

DO PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES SHOW MENTAL ILLNESS IS BEHIND BEING RELIGIOUS?

Is religion the fruit of mental illness? Do only sufferers of mental disorder set up religion?

Do you only follow religion if you have some disorder? Is it only the most committed religionists who have a mental disorder?

Psychiatry and psychology are steadily lengthening their list of mental disorders. Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders listed 106 in 1952 and it was 297 in 1994. This is good news for the self-help and counselling and stress industry. But it has produced a sense that mental health is extremely uncommon. It is hard to see why various forms of accepted religion should be seen as normal. Running after miracles and praying should be seen as abnormal in light of the fact that most of us most of the time do not think about religion. Faith does not feed your hungry children. It is strange to consider mundane problems and misperceptions as mental disorders when religion with all its bizarre ideas and obsession with things that don't matter at all is considered mentally healthy. We can easily live in a world where all religious activity is seen as disturbed.

Science speaks!

Jesse Bering states that religious belief is adaptive - they help you fit well into life and society. This is contrasted with mental illness where you are seriously failing to adapt. It is obvious that many religious people do not adapt well. They run to convents or join a clerical caste. Plus how do you measure the adaptive or maladaptive?

Not being able to function well in society is a sign of possible mental illness but the fact remains that some people with schizophrenia seem reasonably normal. Some who suffer paranoid schizophrenia are also highly intelligent and able to mask their illness well. Sometimes the only marker is a strong core insane belief. Not all irrational beliefs are equally irrational. There is a difference between thinking there are fairies down the garden and thinking that they are always under your bed.

All people have irrational ideas but we should only consider them mentally ill when the belief is too big or important to them and/or they are not functioning in a reasonably safe and healthy way. "As a survivor of mental illness myself, I think we should save that term for situations in which people are truly suffering and having trouble going about their lives" writes Mogilevsky.

If a person was worshipping a turd as the one true God and claiming to be in a personal relationship with it and getting spiritual help from it that person is mentally ill even if it is the one thing that the person is doing out of the norm. There is a difference between natural wild beliefs and supernatural ones. While you may crazily think homoeopathy cured your cancer that is not necessarily insanity for you still believe in nature and that cats don't grow on trees. You are making a mistake about how nature works. But the supernatural is a different story. Somebody who is convinced that tap water cured their cancer through some ghost that was in it is not right in the head.

Religious inspiration and "spiritual perception" take place in the temporal lobe and if this region of the brain is disturbed hallucinations and false memories of spiritual blessings and thought disorders and spiritual delusions can happen.

<http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1032067/pdf/jnnpsyc00553-0001.pdf>

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It is a fact that nuns locked away have notoriously high chance of having a serious mental illness such as psychosis. Other nuns are too prone to mood disorders or OCD. The priesthood as well attracts a high number of depressed men suffering from personality disorders and even psychosis.

Psychological Medicine October 2013 found that believers suffer depression at larger rates than atheists. Now in fairness this study was about China where religion is suppressed. But it shows that religion and faith are no buffer against depression. Yet we are pressured by society to think that religion helps if things go terribly wrong in your life!

From a 2016 study, it was learned men are less religious than women because men on average are more into analytical thinking than women and focus on how a leads to b and how things fit together and work together (systemising). So a man is more likely than a woman to question a religious doctrine or find holes in it.

Here is a quote from the authors of the results of the study: "Although supernatural ideation has long been one diagnostic

criterion for schizotypy and schizophrenia (...), schizotypy has only recently received attention among scholars of religiosity. Much of this attention has focused on Crespi and Badcock's theory (2008; Badcock, 2009), which proposes that both religious and schizotypal individuals are prone to impressions of supernatural agents and hidden intentions because they share similar epigenetic development of the social brain related to mentalizing far beyond the normal range. Crespi and Badcock's diametric model (Badcock, 2009; Crespi & Badcock, 2008) proposes that if the physical world is not well understood, mental concepts such as agency and intentionality expand to the whole universe, resulting in beliefs in demons and gods."

Another quote asks of the study if its "arguments mean that religious believers are nonanalytical individuals who are prone to schizotypy and who understand people but not physical mechanisms? In turn, are nonbelievers strong analytical thinkers who have autistic traits and who understand the physical world but not people? Not necessarily. Rather, it is more probable that both believers and nonbelievers represent subgroups that differ in their cognitive characteristics and clinical symptoms. Although most theorists agree that the factors which predict religiosity and atheism interact in complex ways, and that consequently there are different kinds of believers and nonbelievers, these subgroups have not been empirically elucidated. The present study was therefore designed to examine the characteristics of these groups."

You don't need to be living in the stone age to inadequately understand how things work. Sometimes you should know but you don't. It has not sunk in. The more you fail to understand or the more mystery you are faced with the more likely you are to think that gods and demons are doing things. The more you will want to think it for it makes your life less stressful. And you may let it happen because you are lazy.

