

Who Are You?

Profiles of the Godless from the Non-Religious Identification Surveys

Luke Galen, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of Psychology

Grand Valley State University

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

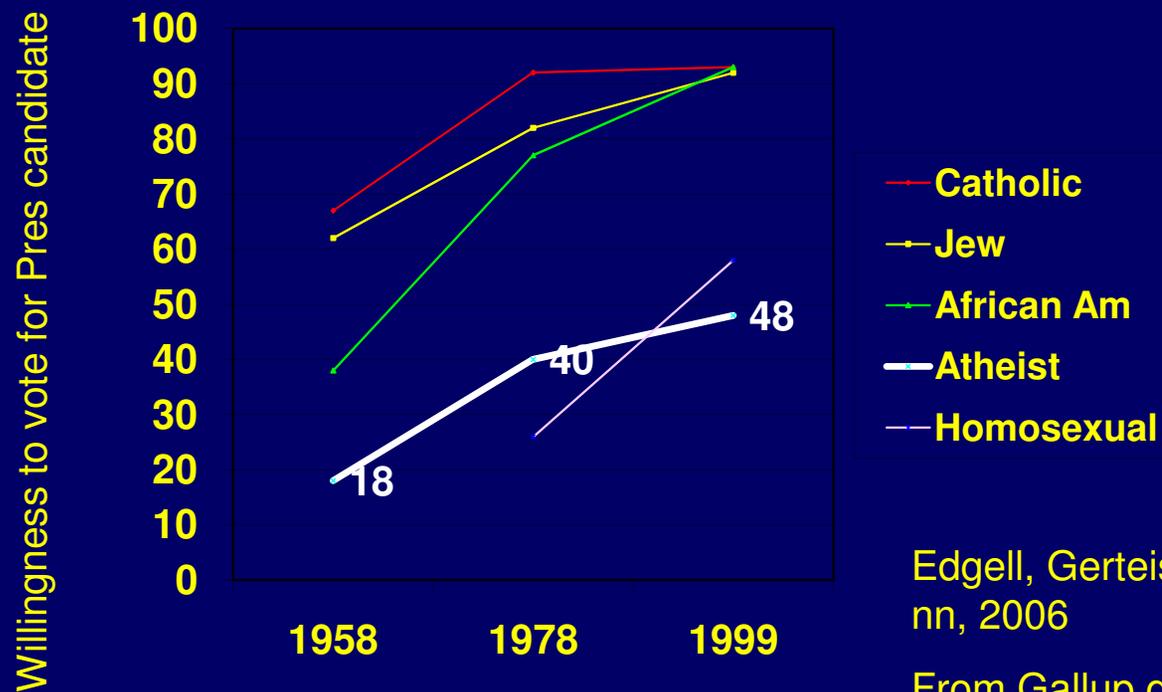
General Questions:

- 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 1/2 empty?



Edgell, Gerteis, Hartmann, 2006

From Gallup data

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?

Hunsberger & Altemeyer's book "Atheists: A groundbreaking study of America's non believers" (2006).

- 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)

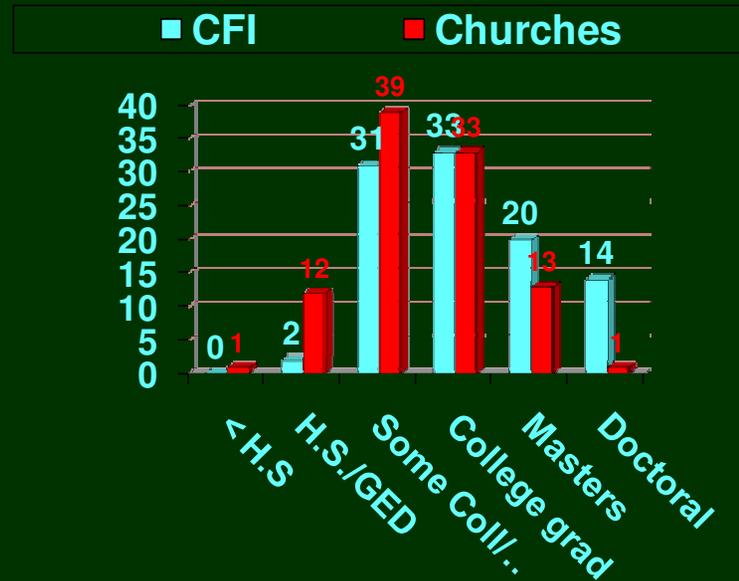
Participants filled out online survey regarding:

- 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?

