3.325$, $p<.001$) was statistically significantly higher in the Protestants than in the non-religious college student group. Also, the boredom proneness ($t(80)=-2.16$, $p<.05$) of the Protestants group was significantly lower than that of the non-religious college students group. Therefore, hypotheses 1 and 2 were supported, suggesting that religious university

students had a higher meaning in life and a lower degree of boredom proneness than non-religious university students.

4.2 Mediating effect of the meaning in life in the relationship between the religious activities and the boredom proneness

Table 2. Mediating Effect of Meaning in Life on the Relationship Between Religious Activities and Boredom Proneness

Step		B	SE	β	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>	Adj R ²	F	<i>p</i>
Step 1 (route A)	Religious Activity -> Meaning in Life	0.7	0.211	0.348	3.325	<i>p</i> <0.001 ***	0.11	11.057	<i>p</i> <0.001 ***
Step 2 (route B)	Religious Activity -> Boredom Proneness	-0.33	0.152	-0.24	-2.16	<i>p</i> 0.05 *	0.043	4.644	<i>p</i> <0.05 *
Step 3 (route C)	Religious Activity -> Boredom	-0.09	0.144	-0.06	-0.62	<i>p</i> >0.05	0.248	14.327	<i>p</i> <0.001 ***
	Meaning in Life -> Proneness	-0.34	0.072	-0.49	-4.77	<i>p</i> <0.001 ***			

* *p*<0.05, ** *p*<0.01, *** *p*<0.001

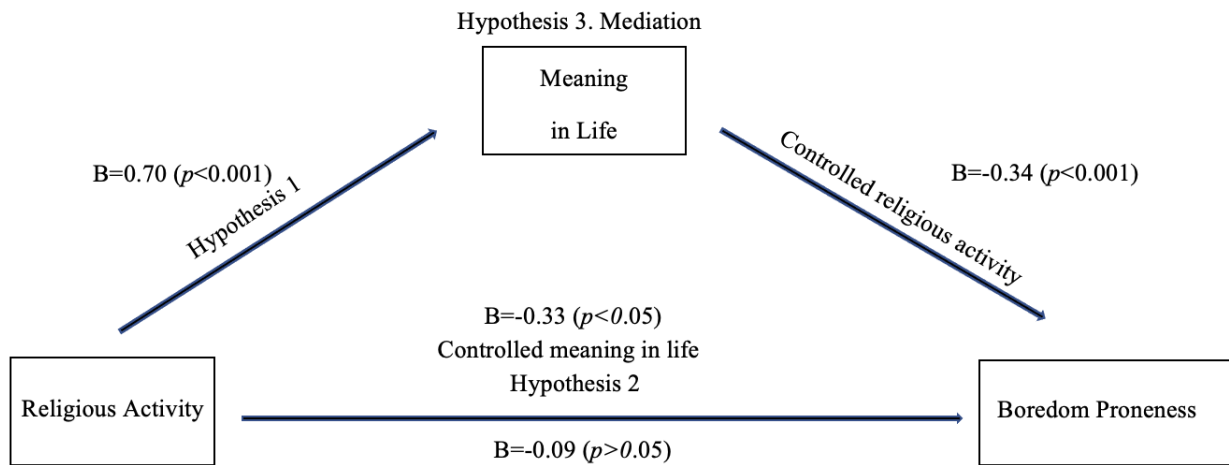


Figure 1. Mediating effect of meaning in life in relationship between religious activity and boredom proneness

Baron and Kenny (1986) method was used to examine the mediating effect of the meaning in life in the relationship between religious activities and the boredom proneness. In order to verify the mediating effect of the meaning in life according to the procedure of Baron and Kenny, regression analysis was performed through three steps. In the first step, we examined whether religious activities, an independent variable, significantly predicts the meaning in life. As shown in <Table 2, Figure 1>, religious activities significantly predicted the meaning in life in the first step ($\beta=0.348$, *p*<0.001). In step 2, to examine the relationship between independent and dependent variables, we examined whether religious activities significantly predict the boredom proneness. According to the analysis result in <Table 2, Figure 1>, religious activities significantly predicted boredom proneness ($\beta=-0.328$, *p*<0.05). In step 3, it was examined whether boredom proneness was significantly predicted by religious activities and the meaning in life. According to the analysis result of <Table 2, Figure

1>, it was found that the influence of religious activities on the boredom proneness was significantly lower than that of the second step (stage 2: $\beta=-0.063$, $p>0.05$, stage 3: $\beta=-0.49$, $p<0.001$). In other words, there is a complete mediating effect of the meaning in life between religious activities and boredom proneness.

5. DISCUSSION

This study is meaningful in that it suggests concrete action plans that can increase the meaning in life and reduce boredom. When there is no meaning in life, people feel an inner emptiness called existential emptiness. In addition, boredom has been shown to be an emotion that does not dissipate on its own over time and has a persistent negative effect on an individual's performance [39]. As such, boredom can have various negative results in all areas of life, and it is important to find factors that can alleviate the tendency to boredom because it does not disappear naturally. In this study, religious activities played a significant role as a factor in lowering boredom. Religious activity affects the meaning in life and ultimately may help to decrease the level of boredom. So far, many studies have been conducted showing that there is a close relationship between the meaning in life and religion [15, 43]. Existing studies emphasized community as an important aspect of religion and revealed that the meaning in life can be promoted through connections between people with similar ideologies and the inherent sense of community [44]. On the other hand, this study focused on individual Bible reading behavior. It is significant in that it reveals that religious activities at individual levels can promote the meaning of individual life in a society that is continuously becoming individualized.

The limitations of this study and suggestions for follow-up studies are as follows. First, it is somewhat difficult to generalize the research results to all generations because the study was conducted for university students. According to Giambra's study, boredom is greatly affected by life cycle [45]. Also, according to a recent study by Alisha Chin, boredom decreased sharply in early adulthood, and the trend of decreasing boredom was insignificant starting from middle age [46]. In other words, since the degree of boredom is different for each generation, it is necessary to increase the external validity by securing samples of various age groups from adolescence to old age in future research. Second, in the world religions, besides Protestantism, there are various religions and religious activities such as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. According to the Korea Missionary Research Institute, in 2022, Protestantism is 32.2%, Muslim 24.6%, Hinduism 13.5%, and Buddhism 12.9% [47]. Since the activities and meanings of each religion are also different, there is a limit to claiming that the act of reading the Bible adequately reflects the diversity of religious activities. Therefore, in future research, it is necessary to obtain a sample from people of various religions and select representative religious activities for each religion to make the operational definition of religious activities more universally valid. Third, as religious activities of Protestantism, there are various activities such as attending Sunday service, fellowship and sharing in addition to reading the Bible, but this study has a limitation in not including all of them. However, in the non-face-to-face period due to the global Pandemic, Bible reading is less limited in time and space and more accessible than other religious activities. In line with the current situation, this study's operational definition of religious activity may be a suitable alternative to confirm individual religiosity.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this study was to investigate whether there is a difference in boredom according to religious activities and whether the meaning in life mediates the relationship between religious activities and boredom. As a result of the study, we conclude the group participating in religious activities had a significantly lower boredom than the non-religious group, and the meaning in life was significantly higher. Also, we found the meaning in life showed a significant complete mediating effect in the relationship between religious activities and boredom.

This study revealed that religious activities can improve the meaning in life and ultimately lower boredom. Through these results, we suggest participation in religious activities can be a useful practical way to reduce boredom in personal life for many modern people who experience boredom. At this point in time when interest in boredom is increasing, the results of this study contribute to broadening the knowledge of boredom.

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