Who Are You?
Profiles of the Godless from the Non-Religious Identification Surveys

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Background:

I. Research on non religious
II. Tale of two groups in same city: CFI-M vs. churches
III. Lots of Freethinkers: Non Religious Identification Survey with CFI- international

General Questions:
• What are the non religious “like”?
• What differentiates them from religious (majority)
• How are they viewed? Are these stereotypes accurate?
How are the non religious perceived?
Non believers are not accepted by mainstream U.S..

• Two trends: increased acceptance for many minority groups, but atheists still at the bottom. Glass ½ empty?

From Gallup data
Edgell, Gerteis, Hartmann, 2006
This group does not at all agree with my vision of American society:

- Atheist: 40%
- Muslim: 26
- Homosexual: 23
- Conservative Christian: 14
- Recent Immigrant: 13
- Hispanic: 8
- Jewish: 7
- Asian: 7

I would disapprove if my child wanted to marry a member of this group:

- Atheist: 48%
- Muslim: 34
- African American: 27
- Asian American: 19
- Hispanic: 19
- Jewish: 12
- Conservative Christian: 7

Source: American Mosaic Project Survey, 2003
Who specifically disapproves of non religious?

Atheists as “other”: Moral boundaries and culture membership in American society (Edgell et al. 2006)

•Predictors of disapproval:
  •Conservative religious (duh), lower education, female, non white, South/midwest
•Interviews yielded two general stereotypes:
•Immorality threatening from below: “The prisons are probably filled with people who don’t have any kind of a spiritual or religious core. So I don’t have to worry about a conservative Christian… committing a crime against me..”
•Materialists and Elitists threatening from above: “a real ‘I’m an atheist’ attitude among people with major money. I don’t care who or what you worship….”

“To be an atheist in such an environment is not to be one more religious minority among many in a strongly pluralist society. Rather, Americans construct the atheist as the symbolic representation of one who rejects the basis for moral solidarity and cultural membership in American society altogether”
Do non religious fit these stereotypes?


• Survey of atheist organizations in the San Francisco/Bay Area, two rural groups (Alabama, Idaho) and Canadian parents of college students.

• Demographically: Male, older, educated, leftist

• Most had no or little emphasis on religion as a child. Some were “recovering fundamentalists”. More of these (71%) in rural group.

• Most developed personal doubts, turned to intellectual resources (books), lack of belief caused conflicts with family and friends.

• Scored very low in authoritarianism, zealotry and dogmatism.

• But…atheist group had proportion of “dogmatic” vs agnostic.
Shermer’s Skeptic magazine survey (from “How We Believe”, 2000)

General predictors of lower religious belief were:
1) higher education
2) age
3) parental conflict (those with strongly religious parents and who had conflicts with the parents less religious).

Other predictors of non-belief were:
- an interest in science
- earlier/younger age of doubt
- liberal politics
- family birth order (later-born, as opposed to first born)
- personality variables (openness)
What are Apostates like?: Altemeyer and Hunsberger’s “Amazing Conversions” (1997)

“We think the apostates rejected their religion primarily because their religious training made them care so much about the truth and having integrity. Its not that their upbringing failed; indeed it worked so well that ultimately the family religions failed the test it helped establish.”- Altemeyer and Hunsberger
Unanswered questions and rationale for study:
• What characterizes our members as a group? (relative to church members).
• What differentiates those with religious upbringing who retain versus rejects beliefs?
• Are there differences between types of non religious (atheist, agnostic, spirituals, humanists)?
• Social and personality characteristics.
CFI vs. local churches

CFI Michigan survey: A tale of two cities (city of God vs city of godless) (it was the best of times; it was the worst of times?)

Method: all members on CFI email list (not just attending)

Caveat: these are not non believers *in general* but members of CFI (i.e., sample is of involved or active people)

Participants filled out online survey regarding:

• Beliefs: certainty, self i.d. (theist/ atheist)
• Social characteristics: confidants, degree of perceived social support, group participation.
• personality
• For comparison: members of two local churches:
  • Kentwood Community Church (Wesleyan) and Fountain Street Church (non-denominational w/ UU connections)
  • In what way do two groups differ?
CFI vs local churches

CFI Michigan  Kentwood C.C./ Fountain St.