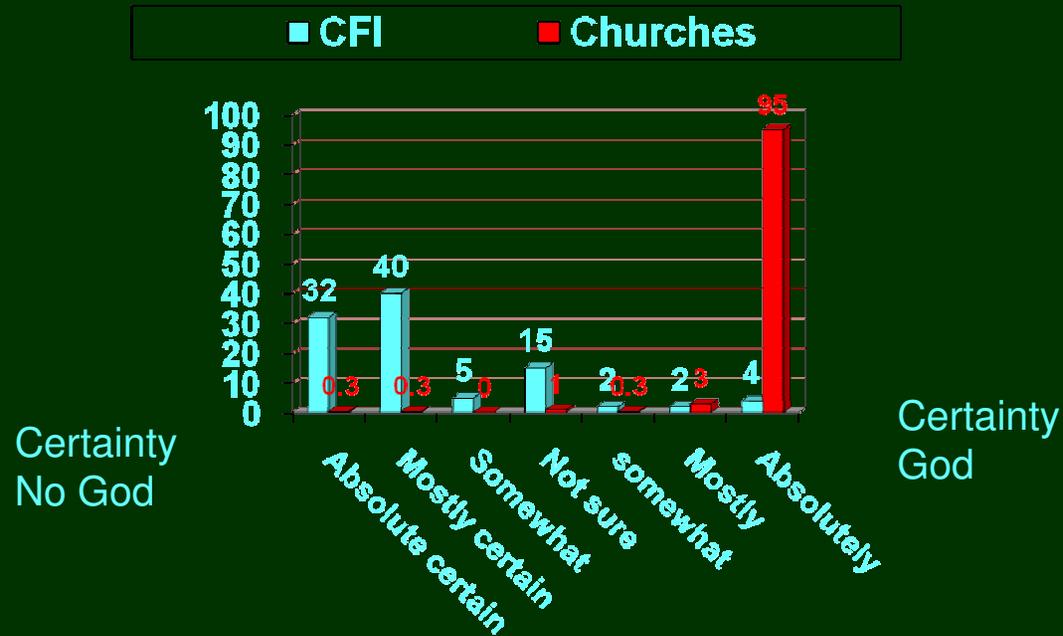
CFI vs. local churches

CFI Michigan Kentwood C.C./ Fountain St.

Married	54%	70%
Divorced	11%	15%
Never married	25%	12%
Cohabiting	8%	1%
•Kids<18 at home	38%	62%
•Education		



CFI vs local churches
 • Belief certainty: How certain that God exists?

