

PSYC.607

Psychology of Religion Seminar

Tuesday 2:00pm-3:50pm (271b Franklin)

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The aim of this class is to review, discuss and expand on what social scientific research currently knows about the social and psychological effects of religion. Questions about whether religion makes people more moral, more divided, happier and healthier have been debated for generations. Only in the last generation, though has data started to mount that can contribute empirical evidence to this debate. This class will cover the latest evidence on a set of specific social and psychological aspects that religion may or may not impact.

Teaching Aims

There are two main teaching goals of the class, one for content, and one for methodological training. The content goal is for you to exit the class with a comprehensive view of the impact that religion has on psychologically important phenomenon. In that sense, the first goal is a *consumption* goal.

The second goal, in contrast, is directed towards you as producers, rather than consumers, of knowledge. This goal is to stimulate you guys to critically evaluate the studies we review, and then propose your own studies to push our knowledge further. Doing so will hone your study-designing skills, force you to figure out different ways to operationalize similar questions, and potentially lead to viable studies to actually pursue. These are very important skills to master as researchers, which is why they make up a large portion of the class assignments.

Class Format

The first class will provide an over-arching theory of religion. Subsequently, each class will tackle a single topic (see below for the list). Prior to the class, everyone will do the readings designated for that class and prepare a study proposal (see assignments). One student will spend the first twenty minutes recapping the main readings, as well as related studies (see assignments). We will then spend 40 minutes evaluating and discussing these studies. At about the three o'clock mark, we will switch to discussing and evaluating the study proposals.

Brief Student Presentation	Reading Discussion	Study Proposal Discussions
20 min	40 min	50 min

Assignments

Once-off Presentation: Two students will choose one class on which they will jointly present the initial presentation on the assigned topic. That presentation will include (a) a brief recap of the initial readings, (b) other key studies on the topic they have come across, and (c) two opening questions for the class to consider.

Presentations will be worth **25%** of your grade and will be evaluated on:

- (1) How well they accomplish the three components mentioned above
 - a. Recap of Readings: 5%
 - b. Other studies: 10%
 - c. Discussion Questions: 5%
- (2) Clarity and compelling-ness: 5%

Weekly study proposals: Every week, each student (except for the two students doing that week's presentation), will submit a one-page proposal for a study. These paper will be submitted 24 hours before the class for which they are due, so the prior Monday at 2pm. An ideal proposal will:

- (a) Identify an important (theoretically or socially, or both) and apparently unexplored (on the basis of the readings) research question on the given topic.
- (b) Convert that question into an operationalized research study. The description of this study should clearly outline the sample, study design, independent variable(s), dependent variable(s).
- (c) Make a prediction as to what the results would be and interpret what conclusions could be drawn from those results vis-à-vis the original research question.

Recall that this should all be done within a single page. I will read all of them, and grade a random 4 of the eight. They will be evaluated on (a) the novelty and importance of the research question, (b) the soundness and feasibility of the research, and (c) how well the study tests the original research question. Together, the study proposals will be worth **50%** of your term grade.

Participation: Obviously a large part of the class is devoted to discussion. The ideal student will be well informed of the readings, able to take an incisive and, if necessary, critical perspective on the research we review, and willing to provide thoughtful contributions and feedback to our discussion of future studies. The class is small enough that we can have very engaging discussions with everyone participating. **25%** of your final grade will be based on participation.

Assignments and Evaluation:	Presentation	25%
	Weekly study proposals	50%
	Participation	25%

Accessibility Services: The University of Oregon is working to create inclusive learning environments. If there are aspects of the instruction or design of this course that result in disability related barriers to your participation, please notify me as soon as possible. You may also wish to contact Accessibility Services in 164 Oregon Hall, at 346-1155, or uoaec@uoregon.edu.

Academic Misconduct: By this point, I shouldn't need to discuss this, and I'm not going to.

Class Schedule

Class	Date	Topic	Presenter(s)
1	Oct 1	Introduction – A grand unified theory of religion?	
2	Oct 8	Prosocial Behavior	John
3	Oct 15	Moral Decision Making and Motivation	Jeff
4	Oct 22	Violence and Conflict	Erik and Joe H.
5	Oct 29	Racism	Erika
6	Nov 5	Marriage and Gender Relations	Steph
7	Nov 12	Happiness	Jacob
8	Nov 19	Anxiety and Meaning	Rina and Joe R.
9	Nov 26	Self-Regulation	Jordan and Emily
10	Dec 3	Intelligence, Critical Thinking and Science	Kathryn and Zhen

Reading List

Prosocial Behavior (Oct 8)

Norenzayan, A. & Shariff, A.F. (2008) The Origin and Evolution of Religious Prosociality. *Science*, 322 (5898), 58-62.

