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RELIGIOUSITY AS A PREDICTOR OF EXISTENTIAL FULFILLMENT

PhD Dissertation Summary

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DISSERTATION BASICS

Relevance of Research

Our research focuses on the phenomenon of existential fulfillment, which is relatively unknown within academic psychology. This concept was introduced within the framework of existential psychology by V. Frankl and developed in the theory of A. Langle to denote the subjective well-being and psychological health of a person from an existential point of view. A person is existentially fulfilled if he or she acts in accordance with what he or she considers as possible, good, authentic, and moral. The subjective marker of fulfillment is the experiencing of internal consent with the self and the world.

At the theoretical level, this topic has been widely discussed in existential philosophy (P. Tillich, M. Buber, M. Scheler, N. A. Berdyaev, L. I. Schestov), as well as in existential psychology and psychotherapy (K. Jaspers, R. May, V. Frankl, A. Langle, K. Schneider). However, the problem has barely been explored in empirical studies within the framework of the existential-psychological approach.

Quality of life studies seems to be the closest to the topic discussed on academic science. They provide a wealth of data on the relationship between religiosity and various aspects of well-being, still a number of unresolved questions remain in this area. Firstly, most studies show a positive effect of religiosity, but the effect differs depending on tools used for measuring religiosity and also on theoretical assumptions and explanatory principles underlying the measurement of well-being. In addition, comparison between studies can be difficult due to the non-equivalence of the criteria—what is adequate for measuring religiosity in one religious tradition may not be appropriate for another.

Secondly, the effect of religiosity on well-being depends on additional factors related to the cultural context, dominant values, and religious traditions. Since most of the studies that have shown a positive relationship between religiosity and well-being were conducted in the US and focus on Christianity, researchers have doubts about the possibility of accepting their findings as universal ones. At the same time, large

international studies covering many countries and several religions that could clarify the situation provide conflicting data.

Thirdly, researchers often do not provide enough information about the effect size of the association found. As large meta-analyses show, if the effect is reported as significant, then its magnitude is often insufficient to recognize the predictive significance of religiosity for well-being when other generally accepted criteria (social status, economic indicators, health, marital status, etc.) are considered. These contradictions produce the inexhaustible interest of researchers around the world in the topic of religiosity as a predictor of well-being.

In the theory of existential psychology, it is assumed that religiosity is a significant factor for the existential fulfillment of a person. At the same time, both positive and negative effects of religiosity on existential fulfillment are possible. Within the framework of A. Langle's existential analysis, the effect of religiosity on existential fulfillment is theoretically substantiated as follows: (1) in a religious context, the prerequisites for the fundamental motivations of a person can be implemented; (2) through religious practices, a person can exercise attitudes (active openness, self-mindfulness, letting go) that create conditions for existential fulfillment.

Belonging to a religious tradition, religious beliefs and participation in religious practices are components of religiosity as a systemic phenomenon. In relation to human values, religiosity is studied at the group and individual level. However, there are no studies that consider the interaction of values and religiosity as predictors of subjective well-being. Based on the existential-psychological approach, we can hypothesize that the harmonious correspondence of beliefs, values, and behavior leads to a person's experience of existence as fulfilled.

In general, we can distinguish four groups of contradictions that determine the **problem of this study**:

1. Inconsistency in the results of empirical studies of the relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being.

2. Plurality and ambiguity in determining the composition and significance of aspects of religiosity as predictors of subjective well-being, as well as in determining possible mediators and moderators of this connection.

3. The contradiction between the depth of the concept of existential fulfillment in philosophy and psychotherapy and the lack of empirical research within the framework of the existential-psychological approach.

4. The contradiction between lack of studies on the interaction between religiosity and values at the individual level as predictors of subjective well-being, with relative knowledge of the relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being, as well as between values and subjective well-being, which were studied separately.

The purpose of the study: to reveal the connection between existential fulfillment and the components of religiosity (religious affiliation, religious belief, and religious practices) and to identify the role of individual values in moderating this connection.

Based on the analysis of theoretical concepts, the following assumptions were put forward:

Hypothesis 1: Religiosity (religious affiliation, religious belief, and religious practices) is a predictor of existential fulfillment of people belonging to different religious traditions (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism).

Hypothesis 2: Individual values — Security, Conformity, Tradition, Universalism, Self-direction, and Achievement — are moderators of the relationship between the religious affiliation and existential fulfillment.

Based on the purpose and the research hypotheses, the following **research aims** were formulated:

1. To operationalize the concept of existential fulfillment and to systematize theoretical approaches and empirical work on the relationship between various forms of subjective well-being and existential fulfillment.

2. To review models of religiosity, measurement tools, considering the presence of three components — religious affiliation, belief, and practices — in these models.

3. To analyze empirical works on the relationship between subjective well-being and religiosity, to identify methodological problems of its measurement, and to systematize interpretive theories that explain this relationship.

4. To theoretically analyze the relationship of values, subjective well-being, and religiosity and to create a theoretical research model.

5. To conduct a pilot qualitative empirical study to identify the subjective representation of the connection between religiousness and the components of existential fulfillment among religious respondents.

6. To empirically reveal the relationship between the components of religiosity — religious affiliation, religious belief, religious practices — and existential fulfillment among people belonging to different religious traditions.

7. To reveal the features of the interaction of the components of religiosity as predictors of existential fulfillment.

8. To determine the significance of the interaction of individual values and religious affiliation as predictors of existential fulfillment.

The object of the study is the existential fulfillment of the personality, and **the subject** is the relationship between the existential fulfillment and the religiosity of the personality.

The theoretical and methodological basis of the study are: A. Langle's existential analysis, V. Frankl's anthropology and ontology, D. A. Leontiev's concept of the phenomenon of subjective well-being and systematization of subjective well-being theories, K. Keyes' mental health continuum model, a multidimensional approach to definition and measurement religiosity in social psychology (K. Pargament, D. E. Hall, H. G. Koenig, R. T. Kragun, D. Speed, V. Saroglu), S. Schwartz's theory of individual values, positions of ethnic and cross-cultural psychology on the formation of religious

identity (N. M. Lebedeva, A. N. Tatarko, S. V. Ryzhova, V. A. Shorokhova, M. V. Efremova).

Research methods and techniques. Methods for achieving the theoretical goals of the study were – analysis, systematization, generalization of theoretical approaches to the research problem and the results of empirical research, and modeling technique. In the qualitative part of the research semi-structured interview (Kvale, 2003) were used. In the quantitative research the following methods were used:

1. *Test of Existential Motivations* (Shumsky et al., 2016) to measure existential fulfillment based on A. Langle's theoretical model of four fundamental motivations.

2. *Questionnaire Mental Health Continuum—Short Form* according to the well-being model of K. Keyes and K. Riff, adapted by E. N. Osin (Żemojtel-Piotrowska et al., 2018).

3. Modified scale *Following Religious Practices* (Efremova, 2009).

4. Religious affiliation and religious belief were measured using direct questions based on the analysis of socio-psychological approaches to measuring religiosity.