- Sample size = 333  325
- Sex  64% male  31% male
- Age  44  46
- Household Income

![Bar chart comparing CFI and Kentwood C.C./Fountain St. income distributions.](chart.png)
### CFI vs. local churches

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Status</th>
<th>CFI</th>
<th>Churches</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never married</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kids&lt;18 at home</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Bar Chart

- **CFI**
  - <H.S/GED: 0
  - H.S: 2
  - Some Coll/+: 13
  - College Grad: 31
  - Masters: 333
  - Doctoral: 39

- **Churches**
  - <H.S/GED: 2
  - H.S: 13
  - Some Coll/+: 20
  - College Grad: 14
  - Masters: 13
  - Doctoral: 1
**Belief certainty: How certain that God exists?**

- **CFI** vs **local churches**

The bar chart compares the belief certainty of God among CFI and local churches. The x-axis represents the levels of belief certainty:.

- **No God**
- **Absolutely**
- **Absolutely certain**
- **Somewhat**
- **Somewhat certain**
- **Not sure**
- **Not at all**

The y-axis shows the number of individuals at each level of belief certainty.

- **CFI**
  - Absolutely: 32
  - Absolutely certain: 40
  - Somewhat: 5
  - Somewhat certain: 16
  - Not sure: 2
  - Not at all: 2

- **Churches**
  - Absolutely: 3
  - Absolutely certain: 33
  - Somewhat: 4
  - Somewhat certain: 2
  - Not sure: 4
  - Not at all: 4
CFI vs. local churches

Self label of beliefs (choose 1)

Churches: Belief certainty in God high, but split amongst labels.
Childhood Religious Emphasis.

Those with “mild – moderate “ child religion are older than no relig and strong. More common to have in the 1960s?

Negative family impact? Those CFI members who had strong family religious upbringing report 2x more “my beliefs affect my relationships with my family” than those with moderate upbringings.
Are members satisfied with life? Satisfaction With Life Scale

Life satisfaction is comparable and well within normal range. Not significantly different from church members.

CFIM = 24.2
Church = 25.1
Avg = 22
Psych pts = 14
College students = 24
Nuns = 24
Prison inmates = 12
Older Canadian adults = 27

CFI vs. local churches
Do social lives of CFIm members differ from church members?

- Church members have slightly more:
  - Number of people socialized with
  - Perceived social support
  - Confidants: “how many non-family members have you discussed important personal issues with in past 6 mon”?

- Effects were barely statistically significant except for perceived social support
- Does church provide social contact in a way an organization such as CFIm cannot?
Personality and “The Big Five”

• Measures of personality indicate 5 independent dimensions.

• 1) Extraversion vs Introversion
  Sample E item: “I am the life of the party”
  Low E: Shy
  High E: Sociable

• 2) Neuroticism vs Stability
  Sample N: “I get upset easily”
  Low: N Calm and stable
  High N: Depressed, anxious, angry
Personality and “The Big Five”

3) Conscientiousness
- Sample C item: “I am always prepared”

- Low C: Relaxed and spontaneous
- High C: Disciplined and achievement-oriented

- Low A: Suspicious antagonistic
- High A: Cooperative, compassionate

4) Agreeable vs. Disagreeable
- Sample A item: “I make people feel at ease”
The Big Five: Openness to Experience

Intellectually curious, imaginative, aesthetically sensitive. Sample O item: “I am full of ideas”, “I spend time reflecting on things”

Low:
Conventional, traditional, down to earth, conservative, prefers familiarity

High O: Intellectually curious, imaginative, artistic, unconventional, prefers novelty

• High O scorers are low in dogmatism, authoritarianism and fundamentalism.
• Whether measured by CFI-M membership or lower belief: Openness differentiates
CFI vs. local churches

What makes the difference between those who are CFI-M members vs churches? Relative importance of factors:

One is more likely to be non-religious or CFI-M if:
- Higher Openness to experience personality
- Lower Agreeableness personality
- Higher education
- Lower Conscientious personality
- Lower chance of having child<18 living at home
- Lower childhood religious emphasis
- Male sex

What about just those who grew up strongly religious?
- Openness to experience - Male sex
- Lower emotional stability - Fewer children
- Lower agreeableness - Higher education
Meetings: church vs. CFI
How often do CFI-M members attend meetings? (relative to church?)

Churches have greater regular attendance.

