Psychological Science Meets the World of Faith

David G. Myers
Emmaus
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“psychology and religion” proportional frequency in Google books, 1850-2000
Number of PsychINFO articles with keywords “religion,” “religious,” or “religiosity”
Seven Ways to Relate Psychology and Faith

Not on this evening’s menu:
• Faith-inspired values in research and practice
• Applying psychology in faith communities
• Special topics: prejudice, prayer, sexual orientation

The hors d'oeuvres:
• Faith motivates science & skeptical scrutiny
• Relating psychological and religious descriptions of human nature
• Studying psychology of religion and irreligion

The main course:
• Studying outcomes of religion: is religion associated more with harm or good?
Science, Reason, and Faith

- The religious mandate for science:

  - Two assumptions of theism:
    - There is a God.
    - It’s not me (or you).

  - Ergo, we should
    - hold our own untested beliefs tentatively,
    - assess others’ ideas with open-minded skepticism, and
    - when appropriate, use observation and experimentation to winnow error from truth.
Science, Reason, and Faith

- Moses: “If a prophet speaks in the name of the Lord and what he says does not come true, then it is not the Lord’s message.”

- Jeremiah: “When the word of that prophet comes true, then it will be known that the Lord has truly sent the prophet.”

- Paul: “Test everything, hold fast to what is good.”

- My own religious heritage: “reformed and ever-reforming.”
Psychological Research and Christian Belief: Complementary Principles
Psychological Research and Christian Belief: Complementary Principles
Phyllis Tickle, *Emergence Christianity*, 2012

**Traditional church model:**
- Believe → Behave → Belong

**Emerging church model:**
- Belong → Behave → Believe
Psychological Research and Biblical Region: Complementary Principles

- **Brain and Mind**
  a. Brain enables mind
  b. Mind controls brain

- **Body and Spirit**
  a. We are bodies alive
  b. We are created for spiritual relationship

“When they breathe their last, they return to earth, and in that day their thoughts perish.”
Psalm 146:3
Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

- Self-serving bias and self-esteem
  a. S-S bias is powerful & perilous
  b. S-E & positive thinking pay dividends

- Pride and Grace
  a. Pride is the fundamental sin
  b. To experience grace is to feel unconditional acceptance
Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

- Social & Personal Control
  a. We are the creatures of our social worlds
  b. We are the creators of our social worlds

- Divine Sovereignty & Human Responsibility
  a. God is ultimately in control
  b. We have responsibility
Psychological Research and Biblical Religion: Complementary Principles

- **Rationality & Irrationality**
  a. Our cognition is awesome
  b. To err is human

- **Divine Image Yet Finite**
  a. We are made in God’s image
  b. We are finite creatures
Do explanations of religion (evolutionary, neuroscientific, cognitive, and socio-cultural) explain religion away?
Born believers: How your brain creates God
By Michael Brooks
Explaining a belief does not explain it away

“You believe that I believe what I believe because of the way I was brought up, because of the way you were brought up.”

~Archbishop William Temple
1949 (Dutch), 1952 (English)

The Psychology of Unbelief: character and temperament in relation to unbelief

by Rumke, Henricus Cornelius
Welcome to the “Investigating Atheism” project.

Since the publication of Sam Harris' 'The End of Faith' in 2005, the English speaking world has seen a spate of books on atheism, most notoriously perhaps Richard Dawkins' 'The God Delusion' (2006). The publication of Christopher Hitchens' 'God is not Great' (2007), and Michel Onfray's 'Atheist Manifesto' (2007), among others, have added to and expanded on the debate. However,
The origins of religious disbelief

Ara Norenzayan\textsuperscript{1} and Will M. Gervais\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1}Department of Psychology, University of British Columbia, 2136 West Mall, Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z4, Canada
\textsuperscript{2}Department of Psychology, University of Kentucky, 201 Kastle Hall, Lexington, KY 40506, USA
Would a successful psychology of *irreligion* explain away atheism?

*(With tongue partly in cheek, let’s have a little go at this.)*
Skepticism’s Maleness and Paleness

- *Skeptical Inquirer*’s 2011 “Pantheon of Skeptics”: 27 male, 0 female

- Prometheus book authors 2010 “science and the paranormal” section: 98 male, 4 female

- Skeptics Society survey: 4 in 5 respondents male

- NY Times on the audience at 2010 Council for Secular Humanism atheism confab: “largely white and male crowd — imagine a Star Trek convention, but older.”

- Irreligiosity:
  - Weekly worship: 23% of men, 33% of women
  - Daily prayer: 43% of men, 66% of women
  - Ditto race differences (praying < once a week: 1 in 4 White Americans and 1 in 10 Black Americans)
Gender website demographics
(from quantcast.com, 1/25/09)

Google.com

US Demographics
Dec 2008

- 50% Male
- 50% Female

Hope.edu

US Demographics

- 49% Male
- 51% Female
Gender website demographics
(from quantcast.com, 1/25/09)

GoodHousekeeping.com
- US Demographics Dec 2008
  - 31% Male
  - 69% Female

SI.com
- US Demographics Dec 2008
  - 70% Male
  - 30% Female

BeliefNet.com
- US Demographics Dec 2008
  - 33% Male
  - 67% Female

RichardDawkins.net
- US Demographics Dec 2008
  - 66% Male
  - 34% Female

Skeptic.com
End Part I: Questions, Comments?