5. *Schwartz Human Values Scale*, a methodological inventory based on Schwartz's theory. A short version from the European Social Survey (ESS) was used (Schwartz et al., 2001) (adapted by N. M. Lebedeva).

Several questions on socio-demographic data (gender, age, city of residence) were also included in the survey.

A. Giorgi's method of descriptive phenomenological analysis was used as a method for analyzing qualitative data. The methods of statistical data processing were correlation analysis, linear regression analysis, multiple hierarchical regression analysis, analysis of variance, and calculation of the effect size. For statistical data processing and work with graphics the R programming language, R-studio software, JUSP and SPSS Statistics 22 were used.

The empirical base of the study included people living in Russia and speaking Russian. The pilot qualitative study involved six respondents (five women and one man) aged 26 to 50, affiliated with Orthodoxy. The sample was targeted; the recruiting was carried out through social networks. The interview was conducted online, on a voluntary and free basis. Quantitative studies included people of different religious beliefs, 481 women and 277 men, from 16 to 80 years old, with a mean age of 33 years (median 30 years). The final sample of 758 people consisted of five groups in accordance with the criterion of affiliation with a religious tradition: 171 people were Orthodox Christians, 188 were Muslims (Sunnis), 136 were Buddhists (mystical schools), 109 were atheists, and 154 people were unaffiliated with religion (so-called “Nons”). In the Muslim group, most respondents were residents of the Republic of Tatarstan; in the Buddhist group, – residents of the Republic of Kalmykia. This distribution is due to the peculiarities of the spread of religions in the regions of Russia. The survey was conducted in two forms—in person in the respondent's region of residence (Kazan, Buinsk, Elista, Smolensk and the region, Moscow and Moscow region) and online via Google form. Among the respondents, 447 people are residents of million-plus cities and 311 live in small towns. The sample was built as a target one; members of specialized religious groups in social networks and subscribers of Internet portals were invited to the survey. This work is a summary of studies conducted in 2017–2022.

Scientific novelty of the research:

1. An original model is proposed within the framework of the existential-psychological approach that describes the relationship between existential fulfillment and religiosity measured as a multicomponent phenomenon in different religious traditions.
2. A theoretical model of relations of existential fulfillment with religiosity and individual values is developed.
3. The role of the components of religiosity (religious affiliation, religious belief, and religious practices), as well as their interaction as predictors of existential fulfillment, is revealed.

4. The role of individual values as a mediator of the connection between religious affiliation and existential fulfillment is established.

5. The study provides data to confirm the theoretical thesis of A. Langle's theory about the consistency of internal beliefs and positions with implemented actions as a condition for experiencing internal consent with oneself and with the world, that is, existential fulfillment. Regarding existential fulfillment particularly important is the correspondence between a person's position about his or her belonging to a religious tradition and religious beliefs, his or her commitment to religious practices and the severity of the corresponding individual values.

The theoretical significance lies in deepening and supplementing ideas about the phenomenon of existential fulfillment, in systematizing modern knowledge about the relationship between religiosity and subjective well-being, in developing a theoretical model of the relationship of existential fulfillment with religiosity and individual values and its empirical verification, in highlighting the features of the connection between religious affiliation and existential fulfillment among people with different individual values.

The practical significance of the research includes the possibility of using the data obtained in the teaching and counseling work for helping people with different religious beliefs. The results of the study can be used in such academic disciplines as “Fundamentals of “Existential Analysis and Logotherapy”, “Ontology of Personality”, “Psychology of the Search for Meaning”, and “Psychological Well-Being: Individual Space of the Personality”.

Thesis submitted to defense:

1. Existential fulfillment is a qualitatively specific phenomenon, which is defined: (1) as the process of the constant fulfilling of existence, (2) as an experience of internal consent and life satisfaction, and (3) as a multicomponent structure that describes the psychological processes that determine existential fulfillment.

2. Each of the three components of religiosity—religious affiliation with traditional institutionalized religion, religious belief in God or other Higher Powers, and adherence to religious practices—are predictors of existential fulfillment in different religious traditions.

3. The components of religiosity, acting as predictors of fulfillment, have different strengths and interact with each other, making up a complex phenomenon. The strongest predictors of existential fulfillment are religious affiliation and the religious practices. Religious practices are a predictor of existential fulfillment among people affiliated with any of the three religious traditions but are not associated with the existential fulfillment among people who do not identify as followers of any religion. The adherence to religious practices among religiously affiliated respondents mediates the connection of religious belief with existential fulfillment. Different religious practices have different significance and effect sizes in predicting existential fulfillment depending on the religious tradition.

4. Individual values are differently related to existential fulfillment depending on religious affiliation: among religion-affiliated respondents, the experience of existential fulfillment is positively associated with the values of Benevolence and Universalism and negatively with the value of Power. Among respondents not affiliated with religion, existential fulfillment is positively associated with the values of Stimulation and Achievement and negatively with the values of Conformity and Tradition. A common trend for both respondents affiliated with and not affiliated with religion is a positive correlation of existential fulfillment with the value of Independence and a negative one with the value of Security.

5. Individual values moderate the effect of religious affiliation on existential fulfillment: respondents affiliated with Orthodoxy demonstrate a higher level of existential fulfillment than unaffiliated respondents only in the case of high and medium expression of their values of Universalism and Benevolence, as well as with a low value of Achievement.

The reliability and validity of the results is provided by the theoretical and methodological basis of the study, the use of a combined qualitative-quantitative design, the use of a representative sample, and the adequacy of the methods of statistical processing used.

Approbation and discussion. The dissertation materials were discussed at the meetings of the postgraduate scientific seminar at the National Research University Higher School of Economics, were presented at the Russian and foreign conferences: 11th International Conference on Meaning (INPM) (2021, Toronto, online), Online Pre-Congress of the Ninth World Congress on Psychotherapy “*Psychotherapy in helping citizens, families, communities, everything society during the coronavirus pandemic*” (2020, online), II World Congress on Existential Psychotherapy (2019, Buenos Aires), 9st European Conference on Positive Psychology (ECP) (2018, Budapest), 13th World Conference on Person-Centered and Experiential Psychotherapy and Counseling (2018, Vienna), 10th Conference on the Problems of the Dialogic Self (2018, Braga), Final International Congress “*Possibilities of Psychotherapy, Psychology and Counseling in the Preservation and Development of Health and Well-Being of a Person, Family, Society*” (2017, Moscow), VI International Scientific and Practical Conference “*Personality in Space and Time*” (2017, Smolensk), and All-Russian Psychological Forum (2017, Kazan). Based on the materials of the dissertation work four scientific articles were published, three of them in journals recommended for defense by the HSE university. And the abstracts in three collections of scientific conferences were published.

The structure of the thesis follows the general logic of the study and consists of an introduction, four chapters, deductions, a conclusion, a list of references, and six appendices. The list of references includes 217 sources, 114 of them in a foreign language (English, German). The main part of the dissertation is presented on 187 pages. The results of the study are presented in sixteen tables and five figures.