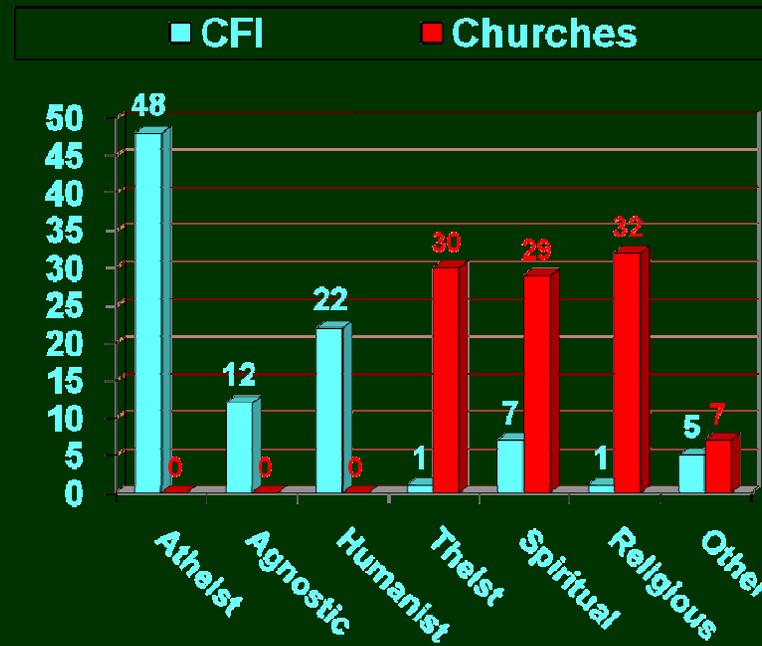


Certainty
No God

Certainty
God

CFI vs. local churches

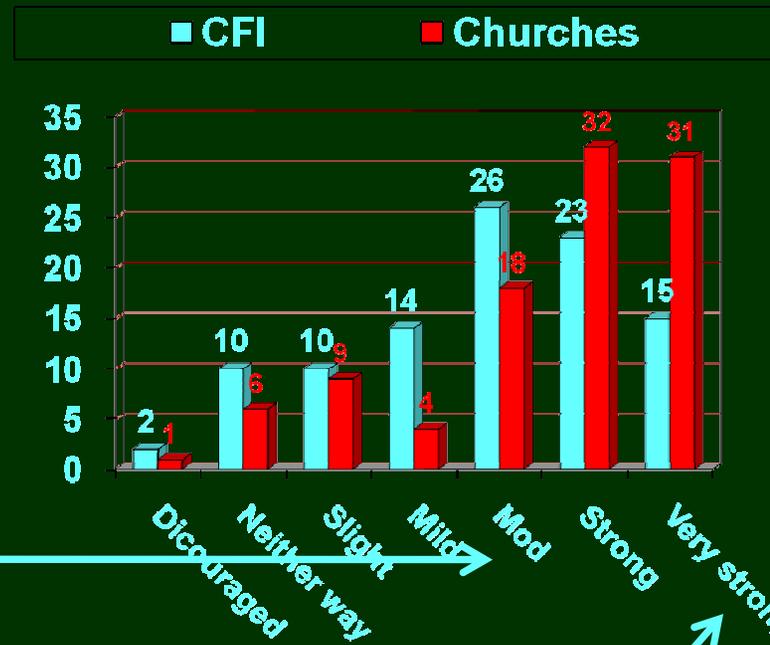
Self label of beliefs (choose 1)



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

CFI vs. local churches

Childhood Religious Emphasis.

