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Helping Behavior Among the Religious and Non-Religious

Introduction

The religious texts of all major religions have one commonality: they all explicitly encourage pro-social helping behavior among their followers (Batson et. Al, 1993; Coward, 1986). For example, in Christianity, one of the passages promoting helping behavior is the story of the Good Samaritan, which emphasizes the need for altruism towards others to be practiced in the daily life of its followers. Similarly, Islamic teachings emphasize acts of charity and see helping others in need as a necessity (Johnson, 2009). Often, prominent religious leaders are noted for their dedication to spend their lives serving others. Poloutizan and Park (2005) noted how the Nobel Peace Prize often goes to individuals that are motivated by strong religious beliefs. Despite this, research has been unable to show a correlation between being religious and helping others in behavioral studies. This paper will focus on the helping behavior between practicing members of the religious, secular, and atheist community as well as conduct a statistical analysis regarding self-reported helping behavior among exclusively non-religious individuals.

Helping Behavior and Religion

Although researchers have not been able to find a correlation between going to church and helping behavior in behavioral studies, numerous self-report studies have found that regular Church attendance has a positive correlation with helping behavior (Friedrichs, 1960; Rokeach, 1969; 1974 Gallup Poll as cited in Langford & Langford, 1974; Nelson & Dynes, 1976; Zook et. Al, 1982, 1984 Gallup Poll as cited in Paloutzian and Park, 2005; Colasanto, 1989; Wuthnow, 1994). For example, in a Gallup poll study, 58.7% of respondents who attended Church regularly

responded that they almost always took concrete action on the behalf of others compared to 31.4% of non-attendees who said they did the same (Langford & Langford, 1974). Self-reported findings, however, are often not reliable. Researchers studying the psychology of religion have concluded that there is considerable difference between “pencil and paper” and behavioral studies of helping (Gorsuch et. Al, 2003). Studies using behavior measures have offered little evidence that religious individuals are more helpful than their non-religious peers (Batson et. Al, 1993).

Behavioral Studies of Helping Behavior and Religion

The Lost Letter technique was discovered by Milgram (1965). To do the technique, the experimenter leaves sealed, address, and stamped letters in public places. The individuals that view the letter have the option of ignoring it, picking it up, reading it, or throwing it out. While he demonstrated that the letter could survey public opinion, others have used the lost letter technique to survey the helping behavior of individuals.

In the early 1970s, researchers began to use behavioral measures to test helping behavior in religious individuals. One of the earliest tests was conducted by TeVault and Gromoll (1971). In their study, they placed lost letters on the floor near different churches and secular places and examined what amount of them were returned by being placed in the mailbox (TeVault and Gromoll, 1971). This study found no difference between letters left near churches and those left near secular places.

Forbes, TeVault, and Gromoll (1971, as cited in Batson et. Al, 1993) used the technique to conclude that there were no measurable differences in the rate of return between letters left in religious and non-religious places. They found that letters dropped outside conservative churches

were returned more often than those left outside of liberal ones (Forbes, 1971 as cited in Batson et. al, 1973).

The lost letter technique is still an effective way to measure helping behavior today. Yezer et. al (1996) used the technique to show that economic students are more helpful and honest than students with competing majors.

The inaction of others can be used to justify not helping. This is a social psychology phenomenon known as the bystander effect, where people who see another person in distress are less likely to respond if the person knows that others are present. Batson et. al (1989) found that when the pressure to help is low, those with high scores for extrinsic religion were less likely to help. Therefore, when using the lost letter to measure helping behavior in religious individuals it is necessary to take into account the size of the institution.

The second experiment was done in 1975 by Smith, Wheeler, and Diener. In this experiment, they found that “Jesus people”, religious, nonreligious, and atheist individuals were equally likely to help a mentally retarded child in their spare time (Smith et. al, 1975). In 1976, Annis measured religion by self-report, frequency of prayer, frequency of church attendance, and religious value scores on the Allport, Vernon, and Lindsay scale. Annis (1976) found no difference in helping behavior after religious and non-religious individuals heard a ladder fall, possibly injuring a lady in the other room. McKenna (1976) found that clergy were no more likely than non clergy to call a garage for a woman who spent her last dime on a call home.