MAJOR CONTENT OF THE RESEARCH

The first chapter analyzes the object of research — existential fulfillment (EF) — as a phenomenon that describes psychological health and well-being from the point of view of the existential paradigm. **Paragraph 1.1.** contains a systematization of the definitions of existential fulfillment that exist in psychotherapeutic and academic literature. We distinguish three groups of definitions that characterize EF from different angles: (1) as a process of fulfilling or implementation of existence, (2) as an experience of inner consent and satisfaction with life, and (3) as a multicomponent construct based on the structure of conditions and prerequisites, that makes differential measurement of the level of EF possible.

Each definition was discussed in detail. Firstly, the fulfillment of existence is presented as a process immanently inherent in a person at every moment of time. Human being is characterized by dialogue, dynamism, openness, and non-determinism. A person is constantly in the process of implementation of these properties of existence to a greater or lesser extent (Längle, 1993; Koryakina, 2015). Secondly, existential fulfillment is described as an experience of inner consent and satisfaction with life that marks the presence of a personal position (from the word “Person”) in existence. Thirdly, EF is presented as a latent construct that is derived from the structural model of its conditions—the implementation of four fundamental motivations (according to A. Längle). The structural model describes the psychological processes underlying the EF. The three discussed sides of the EF are not independent, they complement each other and constitute the phenomenological, structural, and procedural aspects of existential fulfillment.

Paragraph 1.2. is devoted to determining the place of EF among the concepts that describe the positive functioning and well-being of the individual. Based on the systematization of the conceptual field in this area, proposed by D. A. Leontiev (2020), a theoretical comparison of the properties of EF with the concepts of happiness, subjective well-being, psychological well-being, quality of life, hedonistic and eudaimonic well-being, spiritual well-being, and existential well-being is made. In each case, the points of intersection and the uniqueness of the concept of existential fulfillment were identified.

Existential fulfillment seems to be close to the concept of eudaimonia in the understanding of D. Galati and I. Sotgiu (Galati, Sotgiu, 2004). However, referring to the model of psychological health by K. Keyes (Keyes, 2009) and psychological well-being by K. Ryff (Ryff, Keyes, 1995), we show that existential fulfillment combines features of hedonistic and eudaimonic well-being. EF includes both the experience of positive emotions and the presence of personal prerequisites for well-being, while not including both of these aspects without a trace. It is indicated that existential fulfillment does not imply an emphasis on a personal relationship with God or another transcendent reality, as is typical for the concept of spiritual well-being. EF is also not identical to the experience of having meaning and purpose in life.

In **paragraph 1.3.** a review of empirical studies of the connection between existential fulfillment and subjective well-being is given. The review reinforces the conclusions of the theoretical analysis — most of the works show a positive correlation between existential fulfillment and subjective well-being, while there is no complete parallel to the psychic reality they cover.

The second chapter is devoted to the concept of religiosity and the problem of the relationship of religiosity with existential fulfillment and various aspects of subjective well-being. **Paragraph 2.1.** provides an overview of theoretical approaches to the definition of religiosity and its separation from the concept of spirituality. A working definition of religiosity is given — it is a multidimensional personal phenomenon, consisting in the features of human conscious and behavior. Models of religiosity as a multidimensional phenomenon are presented (Glock, Stark, 1966; Poloma, Pendleton, 1991; Voas, 2007; Hall, Meador, Koenig, 2008; Saroglou, 2011; Schwadel, Hardy, 2022; Novikova, 2001). An overview of the components of religiosity used in major international studies (ESS, WVS) is given. Unresolved difficulties in measuring religiosity as a set of components as applied to different religious traditions are discussed. The concept of religious identity is introduced as one of the possible components of religiosity included in some models in the context of cultural and cross-cultural psychology (Efremova, 2009, 2011).

An operational model for the study of religiosity based on the three-component models of Cragun and Speed (2022), Voas (2007), and Novikova (2001) is proposed. The model considers the components that are most consistently present in most models of the multidimensional dimension of religiosity: identity (or affiliation), beliefs, and behavior. The author's three-component model for assessing religiosity includes religious affiliation, religious belief, and religious practices. These three components are related but have their own specifics, describing the features of the consciousness and behavior of a religious person. The advantages of the introduced model are indicated in accordance with the objectives of the study:

1. religious affiliation — an aspect of religiosity that reflects belonging to a religious tradition, a system of norms, community, and social institution of a particular religion.
2. religious belief — an aspect of religiosity that reflects personal beliefs in the existence of God or other Higher Powers.
3. religious practices — a behavioral aspect of religiosity reflecting the involvement in the practices prescribed by religion, the observance of rituals, both individually and in a group of believers.

Paragraph 2.2. presents the relationship of the factors discussed in the first two chapters—religiosity and existential fulfillment. There are few studies where the dimension of existential fulfillment is present, while the relationship between religiosity and well-being in various forms has been studied many times and according to different criteria. Most researchers argue that there is a positive relationship between religiosity and psychological assessment of the quality of life and well-being (Argyle, Hills, 2000; Koenig, McCullough, Larson, 2001; Ardel, 2003; Lewis, Cruise, 2006; Dehejia, DeLeire, Luttmer, 2007; Snoep, 2008; Ritter, Preston, Hernandez, 2014). However, other studies describe a non-linear relationship (e.g. Mochon, Norton, Ariely, 2011) or find no significant correlation between religiosity and subjective well-being (O'Connor, Cobb, O'Connor, 2003; Sillick, Stevens, Cathcart, 2016), or the size of the effect and the strength of the connection are so small that they cannot be interpreted in any meaningful way (Cragun, Speed 2022).

To explain and systematize the reported contradictions, we consider the features of the design of these studies — these are (1) the cultural context and religious tradition of the respondents (Siegers, 2019), (2) the operationalization of the basic concepts of “religiosity” and “psychological well-being” (or its analogues) chosen by the researcher and the research methodology that follows it (Hackney and Sanders, 2003); and (3) the chosen theoretical model for interpreting the results.

We highlight the methodological problem of measuring religiosity: some researchers include in the definition of religiosity those properties that initially relate to the positive well-being of the individual. Religiosity questionnaires often include measures of experiencing the meaning of life, confidence, positive emotions, support coming from the religious community (for example, the Allport and Ross’s ROS questionnaires, Holland's SBI-15R). For this reason, the use of multidimensional religiosity questionnaires that include psychological variables is difficult to use in well-being studies. This is the basis for the author's choice of a sociological approach to measuring religiosity, which is more suitable for the researchers studying its relationship with well-being.

The main interpretative models of the correlation of religiosity and any aspects of well-being are considered. Some theories seek to see the role of religion in human life. Others tend to divide the concept of religiosity to the part that promotes well-being and part that does not have such a positive effect, or even has negative consequences for well-being. Still others call for not wasting time defining religiosity when its effect can be fully explained by other social and psychological mediating variables.