- Galen, L. W. (2012). Does religious belief promote prosociality? A critical examination. *Psychological bulletin*, 138(5), 876-906

Moral Decision Making and Motivation (Oct 15)

- Piazza, J. & Sousa, P. (in press). Religiosity, Political Orientation, and Consequentialist Moral Thinking *Social Psychological and Personality Science*
DOI: [10.1177/1948550613492826](https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550613492826)
- Saslow, L. R., Willer, R., Feinberg, M., Piff, P. K., Clark, K., Keltner, D., & Saturn, S. R. (2013). My brother's keeper? Compassion predicts generosity more

among less religious individuals. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 4(1), 31-38.

Violence and conflict (Oct 22)

- Bushman, B. J., Ridge, R. D., Das, E., Key, C. W., & Busath, G. L. (2007). When God Sanctions Killing: Effect of Scriptural Violence on Aggression. *Psychological Science*, 18(3), 204-207.
- Ginges, J., Hansen, I., & Norenzayan, A. (2009). Religion and support for suicide attacks. *Psychological Science*, 20(2), 224-230.
- Ginges, J., Atran, S., Medin, D., & Shikaki, K. (2007). Sacred bounds on rational resolution of violent political conflict. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 104(18), 7357-7360. [You can skim this one, but get the main point]

Racism (Oct 29)

- Hall, D. L., Matz, D. C., & Wood, W. (2010). Why don't we practice what we preach? A meta-analytic review of religious racism. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*, 14(1), 126-139.
- Johnson, M. K., Rowatt, W. C., & LaBouff, J. (2010). Priming Christian religious concepts increases racial prejudice. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, 1(2), 119-126.

Optional:

- LaBouff et al. (2012). Differences in Attitudes Toward Outgroups in Religious and Nonreligious Contexts in a Multinational Sample: A Situational Context Priming Study. *The International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 22, 1-9.

Marriage and Gender Relations (Nov 5)

- Kaelen, R., Saroglou, V., & Klein, O. (2013). *Women are too good or too bad to be equal to men: Religious priming as increasing benevolent and hostile sexism*. Manuscript submitted for publication. [Waiting on final version from Kaelen. Will send when received]
- Henrich, J., Boyd, R., & P. J. Richerson (2012) The Puzzle of Monogamous Marriage. *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences*, 367 (1589), 657-669

Happiness (Nov 12)

- Diener, Tay & Myers (2011). The religion paradox: If religion makes people happy, why are so many dropping out? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*
- Shariff, A.F. & Aknin, L.B. (2013) The Emotional Toll of Hell: Cross-national and experimental evidence for the negative well-being effects of Hell beliefs. *Manuscript under review.*

Anxiety and Meaning (Nov 19)

- Inzlicht, M., Tullett, A. M., & Good, M. (2011). The need to believe: A neuroscience account of religion as a motivated process. *Religion, Brain, & Behavior*, 1, 192-212.
- Sosis, R, & Handwerker, W.P. (2011). Psalms and Coping with Uncertainty: Israeli Women's Responses to the 2006 Lebanon War. *American Anthropologist* 113, 40-55.

Self-Regulation (Nov 26)

- Rounding, K., Lee, A., Jacobson, J. A., & Ji, L. J. (2012). Religion replenishes self-control. *Psychological science*, 23(6), 635-642.
 - o Laurin, K., Kay, A. C., & Fitzsimons, G. M. (2012). Divergent effects of activating thoughts of God on self-regulation. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 102(1), 4.

Intelligence and Critical Thinking and Science (Dec 3)

- Gervais, W. M., & Norenzayan, A. (2012). Analytic thinking promotes religious disbelief. *Science*, 336(6080), 493-496.
- Zuckerman, M., Silberman, J., & Hall, J. A. (2013). The Relation Between Intelligence and Religiosity A Meta-Analysis and Some Proposed Explanations. *Personality and Social Psychology Review*.
- Preston, J., & Epley, N. (2009). Science and God: An automatic opposition between ultimate explanations. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*, 45(1), 238-241.