Based on these results, it was clear the theory on religion and helping behavior needed to be changed. Daniel Batson and colleagues (1973) discussed three ways in which one could be religious: intrinsic, extrinsic, and Quest. Through a series of studies, Batson (1981) found that the three types of religious categories did not affect the amount people helped but why

individuals helped. Those with an intrinsic religious orientation offered help no matter whether or not the person wanted it, while those with a Quest religious orientation were responsive to whether or not the individual asked for help (Batson, 1981).

The Difference Between Atheist and Non-Believers

Despite these findings, some studies continued to test for a relationship between being religious and engaging in pro-social helping behavior. Eventually, some studies found evidence suggesting that this relationship exists. Yinon and Sharon (1985) found that religious individuals contributed more money to a needy family than a secular family. The researchers, however, concluded that this was only the case when the request came from a member of their own religion (Yinon and Sharon, 1985). Similar results were recorded in a number of other studies, and when studies demonstrate that religious people are more helpful it is usually because of their motives to seek praise or enhance their status within the community (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2007).

A second reason religious people could be more helpful is because they are subconsciously reminded of God. Shariff and Norenzayan (2007) found that when God concepts were activated implicitly in individuals who believed in God, it greatly increased the pro-social behavior directed towards strangers. This strong relationship was not found among the non-religious or atheists, although non-religious individuals gave slightly more money than atheists when primed with God-concepts (Shariff & Noranzayan, 2007). The authors conducted two studies using this method, and found that atheists were not likely to be influenced by God concepts only after forming a stricter definition of atheist. While they left the question open for further investigation, their findings suggest that atheists are different than other non-religious

people because they might “doubt the existence of supernatural agents even at the implicit level (Shariff & Noranzayan, 2007).”

The priming study mentioned above seems to confirm the findings of Hunsberger & Altemeyer (2006) that atheists are much different than both agnostics and non-believers. The authors found that atheists are more dogmatic and place a higher value on the truth than other non-believers and agnostics (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). Also, they found that atheists are less prejudice than other individuals who identify as non-religious (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). This suggests that studies need to stop group atheists, agnostics, and non-religious individuals together because of the fundamental difference between the two groups. No study has looked at whether there are differences in actual or self-reported helping behavior between non-religious individuals that classify themselves as such or agnostic and non-religious individuals that classify themselves as atheists.

Problems in the Literature

The biggest problems in the literature regarding behavioral studies of helping behavior among religious and non-religious individuals is the small sample size, lack of current behavioral tests in the field, and the failure of the studies to differentiate between non-religious individuals and atheists.

In regard to the 1971 lost letter study conducted by Forbes, TeVault, and Gromoll, the return rates were much lower than other lost letter experiments reported during the time. When Milgram (1965) devised the experiment and tested it in New Haven, 71% of the letters were returned. Wicker (1969) also conducted a similar experiment and found that 81% of the letters were returned. Only 40% of the letters left by Forbes and colleagues (1971, as cited in Batson et. Al, 1993) were returned in each location, whether it was religious or non-religious. This extremely low rate might be because they left all of the letters outside, either in parking lots or

on Church doorsteps. In all the previous studies using the lost letter experiment, at least some of the letters were left inside in some areas. When Forbes and colleagues conducted a second lost letter method in 1971 leaving letters inside cafes, department stores and restaurants as well as parking lots, 79 percent of their letters were returned (Forbes et. al, 1971). This low return rate for their behavioral analysis of religious and non-religious individuals suggests that their results might be tainted because of where the letters were left. Also, it is impossible to know whether the individuals who returned letters left in a parking lot were religious or not. Since it is impossible to verify the identity of who returned the letter, broad conclusions should not be drawn from this study.

In the other early behavioral studies of religion, the samples were mostly small. With the exception of the study by Smith and colleagues, the sample population was under 100 participants in each of them. Also, some failed to measure the difference between religious and non-religious individuals. The McKenna study (1976) looked at the difference between adults in clergy and non-clergy homes. This can hardly be generalized to study the difference between religious and nonreligious individuals. Just because one lives in a home without clergy, this does not mean that they are not religious or less religious than those individuals that live in a home with clergy.

Finally, the study by Smith and colleagues (1975) must also be looked at with caution. Although the sample size was large, 402 psychology students, the test field was psychology students being offered to volunteer working with a profoundly retarded child. It is likely, given the class they were taking, that some had an interest in this area as a possible career choice. Therefore, this could have influenced their decision on whether or not to help because of the

benefits being offered. The study could have benefited from offering something that doesn't directly relate with the personal interests of its subject members.