The following interpretive models are discussed: terror management theory by T. Pyszczynski, J. Greenberg, and S. Solomon (Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, 1986); the theory of religious coping by K. Pargament (Pargament et al, 1998); the model of internalization of beliefs and values of religion in the theories of intrinsic motivation and self-determination by E. Deci and R. Ryan (Ryan, Rigby, King, 1993); G. Allport's model of intrinsic and extrinsic religiosity (Allport, 1950), a socio-psychological approach that considers the social-individual religiosity dyad; and, finally, the approach of R.T. Cragun

and D. Speed (Cragun, Speed, 2022) justifying the insignificance of religiosity for the experience of well-being.

Having considered this discussion, in **paragraph 2.3.** we present an explanatory model of the relationship between religiosity and well-being from an existential-psychological point of view. The positions of several authors regarding the place of religion and religiosity in human life (E. Fromm, R. May, V. Frankl, A. Langle, N. Abbagnano, L. Hoffman) are considered. Religiosity is presented as one of the ways people deal with existential themes. Within the framework of the existential approach, there is a theoretical assumption of both positive and negative roles of religion and religiosity in human life. The positive role is due to the formation of a sense of support in a higher transcendental order, a sense of hope and the meaning of life, in relating oneself to a larger context, a sense of belonging and unity with fellow believers. Religious practices help to exercise in the attitudes of openness, mindfulness, letting go, peace, which in theory lead to the existential fulfillment. A negative role is possible if there is a strengthening of neurotic personality traits through religious participation: an increase in immaturity and lack of independence, a flattening of emotional life due to self-restraint, a painful feeling of guilt or anxiety, excessive authoritarianism, and pedantry, which may accompany low existential fulfillment.

At the end of the paragraph, the results of the few empirical studies that include existential fulfillment or existential well-being are presented. There is a shortage of empirical studies that could provide data on testing the relationship between religiosity and well-being or life satisfaction within the framework of the existential paradigm.

Paragraph 2.4. is devoted to describing the author's theoretical model of the connection between religiosity, defined through a three-component model (presented in paragraph 2.1.), with existential fulfillment (Fig. 1). The first hypothesis of the dissertation research is formulated. Following the theoretical positions discussed in paragraph 2.3., we assume that religious belief (that is, belief in a transcendent reality), religious affiliation (as belonging to an institutionalized religion), and religious practices are predictors of existential fulfillment. Implementation of the four fundamental

motivations in the context of religion could be one of the ways to the inner consent of a person with himself and with life.

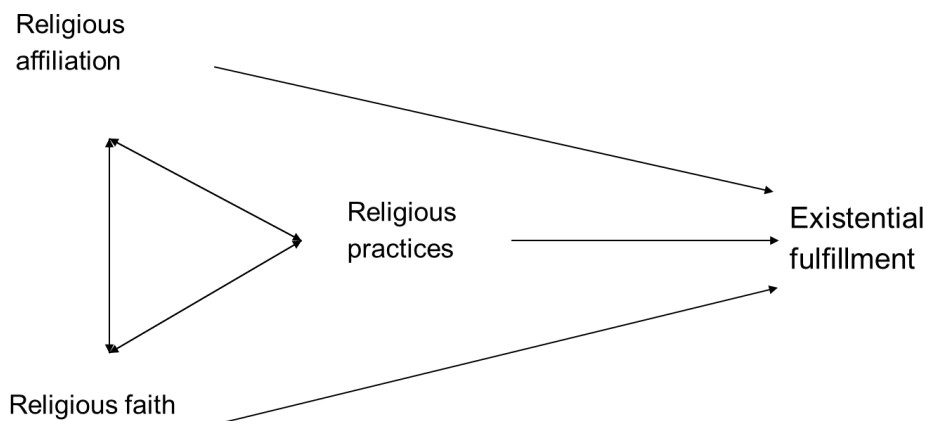


Figure 1. Model of connection between aspects of religiosity and existential fulfillment

Chapter 3 discusses the role of individual values as the part of the mechanism of the connection between religiosity and existential fulfillment. There are two parallel lines of research: some studies show that religiosity is associated with certain values, while others reveal that values determine the criteria for assessing subjective well-being. In our study, these lines are combined by exploring the tripartite relationship of individual values and religiosity with existential fulfillment. To do this, we consistently consider the first and second lines in the refraction of the existential approach and then put forward an operational model of tripartite connections.

In **paragraph 3.1.** the relationship between existential fulfillment and values is analyzed. Firstly, the view of existential analysis on the role of values in the formation of existential fulfillment is presented. The ability to experience the values is one of the conditions for a fulfilled existence, according to the theory of A. Langle. At the same time, the content (or list) of values that are associated with existential fulfillment is not described in existential analysis. However, since existential fulfillment presupposes the experience of inner consent, therefore the characteristic of an existentially fulfilled life

will be the correspondence (harmony) of a person's actions with his or her stable values and beliefs.

Secondly, the concept of values used in social and cross-cultural psychology (Lebedeva, 2011) is introduced. Value orientations are generalized goals that arise in the process of interiorization of cultural values and that largely determine personal beliefs and behavior. The theory of basic values by S. Schwartz that defines ten universal basic values—Self-direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence and Universalism—is considered in detail.

Thirdly, the results of the only work that provides empirical data on the relationship between basic values and existential fulfillment in the Russian-speaking space are described (Vasanov, 2010). The data show weak negative correlations with such value orientations as Conformism, Tradition, Stimulation, Hedonism, and Security and a positive correlation with the Self-Direction value. Based on these data, as well as based on a theoretical analysis of the phenomenon of existential fulfillment (given in Chapter 1), it becomes possible to assume the direction of the connection between fulfillment and other values in accordance with the model of S. Schwartz.

Paragraph 3.2. describes the relationship between religiosity and values according to the model of S. Schwartz. This section presents a table that summarizes the results of studies exploring the relation between religiosity and value orientations according to S. Schwartz. The analysis showed the following trends: religiosity is positively associated with the values of preservation and negatively with the values of openness to change, positively with the values of social orientation and negatively with the values of individual orientation, and also negatively with the values of self-affirmation and ambiguously (ambivalently) with the values of self-transcendence. In most cases, a positive relationship between religious identity and the values of Tradition, Conformism, Security, and Benevolentness was revealed.

In **paragraph 3.3.** a theoretical model of a connection between religiosity, values, and existential fulfillment is presented. The dissertation research is based on the following

assumptions: in the search for ways to fulfill the existence, a person relies on basic values. The individual values of a person can be more or less consonant with the values preached by the religious tradition. If the values find a harmonious implementation in a religious context, then we can assume a high level of existential fulfillment of a person. Different values lead to differences in the criteria of a personal assessment of the subjective well-being and in the strategies chosen to achieve it, which may affect the existential fulfillment. The working model and the hypothetical direction of the connections are shown in Figure 2. At the end of the paragraph, the second hypothesis of the study is formulated about the differences in the connection between religiosity and existential fulfillment among people with different dominant individual values.