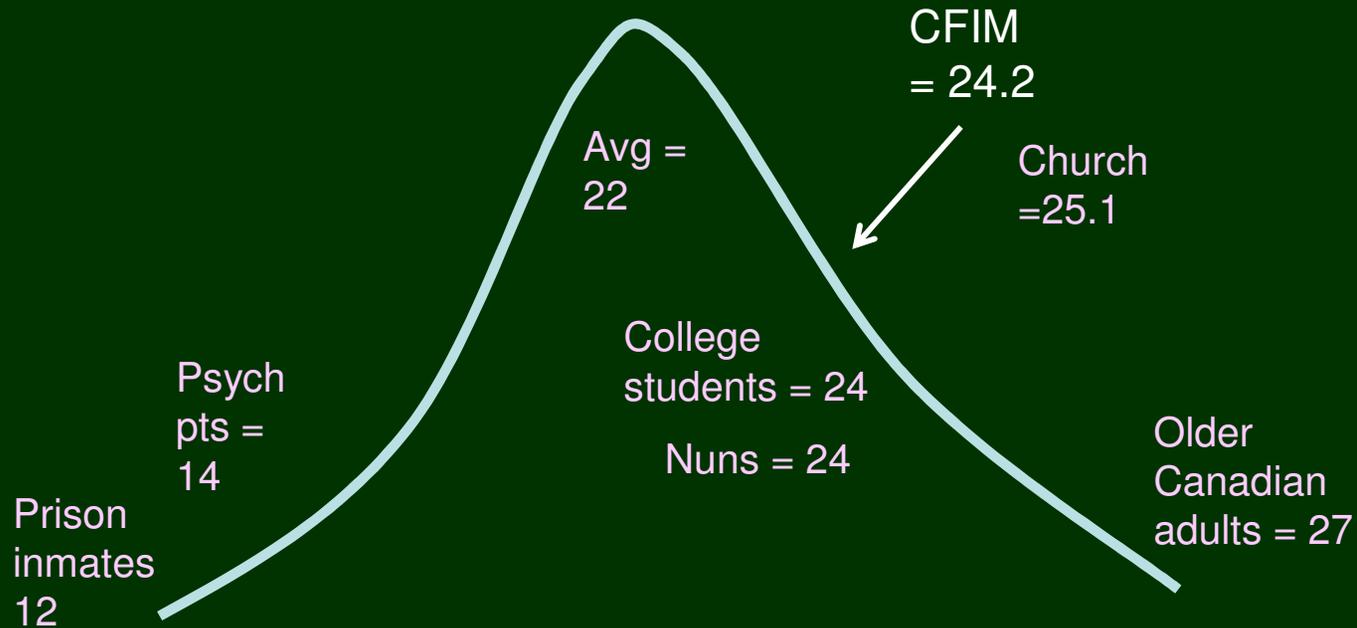


Those with “mild – moderate” child religion are older than no relig and strong. More common to have in the 1960s?

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.

CFI vs. local churches

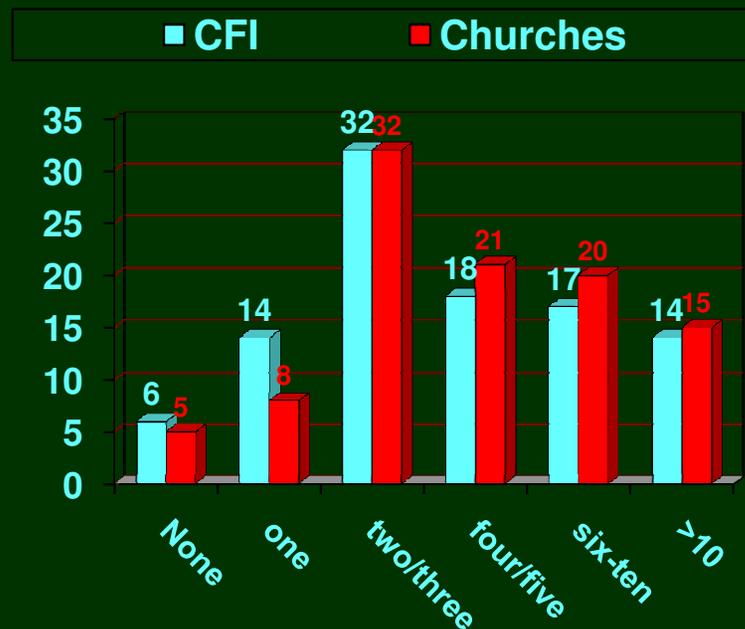
Are members satisfied with life? Satisfaction With Life Scale



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

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 CFI cannot?

Personality and “The Big Five”^{CFI vs. local churches}

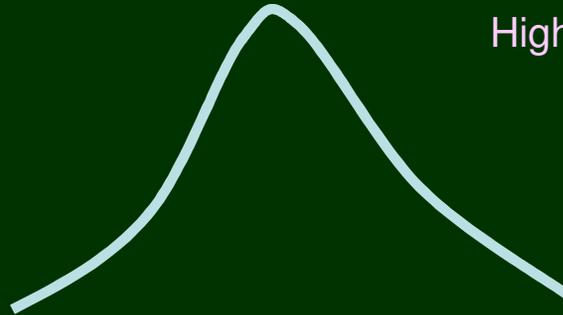
- Measures of personality indicate 5 independent dimensions.

- 1) Extraversion vs Introversion

Sample E item: “I am the life of the party”

Low E: Shy

High E: Sociable



Low: N Calm and stable

High N:
Depressed, anxious,
angry

- 2) Neuroticism vs Stability

- Sample N: “I get upset easily”

Personality and “The Big Five”

CFI vs. local churches

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”