A second problem is the lack of recent studies in the field. In the last few decades, research on religion and actual helping behavior has stagnated. Instead, researchers in the field are looking at why religious people appear more helpful in some studies. The consensus seems to be that it is because religious people help more when it will enhance their reputation within their group and when they are freshly reminded of God's existence (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2008).

Finally, one of the biggest problems in the literature is the failure to differentiate between the different types of non-religious individuals. Many studies in the early psychology of religion use the terms "atheist" and "non-believer" interchangeably because either one believes in something or does not (Filsinger, 1976). The only early behavioral study that looked at the difference between non-religious and atheist behavior was Smith and colleagues, and they found no difference. However, their results are brought into question because of the reasons previously discussed.

More recent studies, however, have hinted that there might be a difference between the pro-social helping behavior of non-religious individuals and atheists. In Shariff and Norenzayan's (2007) study of pro-social behavior during an economic game, they found that non-religious individuals were slightly more likely than atheists when primed with God concepts to give more money. Although these results were not statistically significant, current research would benefit to test them on a larger scale.

Conclusions Drawn from the Literature

The literature shows that, except in conditions where it will benefit their status in the community or where God is primed, religious individuals are not more helpful than those who

are non-religious. This paper plans to add to the body of knowledge in the field by testing helping behavior among religious and non-religious individuals in new ways.

First, a statistical analysis looking at the self-reported helping behavior and values towards pro-social ideals will be conducted. The category of non-religious will be broken down further, into individuals who identify as atheists and those who identify themselves as either agnostic or non-religious. To the author's knowledge, this will be the first study that tries to analyze differences in self reported helping behavior between individuals who identify themselves as non-religious/agnostic and those who identify themselves as atheist. It will also break down religious people into two categories, based on frequency of Church attendance. These subsets will be included to ensure the study confirms the standard in the field that religious individuals are more likely than non-religious individuals to report helping behavior.

Second, this study will conduct a behavioral experiment imploring the lost letter technique in major cities on the Eastern coast of the United States to study whether there is a difference in helping behavior between religious individuals and practicing atheists, controlling for the size of the group that is meeting.

Finally, the study will attempt to avoid bias based on priming or egoistic motives. While it is likely that individuals will pick up a letter in a Church and say they will return it to enhance their appearance onto others, it is unlikely that these individuals would be around when they actually had the opportunity to place the letter in the mailbox.

Research Design: Study 1

This study will analyze the relationship between two concepts: an individual's degree of non-religiosity and that individuals helping behavior. One's degree of non-religiosity is the dependent variable, while one's helping behavior is the independent variable. The concept of

one's degree of non-religiosity is defined as the extent to which the individual identifies with one of three non-religious groups: atheists, non-religious, and agnostics. The concept of values regarding helping behavior is the extent to which respondents voluntarily take part in pro-social helping behavior or are a member of an organization involved in community service.

This study evaluates whether in comparing individuals, those who identify themselves as agnostic or non-religious are more likely to have higher levels of helping behavior than those that identify as atheist. The null hypothesis is that there is no relationship between the individual's non-religious identity and helping behavior, and any difference present in the data is due to measurement error.

The study controlled for income, marital status, education level, age, and gender like previous studies (Shariff & Norenzayan, 2008). The literature on helping behavior shows that those with a higher income exhibit more helping behavior than those with a lower income, older individuals exhibit more helping behavior than younger individuals, individuals that are married exhibit more helping behavior than those that are single, and females exhibit more helping behavior than males. The study controlled for these variables to determine the amount each control variable accounts for variation in the individual's helping behavior and confirm that any relationships found are not spurious.

Data Source and Operationalization

There are two data sources being used to test this hypothesis. The first data source tests the hypothesis in individuals between 13 and 17 years of age while the second tests the hypothesis in individuals over the age of 18. The first data source is the National Survey of Youth and Religion, Wave 1. The study was conducted from July 2002 to April 2003 at the University of North Carolina. Randomly generated telephone digit dialing was used in the study.