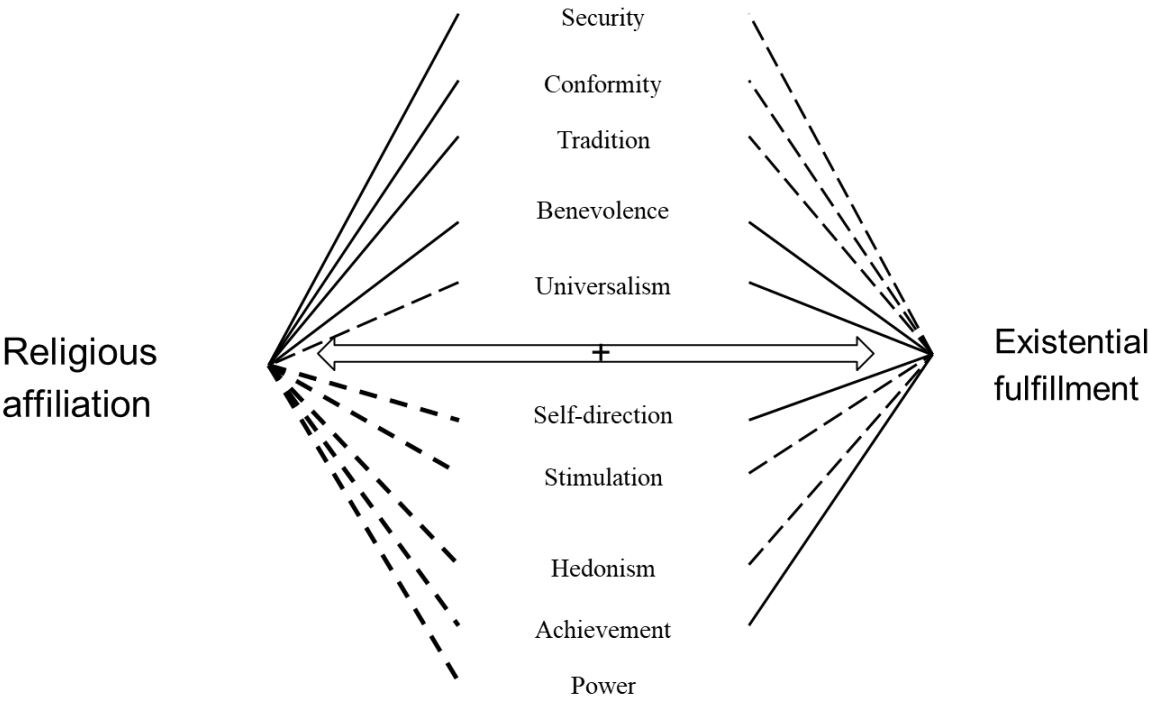


Figure 2. Model of the relationships between religious affiliation and existential fulfillment considering moderating effect of the values (the solid line indicates a positive connection, and the dotted line indicates a negative one)

Chapter 4 includes the results of three empirical studies. The study design, sample, procedures, methods, study results, discussion of the results, conclusions, perspectives, and limitations are described for each of them. The goal of Study 1 is to examine the perceptions of religiously affiliated people about the connection of their religious beliefs

and practices with the experience of existential fulfillment and its prerequisites. Thus, we were looking for empirical support for hypotheses at the level of phenomenological contents. To test the hypotheses at the level of statistical trend, two quantitative studies were conducted. Study 2 is aimed at testing the first hypothesis about the components of religiosity as predictors of existential fulfillment. Study 3 clarifies and complements the Study 2 by including a third variable—individual values—as a moderator of the relationship between religious affiliation and existential fulfillment.

In **paragraph 4.1.** a qualitative study, which we consider as preliminary (pilot) one, is presented. The connection of religious belief and practices with existential fulfillment is studied as the perception of religiously affiliated people. In the existential approach there is a base for both the positive and negative role of religiosity for experiencing life with inner consent. It is important to describe what part of religious life—in the opinion of religious people—is associated with existential fulfillment. A series of semi-structured interviews were made. The interview guide is structured by a categorical grid corresponding to the contents of the four fundamental motivations (FM) by A. Langle. The relevance of the interview guide questions to the content of existential motivations was confirmed by two expert psychologists, specialists in existential analysis. The interview analysis was carried out in accordance with the method of descriptive phenomenological analysis by A. Giorgi (Kvale, 2003). To confirm the validity of the hypothesis regarding followers of other religions, one interview with a Buddhist respondent was performed. And in addition, a brief survey of adherents of two religions was also completed — Buddhism (5 people) and Islam (7 people). The survey was conducted in a short form relative to the main interviews but corresponded to it in content.

The results show that descriptions of positive existential fulfillment in a religious context prevail in the experience of the respondents; however, there are also themes of negative experiences, in the absence of prerequisites for the existential fulfillment. We systematized the topics that sounded in the interview according to the model of four fundamental motivations (FM). Analyzing the highlighted topics in terms of recurrence, we single out three higher order themes that appeared in each conversation: (1) the

experience that religion helps to endure difficult life situations and, to some extent, accept them, through strengthening the feeling of “power” and providing secure space; (2) a warm emotional response when visiting the temple, especially during festive collective prayers; and (3) experiencing an expanded perspective of life and a sense of the non-randomness or meaningfulness of everything that happens to a person, seeing the divine plan in the events of life.

The following conclusions are drawn. Firstly, Orthodox respondents subjectively perceive the connection of their religious involvement (belief and practices) with experiences, which, based on the theory of existential analysis, we may attribute to existential fulfillment. Secondly, in the experience of the respondents there are both descriptions of aspects of religious life that lead to fulfillment, as well as those that hinder it. Therefore, we can assume a more complex relationship between religiosity and existential fulfillment than an unambiguously positive relationship. However, the descriptions that speak about the strengthening of EF, such as accepting and enduring difficult situations, the feeling of being potent (“I can”), positive emotions, a sense of unity, expanding life perspectives, and a sense of meaning, prevailed in the interview texts. Thirdly, there is the complexity of the implementation of FM in a religious context: some respondents express the component of turning to religion for specific help, or for general support, while others do not. Fourth, the result of an additional survey of Buddhists and Muslims makes it possible to suggest a connection between religiosity and fulfillment in relation to followers of different religions. The main conclusion is the empirical substantiation of the hypothesis about the connection between religiosity and existential fulfillment, put forward earlier in the theoretical study (in Chapter 2).

Paragraph 4.2. is devoted to a quantitative study of religiosity as a predictor of existential fulfillment. The study tests the first hypothesis of the dissertation work: religiosity (religious affiliation, religious belief, and adherence to religious practices) is a predictor of existential fulfillment of people belonging to different religious traditions (Orthodox Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism). In **subparagraph 4.2.1.** the study design and data collection methods are presented. The following methods were included in the

questionnaire: (1) Existential Motivation Test (TEM); (2) Mental Health Continuum Questionnaire (MHC-SF) that includes three scales: emotional hedonistic well-being (the frequency of experiencing positive emotions), social eudemonistic well-being (inclusion in social connections), and psychological eudemonistic well-being (a comprehensive assessment according to the K. Ryff well-being model); (3) Measuring three components of religiosity, according to the research model (described in Chapter 2):

1. Religious affiliation was defined by the question, “Do you identify with any religion?”

2. Variable religious belief was measured by the question, “Which of the following statements most accurately reflects your idea of the existence of God or other Higher Powers?”

