

DOES CULTURE CHANGE UNDERSTANDING OF KNEELING DISPLAY IN RELIGIOUS RITUAL?

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Introduction

Some cultures consider the kneeling posture the most salient bodily expression connected to religious ritual practice. Closed, collapsed and lowered postures are generally perceived as either expressing submission and obedience or shame and atonement. Therefore, depending on the associated affective state (submission or shame), these postures might either emphasize power asymmetry (between the superhuman agents and human participants), or signal conformity with moral norms.

Research

Cross-cultural comparison of shared cultural models related to the use of kneeling in religious rituals. Does long exposure to different explicit religious explanations of the display as moral signal shift the understanding of the associated affective state from submission to shame?

Hypotheses

- H1:** Czech and Mauritian cultural models differ in the salience of reasons for the use of kneeling in ritual posture.
- H2:** Religious affiliation predicts moral justification of kneeling in religious rituals.
- H3:** Religious traditions differ in emphasis on the moral understanding of kneeling.



Methods

Free-list technique [1] exploring semantic structures associated with kneeling in two different cultures.

„Please list 5 reasons why you think people kneel during religious ritual“

Responses translated and coded before analysis

Respect, Submission, Surrender, Obedience, Smallness... ⇒ submission (407x)
Shame, Punishment, Confession, Repentance, Conscience... ⇒ morality (37x)

Samples	Responses	Smith's S (%)
 n 164 (♀123) M age 22.9 students	<i>Humility</i> <i>Respect</i> <i>Submission</i>	40.19 37.69 27.15
 n 214 (♀105) M age 43.9 genreal population	<i>Respect</i> <i>Prayer</i> <i>Supplication efficacy</i>	27.46 18.54 14.06

Results

(H1): In contrast with previous (preliminary) evidence, Mauritian and Czech cultural models of reasons to kneel in religious rituals are significantly correlated ($r = .644$, $p = 5.117 \times 10^{-16}$, $n = 125$). Cultural models of kneeling do not differ substantially in those two cultures.

(H1+H2): Results of the logistic regressions analyses of different demographic predictors on likelihood of response proposing understanding kneeling as moral or submission signal are shown in Tables 1 and 2. Kneeling as a moral signal is predicted solely by sex of respondent over all models. Religious affiliation does not predict moralizing interpretation. Sex of respondent, cultural background and religious affiliation predict responses explaining kneeling display as an act of submission.

Beta Estimates with 95% CIs. The Coefficients are likelihood estimates for demographic data predicting a "morality" or "submission" response.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	0.013 (-0.007, 0.033)	0.011 (-0.014, 0.036)	0.008 (-0.017, 0.034)
Sex (male)	-1.064** (-1.941, -0.186)	-1.089** (-1.984, -0.195)	-1.068** (-1.964, -0.171)
Culture (Mauritian)		0.142 (-0.846, 1.131)	0.341 (-1.131, 1.813)
Religion (Hindu)			-0.055 (-1.688, 1.577)
Religion (Christian)			-0.252 (-1.548, 1.045)
Religion (Muslim)			-1.039 (-3.120, 1.042)
Constant	-2.346*** (-3.192, -1.499)	-2.349*** (-3.200, -1.497)	-2.187*** (-3.172, -1.202)
Observations	327	327	327

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Age	0.016** (0.0005, 0.032)	0.008 (-0.011, 0.026)	0.008 (-0.011, 0.026)
Sex (male)	-1.849*** (-2.380, -1.318)	-2.026*** (-2.609, -1.443)	-2.177*** (-2.790, -1.565)
Culture (Mauritian)		0.633* (-0.072, 1.338)	1.373*** (0.370, 2.377)
Religion (Hindu)			-1.169** (-2.323, -0.015)
Religion (Christian)			-1.220*** (-2.110, -0.331)
Religion (Muslim)			-1.222* (-2.462, 0.017)
Constant	1.078*** (0.463, 1.692)	1.063*** (0.453, 1.674)	1.630*** (0.856, 2.405)
Observations	327	327	327

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Discussion

- kneeling in rituals seems ubiquitous, yet its function is still unclear
- kneeling is mostly used to communicate submission and respect (older type of behaviour and state compared to shame)
- moralizing interpretation of kneeling is not predicted by religious affiliation
- religious affiliation (compared to atheism) predicts decrease in kneeling-as-submission interpretation

- kneeling is seen as having communicative (e.g. *submission, respect*) and performative (e.g. *efficacy of supplication*) function
- kneeling is not strongly related to communication of moral conformity
- little cultural variation in models of ritual kneeling



References

[1] Smith, J. J. and Borgatti, S. P. (1997). Salience Counts And So Does Accuracy: Correcting and Updating a Measure for Free-List-Item Salience. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology*, 7(2):208-209.