It was conducted in 2003 and is a nationally representative telephone survey of 3,290 English and Spanish speaking teenagers. The only overrepresented group was those individuals in Jewish households. The data includes three weighed variables (Smith and Pearce, 2003). It was chosen because it was one of only two studies in the last ten years that made the distinction between atheism, agnostic, and non-religious individuals that also included questions about helping behavior.

The dependent variable is helping behavior. Helping behavior is measured by how much the teenagers, in the last year, directly helped homeless people, needy neighbors, family friends or other people in need. This is an ordinal variable, with a series of responses ranging from 1 (A lot) to 4 (None). The variable was recoded, giving the response option a lot the highest response value at 4 so that the variable will be coded in the theoretically proper direction. During recoding, individuals that responded 'don't know' or 'refused' had their answers dropped from the study.

The independent variable is one's non-religious identification. Those who responded that they did not identify with a religious tradition were asked a follow up question asking whether they considered themselves to be atheist, agnostic, not religious, or something else. This variable was recoded to drop 'something else' from the response option, since it is unclear what that individual's non-religious identity entailed. Atheist was recoded as 1, non-religious as 2, and agnostic as 3 so the ordinal variable would be recoded in the theoretically proper direction. Gender was the only variable controlled for in this study, and it was not recoded.

Since both variables this study uses are ordinal level, the study started by cross examining the cross-tabular relationships for the additive index scale of helping behavior and whether or not the individuals level of religiosity led to greater pro-social attitudes and behavior

throughout the community. Next, the study conducted one more cross-tabular relationship with gender as a control variable layered in.

Next, a Chi-square test with proportional reduction in error measurement was run in order to determine whether or not there is a relationship between the variables and to see if they are significant. A test of Kendalls tau-c is run because there are a different number of response options for the two ordinal variable. Next, the study conducted a correlation analysis to provide a theoretical confirmation of the hypothesis. Lastly, a linear regression was used.

The second data source being used is the 1996 survey of God and Society in North America. The study surveyed 6,023 adults in Canada and the United States and gave a representative cross section of the populations. The survey samples were stratified by region disproportionately in order to augment the subsamples (Green et. Al, 1996). The study was chosen because it is one of only two studies that differentiated between agnostics, non-religious, and atheists in people over eighteen years of age. This study was chosen over the other one because the other study only had 10 individuals responding as an atheist, while this study had 123.

The dependent variable is helping behavior. Helping behavior is measured by how much the individual participates in various works of charity. There are four nominal questions in the survey which ask whether the individual is a part of a social service group, youth work group, a community based group, or will claim a charitable donation made in the last year. The variable has two response options, 0 for no and 1 for yes. The variables will not be recoded because they are already in the theoretically proper direction. Since there are four different questions, I will compute a new variable by combining them into an additive index where the scores will range from 0-4, with 4 being the most acts of helping behavior and 0 being the least. Helping behavior

is an ordinal variable because as the values get higher, the more helping behavior the individual exhibits.

The independent variable is one's non-religious identification. The study asked whether or not individuals identified as part of a religious tradition and could choose between Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Other non-Christian, Agnostic, Atheist, no religion, something else, or don't know. All the religions, including 'something else' were recoded to be one category and labeled as 4, while something else or don't know were dropped. Agnostic was recoded as 3, non-religious as 2, and atheist as 1 so the question would be coded in the theoretically proper direction.

The study controlled for income, marital status, education level, age, and gender. Age is the only control variable that has been recoded. Age was bound into three separate categories: respondents between the ages of 18-30 coded 1, respondent's between the ages of 31-50 coded 2, and those 51 and over coded 3. These ages were used instead of visual binding because the survey includes a relatively large number of individuals between 31-40 and visual binding would have misrepresented the range of the dependent variable between the youngest and middle aged group.

The methods used for this data set are the same as the methods used for the first data set. However, in this data set five cross-tabulations were run with control variables, opposed to one, layered in.

Research Design: Study 2

A study was also conducted to determine the helping behavior of religious people, the general population (including both religious and non-religious), and non-religious people. To do this, the lost letter technique was used. The lost letter technique has previously been used to

show that letters lost in front of a Church are no more likely to be returned than letters in a non-secular place – in this study a parking lot (Forbes et. Al, 1971). Likewise, the technique has also been used to show that letters lost in a moderate sized city are more likely to be returned than those lost in an urban city (Forbes et. Al, 1971). Therefore, it is difficult to determine, especially since the letters were left outside, how the size of the religious community affected whether or not they were returned. Also, since the letters were all left outside (unlike previous studies where there was a mix) it brings into question the accuracy of the data. This study planned to leave 120 “lost letters” throughout the Northeast. The study attempted to determine whether being a individual practicing religion or atheism would affect helping behavior. The letters were dropped in the following locations:

- 20 letters were left in Churches with small communities of less than 50 people attending a single religious service on a Sunday.