3. The modified scale *Following Religious Practices* (Efremova, 2009) measured the frequency of practices: prayer and/or reading mantras, visiting a temple (church, mosque, or datsan) or community meetings (sanghas), reading religious texts (Gospel, Koran, or Sutras), participation in religious holidays and fasting, meditation. The rationale for the need for modification and the essence of the changes are given.

The choice of tools for measuring aspects of religiosity for this study is substantiated: (1) the tool is used in modern psychological studies of religiosity; (2) it is applicable to different religions; (3) the tool is suitable for use among respondents with different levels of religiosity, and not only a high level of religiosity; and (4) items or questions measuring aspects of religiosity do not contain nested indicators of subjective well-being (such as meaning, hope, or feeling of support), as this could distort the data on the relationship between religiosity and EF. At the end of the paragraph, methods of statistical data analysis are described.

Subparagraph 4.2.2. contains a description of the sample, procedures for recruiting respondents, the procedure for conducting a survey. The final sample consists of 758 respondents.

In **subparagraph 4.2.3.** the performed data analysis and its results are described. Before a meaningful analysis of the results obtained, the psychometric indicators of the TEM questionnaire were tested in relation to a sample that included religious respondents of different cultural affiliations, as well as unaffiliated respondents. Checking the internal consistency of the questionnaire by calculating Cronbach's alpha showed high score ($\alpha = 0.94$). Verification of convergent validity by the method of correlation of the EF indicator and four FM scales with the questionnaire of well-being according to the model of K. Keyes and K. Riff showed the expected positive relationships of medium strength between all scales ($r_{\text{soc. wb}} = 0.54$, $r_{\text{emo. wb}} = 0.67$, $r_{\text{psy.wb}} = 0.68$). Checking the structural validity by confirmatory factor analysis showed that the model has satisfactory parameters.

To test the first hypothesis, several linear regression models were calculated. In all models, socio-demographic variables were controlled: gender, age, and city of residence. The results showed that: (1) All measured aspects of religiosity are significant predictors of existential fulfillment. (2) Religiosity components are weighted differently as predictors: religious affiliation (with any religious tradition) and religious practices are stronger predictors (9.5% and 11.7%) than religious belief (4.9% of explained variance), both with separate and joint inclusion in the model (Table 1). (3) Religiosity components demonstrate interaction effects as predictors of EF: religious practices mediate the effect of religious belief on existential fulfillment (Figure 3). (4) Adherence to religious practices is a significant predictor of fulfillment among respondents of all three religious traditions but does not predict the fulfillment of religiously unaffiliated respondents (Table 2). (5) Religious practices have different weights as predictors of fulfillment among representatives of different religious traditions (Table 2): participation in holidays and fasts and attending a temple (church, mosque) is highly significant for Muslims ($\beta = 0.28$ and $\beta = 0.27$) and Orthodox ($\beta = 0.32$ and $\beta = 0.21$), and for Buddhists does not make a significant contribution ($\beta = 0.09$ and $\beta = 0.15$). At the same time, for Buddhists, the most significant aspect is the practice of meditation ($\beta = 0.31$).

Table 1. Results of hierarchical multiple regression (β coefficients), dependent variable—level of existential fulfillment

	model 1	model 2	model 3	model 4	model 5
Age	0.11*	0.03	-0.02	-0.11**	-0.11**
Gender (0-female, 1-male)	0.3	0.05	0.07	0.03	-
City (0-large,1-small)	0.00	-0.09	-0.07	0.00	-
Religious affiliation (0-none, 1-affiliated with religion)		0.66***	0.57***	0.35**	0.37***
Religious belief (0-none, 1-believers)			0.19*	0.12	-
General Index of Religious Practices				0.29***	0.31***
Delta R Square	0.012	0.097***	0.005*	0.039***	-
Adjusted R Square	0.008	0.097	0.101	0.138	0.1406
F-statistic (DF)	2.95 (3; 751), p = 0.03	21.32 (4; 750), p < 0.001	17.88 (5; 749), p < 0.001	18.05 (6; 632), p < 0.001	35.8 (3; 635), p < 0.001
BIC	6488	6422	6425	5365	5347
AIC	6465	6395	6393	5330	5325

Note. 3: *** = $p < 0.001$; ** = $p < 0.01$; * = $p < 0.05$.

Table 2. Results of linear regression of existential fulfillment for each of the religious practices and the overall index of religious practices in four groups of respondents of different religious affiliations

	Unaffiliated (“Nons”) (N=145)				
	B	se	β	R-squared	delta R-squared
religious practices					
Visiting a temple/church	2.581	2.601	0.09	0,034	0.014
Participation in holidays and fasting	0.137	2.207	0.00	0,027	0.007
Prayers	2.915	1.763	0.14	0,046	0.026
Reading religious texts	2.539	2.593	0.09	0,034	0.014
Meditation	1.685	1.368	0.10	0,038	0.018
Index of religious practices	3.515	1.547	0.09	0,034	0.014
Muslims (N=188)					
	B	se	β	R-squared	delta R-squared
religious practices					
Visiting a temple/church	3.107**	0.931	0.27	0.073	0.056
Participation in holidays and fasting	2.817***	0.772	0.28	0.083	0.066

Prayers	2.339**	0.724	0.25	0.070	0.053
Reading religious texts	2.937**	0.898	0.27	0.071	0.054
Index of religious practices	5.526***	1.393	0.32	0.094	0.077
Orthodox (N=171)					
	B	se	β	R-squared	delta R-squared
religious practices					
Visiting a temple/church	2.689*	1.071	0.21	0.069	0.036
Participation in holidays and fasting	3.848***	0.984	0.32	0.115	0.082
Prayers	2.605**	0.991	0.22	0.072	0.039
Reading religious texts	2.563*	1.112	0.19	0.063	0.030
Index of religious practices	5.945**	1.777	0.28	0.095	0.062
Buddhists (N=136)					
	B	se	β	R-squared	delta R-squared
religious practices					
Visiting a temple/church	1.913	1.158	0.15	0.028	0.020
Participation in holidays and fasting	1.013	1.026	0.09	0.015	0.007
Prayers and recitation of mantras	2.703**	0.961	0.25	0.064	0.056
Reading religious texts	2.689**	1.020	0.24	0.058	0.050
Meditation	3.302**	1.021	0.31	0.081	0.073
Index of religious practices	7.533***	2.018	0.35	0.103	0.095

Note. 1: In all models, socio-demographic variables are controlled: gender, age and city of residence. Delta R-squared is shown minus a percentage explained by socio-demographic variables.

Note. 2: Religious meditation practice may only be a part of the sample, according to the characteristics of the religions.