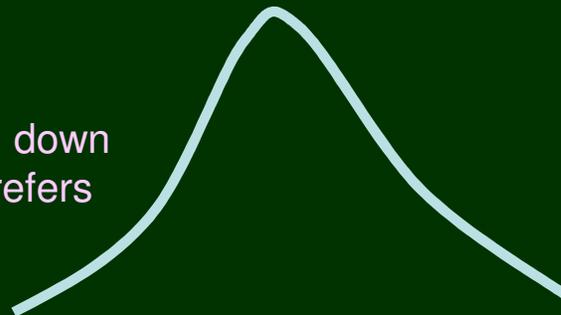
CFI vs. local churches

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

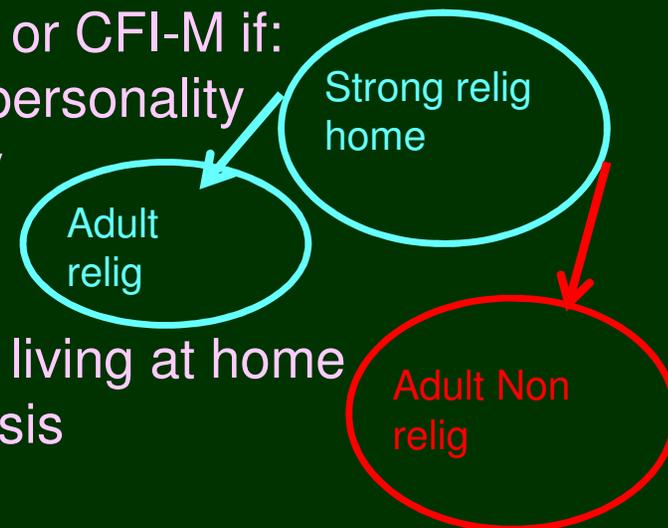
- High O scorers are low in dogmatism, authoritarianism and fundamentalism.
- Whether measured by CFI-M membership or lower belief: Openness differentiates

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



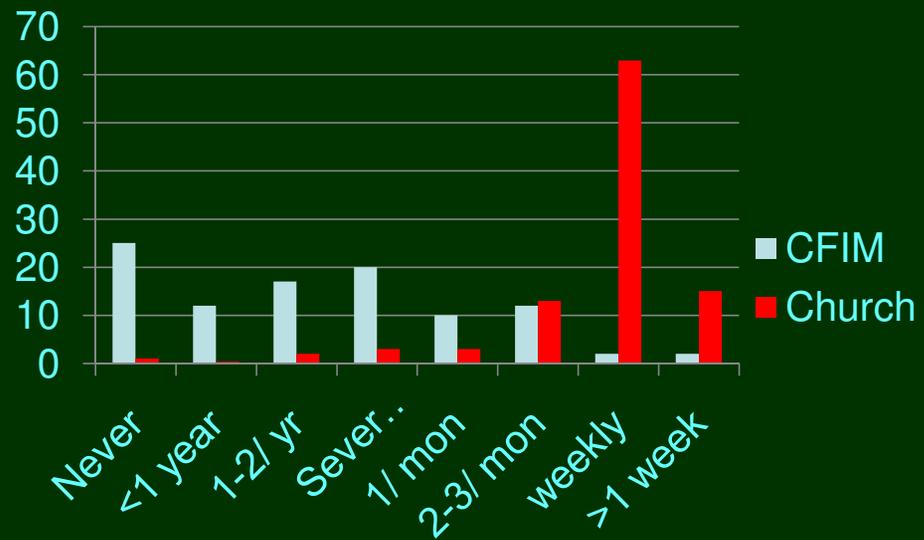
What about just those who grew up strongly religious?

- 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%)