Why not attend meetings?
Don’t have time (32%)
No groups near me (17%)
Don’t like to belong to groups (11%)
Not interested in topics (6%)
Not interested in activism (6%)
Non-Religious Identification Survey

Rationale for project: Collect a larger sample of non-religious nationwide
  • Non religious constitute a minority in U.S. but not necessarily a small minority when categories of non belief are combined.
  • Surveys give differing results based on wording: “no religious preference” vs “no belief in God”. Are there distinct categories of non belief?
the “no religious preference” (@ 14%) not a unitary group. Are atheists different from agnostics, humanists, spirituals?

AP/ IPSOS poll May 2005
• Survey of members from CFI – International mailing list
• Survey was explicitly billed as “non-religious”
• Additional features to earlier survey:
• Strength of identification with personal views and group
  • “my views on religion and philosophy are an important reflection of who I am”
  • “I am emotionally involved with my religious and philosophical views”
Is **CFI-Michigan** similar to **CFI international**?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>CFI International</th>
<th>CFI-Michigan Sample Size</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
<td>5400</td>
<td>333</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>74% male</td>
<td>64% male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income &gt;100k</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At least College</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>66%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate level</td>
<td>41%</td>
<td>34%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Region of CFI international sample**

- West: 25%
- Midwest: 18%
- Northeast: 15%
- South: 23%
- Foreign*: 18%

*Mostly Canada, Australia, UK
The labeling issue...
Check all that apply

- 9% Spiritual
- 28% Agnostic
- 63% Humanist
- 77% Atheist

Agnostic is "catch all"
Roughly equal numbers go on to solely identify with:

- 10% Agnostic
- 24% Humanist
- 57% Atheist

Many include spiritual but few use solely

CFI International
Choose only 1
The labeling issue…
Check all that apply

- 9% Spiritual
- 28% Agnostic
- 63% Humanist
- 77% Atheist

Many choose humanist with other labels
But half of these choose atheist when constrained to 1 label

Atheist “retains” the highest % (3/4)

Choose only 1

- 2% Spiritual
- 10% Agnostic
- 24% Humanist
- 57% Atheist
So? Implications for “the label wars”:
• Many appear to add spiritual and humanist to “soften” atheism but actually share the same metaphysics.
• Those who include “the A word” have already burned that bridge. Also a generational split....
• Humanists and spirituals are on average, 5 years older than atheists. (more of a Kurtz thing?).
• Much higher proportion of women among spirituals.
• Spirituals and agnostics appear to be less tied to non-belief; do not define themselves by non belief.
Life Satisfaction and Emotional Stability: is a little bit of religion a bad thing?

- Standard theory: More religion is associated with better mental health than less religion. And “doubt is bad”.
- Evidence: poorer psychological adjustment among doubters and those with more open ended beliefs.

Problem: many studies include few at the low end of belief; lump together “weakly religious” with “completely non religious”
The curvilinear hypothesis": higher levels of commitment either way are associated with mental health.

Emo Stability

Certainty no God

Certainty God

Life Sat

Doesn’t address cause and effect:
1. Relig uncertainty leads to distress?
2. Distress leads to uncertainty?
3. Common underlying cause?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Self Identification: Variable</th>
<th>Spiritual (n=117)</th>
<th>Agnostic (N=608)</th>
<th>Atheist (n=3296)</th>
<th>Humanist (n=1386)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief Certainty in No God</td>
<td>Not Sure</td>
<td>Somewhat</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
<td>Mostly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Male</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>72%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>51</td>
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<td>Group Identification</td>
<td>Med</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Satisfaction</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
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<tr>
<td>Agreeableness</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Lower</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emotional Stability</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Lower</td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Higher</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Is there some truth to the views of the non religious? If so, why? Where do we go from here?

• Do higher levels of education or interest in intellectualism make us “elitists”?
• Secular vs religious views of marriage, children, birthrates. (e.g., Europe)
• Personality: the “cranky loner” hypothesis. (e.g., lower agreeableness and certainty of beliefs).
• Angry at our families and communities?
• Is there a trade off between following intellectual standards to their logical conclusion and harmony with others’ beliefs?
• Will groups like ours ever serve the social functions of a church-like setting?
• Further analyses are pending (community involvement, organizations, charity, volunteering)
Thank you for assistance with Non-Religious Identification Survey

Thanks to Jim Kloet
Jeff Seaver