Note. 3: *** = $p < 0.001$; ** = $p < 0.01$; * = $p < 0.05$.

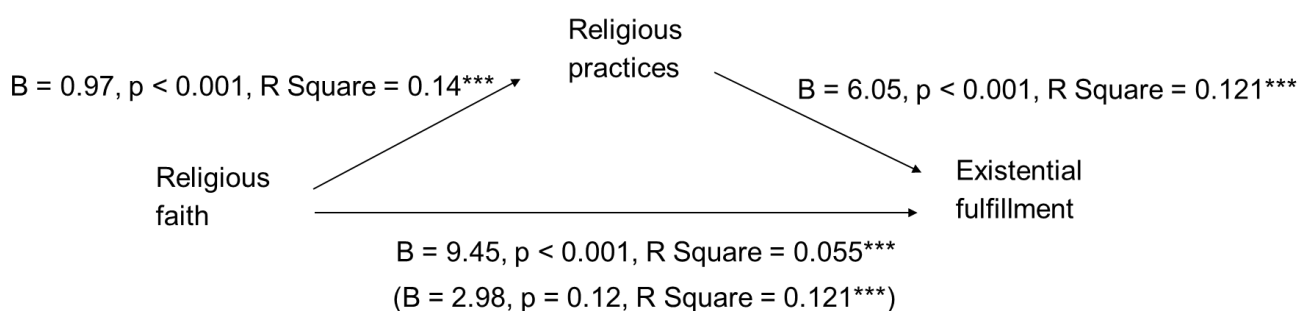


Figure 3. The mediating effect of the religious practices on the connection between religious belief and existential fulfillment in the full sample

In **subparagraph 4.2.4.** the results are discussed based on the data of other studies and theoretical assumptions. It is noted that the components of religiosity are interconnected and represent a single phenomenon with a complex structure that includes interactions. The features of the group of unaffiliated respondents (“nons”) and possible interpretations of the lack of a significant connection between religious practices and fulfillment among respondents who do not identify themselves with a religious tradition are discussed. It is summarized that religious practices could be understood by people in different ways and performed not only with different frequency but also with different meanings. A religious person, praying regularly, experiences inner consent. But praying by itself and reading religious texts, as an exercise that is not supported by adherence to the religious tradition, may not have an effect. **Subparagraph 4.2.5** contains the conclusions, perspectives, and limitations of the study. We conclude that it is unlawful to link the positive effects of religiosity to a certain set of actions and the frequency of their performance, without considering the actual spiritual content of the practices, due to the content of the dogma of the religious tradition.

The third empirical study described in **paragraph 4.3.** specifies the connections explored in Study 2. In **subparagraph 4.3.1.** the second hypothesis of the study is put forward, suggesting that the connection between belonging to a religion and existential fulfillment is moderated by value orientations. In **subparagraph 4.3.2.** a brief description of the sample and procedures is provided. For the study, a part of the sample of the previous study was taken, which filled out the Schwartz Human Values Scale. The sample included 347 people: 84 respondents affiliated with Orthodoxy, 154 respondents not affiliated with religion (“nons”), and 109 who identify themselves as atheists.

In **subparagraph 4.3.3.** the results of the study are presented. A comparison of the average expression of values in three groups of respondents showed that the Orthodox have a significantly more pronounced value of Tradition and a significantly lower value of Hedonism than unaffiliated respondents. The result of a pairwise tripartite study showed that: (1) affiliation with religion is positively associated with existential fulfillment ($r = 0.188, p = 0.007$); (2) affiliation with religion is positively associated with

the value of Tradition ($r = 0.363$, $p < 0.001$) and negatively with the value of Hedonism ($r = -0.162$, $p = 0.036$); and (3) existential fulfillment is positively related to the value of Independence and negatively to the value of Security, regardless of whether a person considers himself a follower of a religion or not. A difference was revealed in the significance and strength of other values as predictors of EF among affiliated and unaffiliated respondents (the direction and strength of the connections are shown in Fig. 4).

The study of the interaction of predictors showed a significant interaction for the level of existential fulfillment between affiliation with religion (Orthodoxy) and several values, such as Tradition (for the interaction variable $B = 4.769^*$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.012$), Benevolent ($B = 5.404^*$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.01$), Universalism ($B = 8.723^{**}$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.021$), and Achievements ($B = -4.542^*$, $\Delta R^2 = 0.011$). This same interaction effect was tested using a two-way analysis of variance. F-statistics showed a significant interaction of religious affiliation and Benevolence ($F(3,339) = 2.232$, $p = 0.05$), Universalism ($F(3,339) = 2.669$, $p = 0.048$), and Achievement ($F(3,339) = 2.577$, $p = 0.05$). The interaction with the Tradition value that was found in the regression model using a continuous variable at the trend level was not significant at the level of comparison of the means of EI in subgroups (possibly due to the sensitivity of ANOVA to the equality of variances in the compared groups) ($F(3,339) = 0.717$, $p = 0.54$).

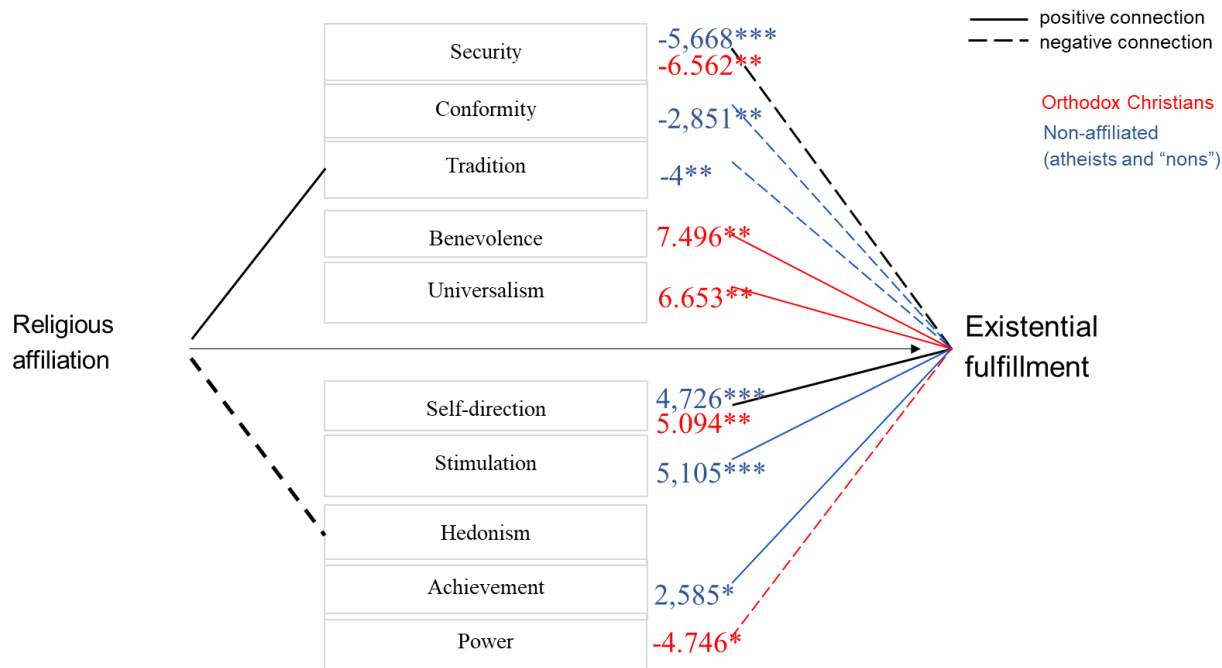


Figure 4. Model of the study, refined according to the results. Only significant relationships are shown. The dotted line indicates negative relationships, while the solid line indicates positive ones. Connections that are significant only in the group of unaffiliated respondents are in blue; those that are significant in the group of respondents affiliated with religion (Orthodoxy) are in red; and connections common to both groups are in black