CFI International

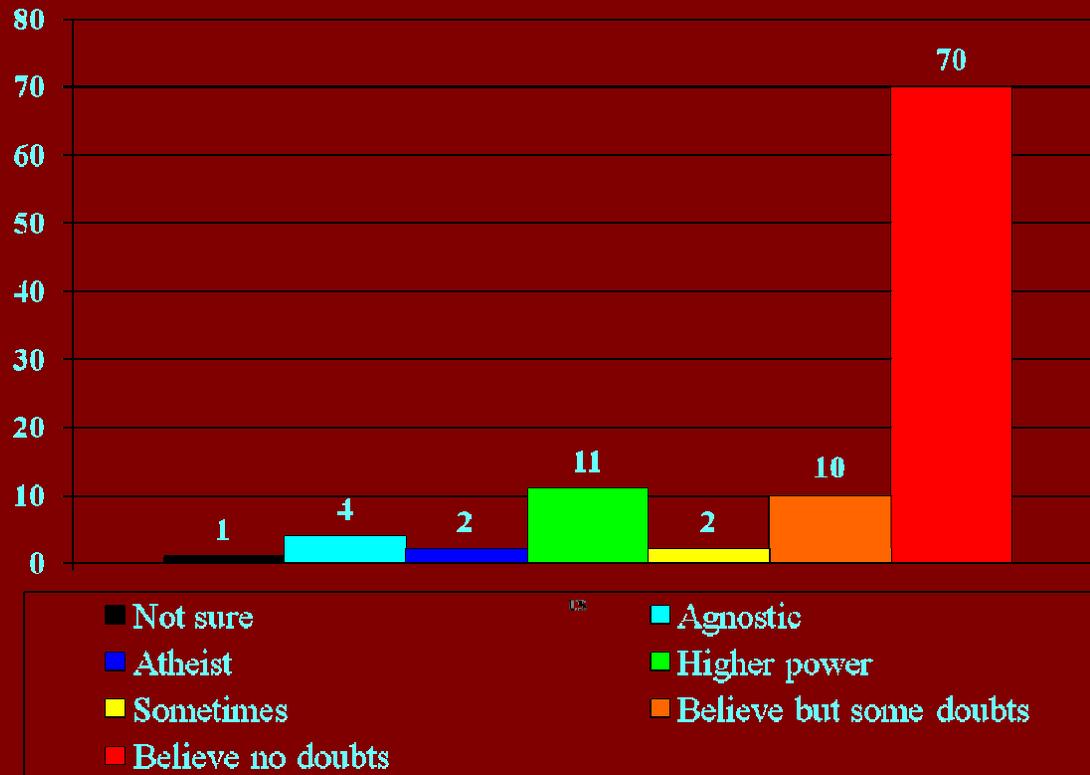
Non-Religious Identification Survey

CFI International

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?

CFI International
 •the “no religious preference” (@ 14%) not a unitary group.
 Are atheists different from agnostics, humanists, spirituals?



AP/ IPSOS poll May 2005

CFI International

- 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”

CFI International

Is CFI-Michigan similar to CFI international?

Sample size	333	5400
Sex	64% male	74% male
Age	45	49
Income >100k	20%	31%
At least College	66%	75%
Graduate level	34%	41%