If a person has mental illness and is hearing voices and seeing things the person may interpret that as coming from demons even if the content of the experiences does not suggest that. The suggestion comes from religion and faith which speak of demons influencing people and talking to them. The belief can turn a mentally ill person violent. It is not the person who is to blame but religion and how it validates superstition. Any alleged good done by blessings and exorcisms mean nothing if somebody who is mentally unhealthy is led by faith to kill.

The research discovered that men on average think of the mechanics of things more than women. Women on average are more mentalistic. A man could attribute his skills to his equipment and tools while a woman could attribute hers to her intelligence and diligence. To me that explains why men are more sceptical of religion than women. The universe could be seen as a brute fact by a man while a woman is more likely to feel it is a gift from God.

The study found that on average women do not fare as well as men at analytical thinking. That is top of the list. The next thing on the list is systemising. Naturally a person who is not good enough at systemising will easily imagine that prayers are answered and stuff. It is easy to think your prayers are always answered when you don't take time to see how if b follows a and a is a prayer that it does not mean a caused b or even helped cause it. Understanding the difference between causation and correlation and applying that understanding is key to analytical thinking.

The study found that if males are careless with or bad at analytical thinking and systemising they ended up with religious beliefs.

The study found that your approach to how you think you know things determines if you will probably end up religious or not.

To me even a person who has a strongly mechanistic awareness of how things work could still develop gullible beliefs in religion and suspend their critical faculties. In other words what happens is that they think they sense supernatural stuff and believe in it on face value. It is a seeing is believing sort of thing but not like normal seeing is believing. For example the feeling that God is present will be taken as true even though logically we know that feeling it is sunny outside will not make it sunny.

Finally the study found that mechanical cognition was weaker among believers and stronger among non-believers.

2009 fMRI STUDY

It was found in a 2009 fMRI study that if a person thinks religious thoughts the part of the brain that is about discerning and perceiving other peoples feelings and intentions comes into play. Grafman published this study. It was published in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences (Vol. 106, No. 12). It was found that telling people that God guides them and protects them that this area of the brain responded. The study was confirmed by a Danish team. That study can be found in the Social Cognitive Affective Neuroscience (Vol. 4, No. 2 - 2009) and in this case the areas lit up when subjects of the study prayed.

This proves that the feeling that you are in touch with somebody when you may not be can be induced. This feeling is behind religion. It is an abuse of the brain to pray and feel you are protected by God for that part of the brain is meant for

relating to people. People can protect you but God does not.

DEPRESSION

<http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/2156869317748713?journalCode=smha>

Sociology professor Matthew May of Oakland University found a definite link between people feeling they had to stay in a religion they wanted out of and depression.

Caleb Lack is associate professor of psychology and practicum coordinator at the University of Central Oklahoma. He directs the Secular Therapy Project. The project enables people who need secular therapy, including people who need to disentangle from religion, to get it. He has found this correlation between staying in a religion you don't accept and depression to be well established. May's findings are of great value to his work and vocation.

Lack says, "I'd say it both matches our experience and isn't unexpected based on what we know about how uncertainty impacts us. If we exist in a state of uncertainty, such as what exists if I am not sure about, or wavering back and forth between, religious belief and doubt, then people are naturally more vulnerable to developing anxiety and depression." If a religion is not credible and harms people then believers who are conditioned to believe will start to suffer and struggle and doubt and end up depressed unless the door is there and they are supported in leaving. A healthy religion supports exiters and people on the other side must be welcoming to them as well.

VOICES

Many people who are difficult to label as schizophrenic hear voices. It is interesting that not all who hear voices hear bad things. But the danger is what are the voices going to say tomorrow? We must be careful that we don't start accepting hearing voices as just another variation of normal mental life. Religion is doing that already in certain cases such as at apparition sites and Jelena at Medjugorje supposedly hears Mary's voice. In all these cases the voices say punitive threatening stuff. The fact that the stuff is usually nice makes no difference for a bully can be very nice in order to wound you when they unexpectedly turn nasty and that is a scam to get you to blame yourself.

CHARACTER CHANGE

Mental health experts consider a person who changes in spiritual matters overnight to be suffering from some mental illness. The atheist or uninterested religionist who suddenly becomes a religious saint in waiting or the saint who turns irreligious atheist in minutes is not well. Take the unreligious becoming dramatically religious. Yet religion sees such change as evidence of the power of God or truth. It argues that God controls all that happens and even our free will is only free because of him and not in spite of him so in a sense it is not really free. Thus God can choose to fast-track a bad man to a holy one. Religion conflicts with science in this matter.

Religion presents sudden saints such as murderous St Paul, the timid apostles turning into hyper-evangelists for Jesus in seconds and Jesus who usually went to the Temple in peace suddenly turning warrior as ideals. It denies the obvious: they were not well. Oddly enough the argument that Jesus rose from the dead is based on the allegedly total change in those who were his followers. They were not great people of faith and because of the resurrection experiences they became intensely devoted to spreading the word that Jesus was alive. Arguing that they were not mentally ill for the resurrection happened is pointless and gets nobody anywhere. Anybody can use arguments around how suddenly a person changes for a miracle being true. Plus the change could still be down to mental illness even if the apostles DID see the risen Jesus or think they did.