In **subparagraph 4.3.4.** the discovered effects of the interaction of predictors (religiosity and values) are summarized. The data of several stages of analysis are compared, and the content of each of the values is discussed. It is noted that the data obtained enrich the previously obtained (Vasanov, 2010) ideas that the values included in the Conservation values category are negatively related to EF. Possible interpretations of the ambiguous significance of the effect of the interaction of religious affiliation and the value of Tradition in explaining the EF are given: (1) features of the items that make up the Tradition scale in the Schwartz questionnaire and (2) insufficient dispersion of data on this value in the results. The specificity of religious respondents (Orthodox) is indicated: the values of Self-transcendence (Benevolence and Universalism)—but not Self-affirmation—are of the greatest importance for the feeling of fulfilled existence

among religious people. An assumption is made about the consonance of the Orthodox dogma with the implementation and development of certain values.

In **subparagraph 5.3.5.** the conclusions of the third study on the significance of the interaction of religiosity and values as predictors of fulfillment are presented. It is noted that the resulting model makes significant additions to existing research in this area.

The **Conclusion** describes the general result of the dissertation research. Religiosity is a predictor of existential fulfillment. However, religious and non-religious people come to fulfillment in different ways, carrying out different values. And thus, the experience of inner consent is not necessarily associated with religion or transcendent reality. The most important for experiencing existential fulfillment is the correspondence of value priorities, beliefs, and actions, as well as the systematic nature of these actions. It is noted that the results are consistent with existing theoretical ideas about existential fulfillment.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS FROM RESEARCH RESULTS

1. We have described three aspects of existential fulfillment. Firstly, the fulfillment of existence is presented as a process inherent in a person at every moment of time. Secondly, existential fulfillment is described as an experience of inner consent and satisfaction with life, that marks a high degree of personal activity in existence. Thirdly, existential fulfillment is presented as a latent construct that is derived from the structural model of its conditions—the implementation of four fundamental motivations. The three distinguished groups of definitions complement each other: existential fulfillment is presented subjectively as an experience of internal consent (phenomenological aspect); to understand the sources of its occurrence and differentiated assessment of the level of fulfillment, a structural model of conditions and prerequisites (structural aspect) is proposed; moreover, existential fulfillment is a dynamic phenomenon implemented at every moment of a person's life (procedural aspect). Thus, existential fulfillment includes not only a feeling, but also an underlying psychological processes.

2. Existential fulfillment is close to psychological well-being concept, life satisfaction, and happiness, but it can be considered an independent phenomenon. Existential fulfillment combines hedonistic and eudaimonic aspects of well-being (that is, the experience of positive emotions and a positive assessment of personal prerequisites for well-being), while the personal position towards life is accented.

3. Religiosity is a multidimensional phenomenon. Three most significant components can be distinguished: religious affiliation or belonging, religious belief, and religious practices. These three components are related but have their own specifics, describing the features of the consciousness and behavior of a religious person.

4. By opinion of Orthodox respondents, there is a connection between their religiosity and existential fulfillment. Religious respondents talk about the following experiences in the context of religious life: accepting and enduring difficult situations, feeling of being potent (“I can”), experiencing trust, support, and security in the space of the temple, positive emotions of reverence, warm attitude, a sense of unity, expanding life prospects, and a sense of meaning. These contents refer to the prerequisites of existential fulfillment according to the model of four fundamental motivations by A. Langle.

5. The first hypothesis was confirmed: the measured components of religiosity are predictors of existential fulfillment. An interaction of predictors was found:

5.1. The frequency of participation in religious practices is a predictor of existential fulfillment only among people affiliated with any religious tradition.

5.2. The effect of religious belief (in the existence of a transcendent reality) is mediated by the religious practices.

5.3. There is a difference in the significance of religious practices as predictors of existential fulfillment in different religious traditions: participation in religious holidays and fasts is a significant predictor of existential fulfillment among Orthodox and Muslims, in contrast to respondents affiliated with Buddhism; among Buddhists the practice of meditation is the most significant. Prayer practices and reading religious texts are positively associated with existential fulfillment in all three groups of religiously affiliated respondents.

6. The second hypothesis of the study was confirmed: there is a significant interaction between individual values and religiosity as predictors of existential fulfillment. However, the theoretical model describing the relationship between religiosity, values, and existential fulfillment has been significantly modified and supplemented.

6.1. The differences in the relationship between individual values and existential fulfillment were revealed among people affiliated and not affiliated with religion. Among respondents affiliated with religion, the experience of existential fulfillment is positively associated with the values of Benevolent and Universalism and negatively—with the value of Power, in contrast to respondents who are not affiliated with religion, among whom existential fulfillment is negatively associated with the values of Conformity and Tradition and positively with the values of Stimulation and Achievement. A common trend for both groups of respondents is a positive correlation of existential fulfillment with the value of Independence and a negative one with the value of Security.

6.2. The respondents affiliated with Orthodoxy demonstrate a higher level of existential fulfillment than unaffiliated respondents, only in the case of high and medium expression of the values of Universalism and Benevolence, as well as with a low value of Achievement. Unaffiliated respondents demonstrate a lower level of existential fulfillment than those affiliated only in the case of high and medium expression of the value of Tradition.

The dissertation work was carried out at the Department of Psychology of the National Research University Higher School of Economics.

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1. Klimochkina A., Nekhorosheva E. V., Kasatkina D. A. Existential Wellbeing, Mental Health, and COVID-19: Reconsidering the Impact of Lockdown Stressors in Moscow // *Psychology in Russia: State of the Art*. 2022. Vol. 15. No. 2. P. 14–31.

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3. Shumskiy V., Klimochkina A. Religiosity and existential fulfillment of Muslims and Buddhists living in Russia // Existenzanalyse. 2018. Vol. 35. No. 2. P. 19–30.

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1. Klimochkina A. Y. Interrelation between Psychological Well-Being and Inner Dialogical Activity When Praying and Meditating // Vestnik Yaroslavskego gosudarstvennogo universiteta im. P. G. Demidova. Seriya gumanitarnye nauki. 2018. № 4 (46). P. 102–106. (in Russian).

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