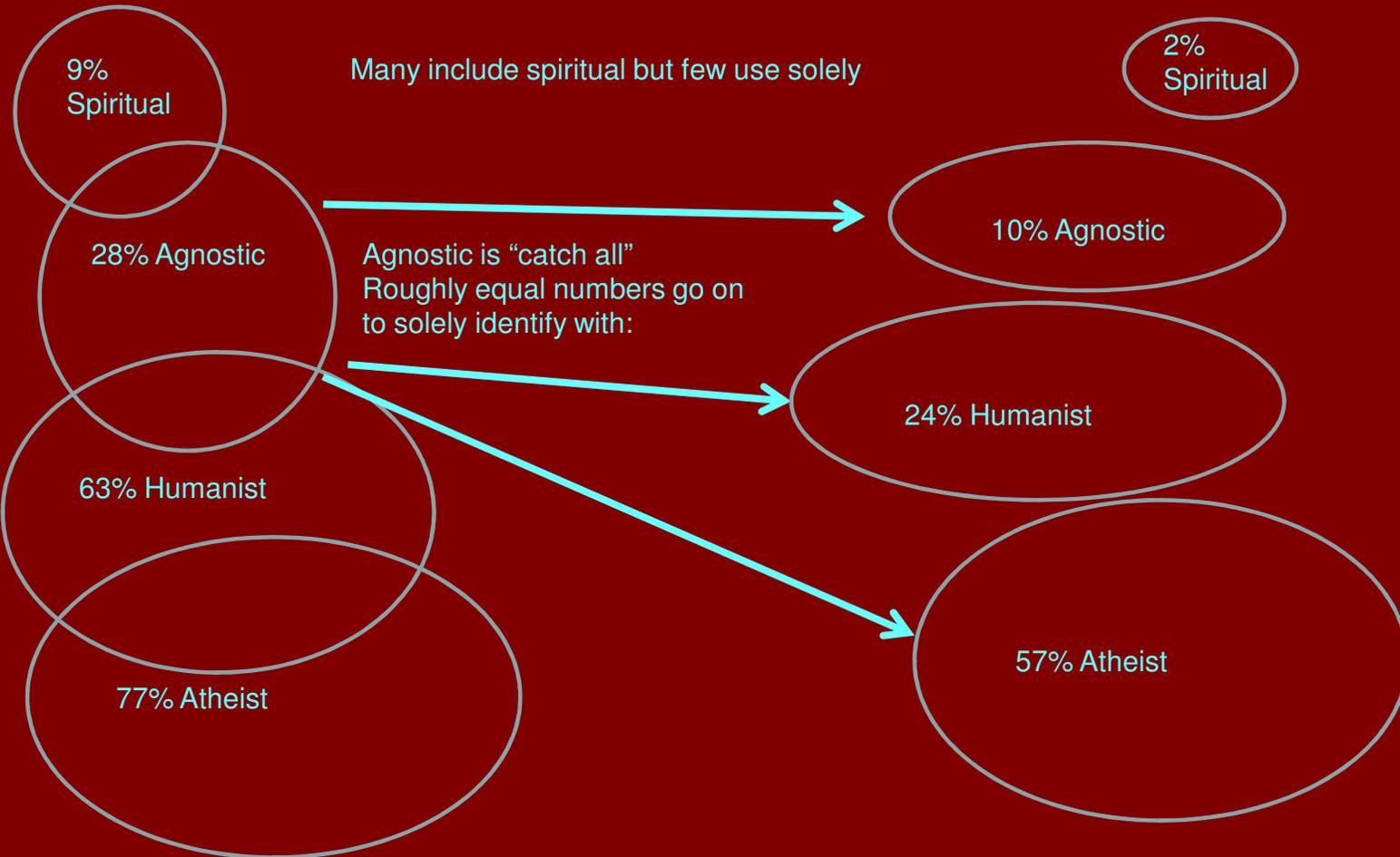
Region of CFI international sample

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

*Mostly Canada, Australia, UK

The labeling issue... Check all that apply

CFI International
Choose only 1



The labeling issue... Check all that apply

CFI International

Choose only 1

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

2%
Spiritual

10% Agnostic

24% Humanist

57% Atheist

Atheist "retains" the highest % (3/4)



So? Implications for “the label wars”:

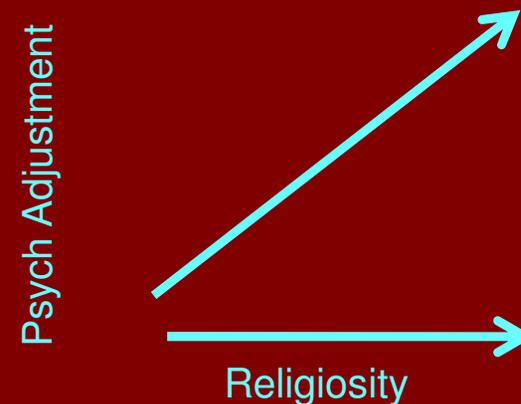
- Many appear to add spiritual and humanist to “soften” atheism but actually share the same metaphysics.
- Those who include “the A word” have already burned that bridge. Also a generational split....
- Humanists and spirituals are on average, 5 years older than atheists. (more of a Kurtz thing?).
- 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.

CFI International

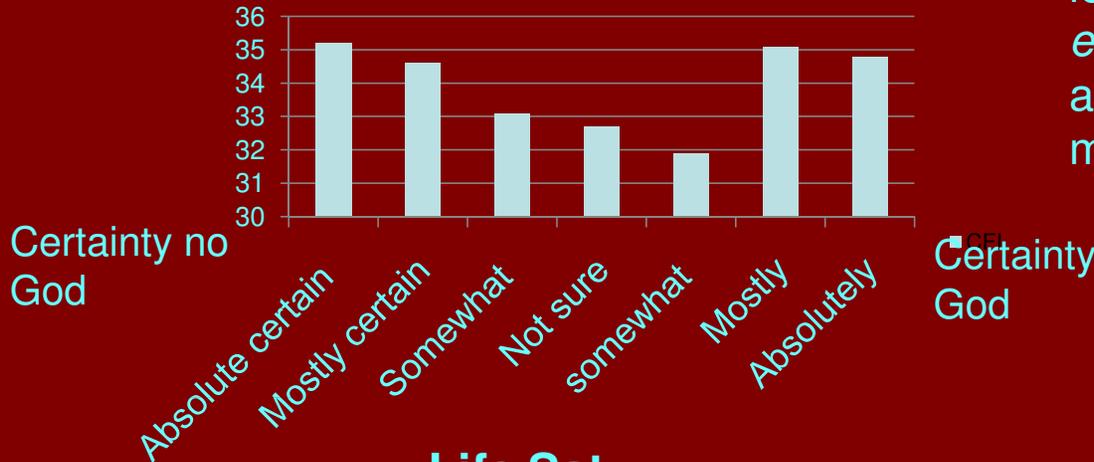
Life Satisfaction and Emotional Stability: is a little bit of religion a bad thing?

- 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”

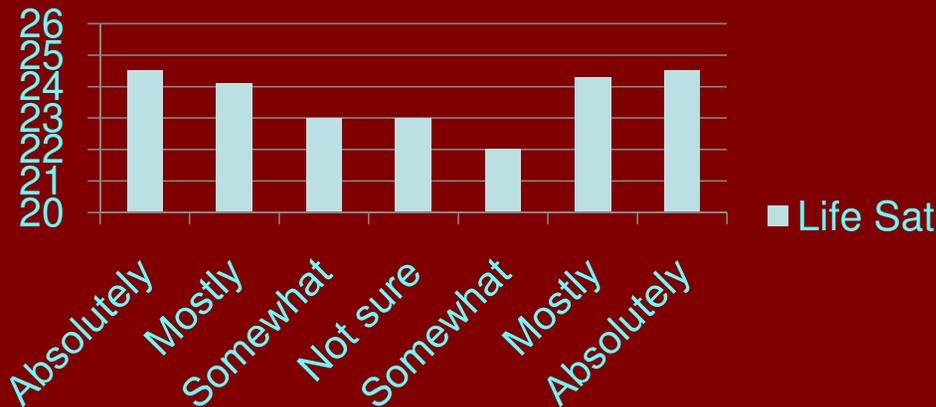


Emo Stability



The curvilinear hypothesis: higher levels of commitment *either way* are associated with mental health.

Life Sat

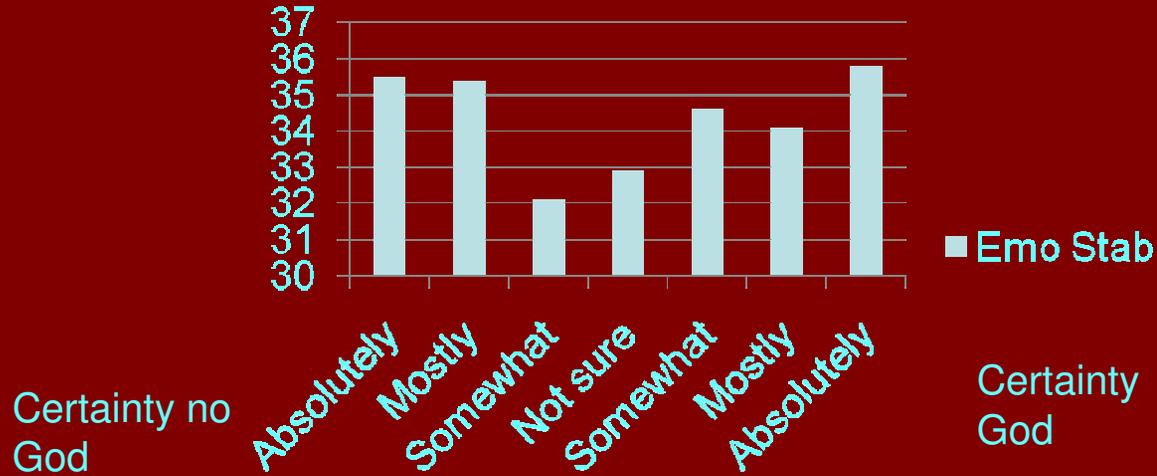


Doesn't address cause and effect:

1. Relig uncertainty leads to distress?
2. Distress leads to uncertainty?
3. Common underlying cause?

From CFI – Mich vs churches

Emo Stab



CFI International

Self Identification: Variable	<u>Spiritual</u> (n=117)	<u>Agnostic</u> (N=608)	<u>Atheist</u> (n=3296)	<u>Humanist</u> (n=1386)
Belief Certainty in No God	Not Sure	Somewhat	Mostly	Mostly
% Male	48%	72%	75%	73%
Age	53	49	47	51
Group Identification	Med	Low	High	High
Life Satisfaction	Lower	Moderate	Moderate	Moderate
Agreeableness	Higher	Lower	Lower	Moderate
Emotional Stability	Lower	Lower	Higher	Higher

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