- 20 letters were left in Churches with large communities of more than 50 people attending a single religious service on a Sunday

- 20 letters were left in a large business (ex. Grocery store, ski resort, pharmacy, casual eatery, fast food chain).

- 20 letters were left in a small business (ex. Locally owned stores with small clientele like local hardware shops, drycleaners).

- 20 letters were left in a small meeting of an Atheist group of less than 50 people

- 20 letters were left in a large meeting of an Atheist group of more than 50 people.

The letter was a standard size envelope with a forever stamp with the picture of the eagle on it. The stamps were address to Martin Kane, with a middle initial used to identify which subset the letter was being set back from. For example, all letters left in Churches with small communities of people were labeled Martin A. Kane. It was addressed to a DC address if the letter was left in D.C. and a NY address if the letter was left in NY or NJ as to attempt to avoid bias based on region. Inside was a small white envelope with a generic message.

The letters were dropped on a weekend during the days of March 6-7, March 27-28, and April 3-4, 2010. Since Forbes and colleagues (1971) showed that members of liberal churches

are more likely to take a little extra effort to return lost letters, the large and small churches were matched based on religion so that the number of liberal and conservative Churches would be accurately represented. The letters for atheists in the small group were left at meetings for the Century for Inquiry and the Beltway Atheists while the letters for atheists in the large group were left during the weekend of the Atheist National Convention in Newark, NJ.

Analysis – Experiment 1

The first study using the National Survey of Youth and Religion evaluates whether, in comparing individuals and controlling for gender, non-religious identification impacts a teen's self-reported level of helping behavior. The study starts by examining measures of central tendency along with the frequency distribution of the variables.

The independent variable, identifying the teenager's non-religious identity, asks the non-religious teen whether they identify as an agnostic, non-religious, or atheist. The mode and median of this variable was the response option 'non-religious.' This variable had a low degree of dispersion, and most of the individual's surveyed answered 'non-religious' with the rest of the answers dispersed among the other two categories (Figure 1).

The dependent variable asks the non-religious teen how often they engaged in helping behavior. The mode of the variable was 'none' while the median was the response option 'a little.' This variable had a high degree of dispersion among the four response options (Figure 2).

Next, the study examined the cross-tabulation of the independent and dependent variables to test for an initial confirmation of the referenced hypothesis. Reviewing the cross-tabulation seems to support the hypothesis posed by this paper. To test this hypothesis statistically, multiple chi-square tests with proportional reduction in error measurement were analyzed. Significant results would reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between one's non-religious

identity and levels of helping behavior. Chi-square tests were run for the two variables without controls.

The results of the chi-square test show that the dependent variable, an individual's level of helping behavior, has a p-value of .032. This makes it significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. In the field of social sciences, the standard for significance is at the $p \leq .05$ level. For the purposes of this paper, significance will be looked at for anything achieving a p-value of less than or equal to .1. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, has a value of .070 showing that 7% of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable and that those who identify as agnostic or non-religious are more likely to engage in helping behavior. This is a moderately strong relationship.

Since the results were significant at the $p \leq .05$ level, the control variables were then tested. Due to limitations of the survey, the only control variable that was able to be tested was gender. When controlling for gender, the results were significant for both males and females. The teenage respondents that were males had a p-value of .007 which is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. The PRE measure for this control response was .162, indicating a strong relationship. The teenage respondents that were females had a p-value of .037, with a PRE measure of .037. This indicates a weak but present correlation. The results from the first study are summarized in Table 1 in the Appendix. No significance was found when analyzing the relationship between non-religious identity and helping behavior of the parents who took the survey. This, however, might be because only ten of the non-religious parents identified as atheists. Therefore, the study used the 1996 survey of God and Society in North America to determine whether there was a significant relationship among individuals over eighteen years old.

In the second survey, the dependent variable inquired about the adult's non-religious identity. The mode and median was the response option 'non-religious.' This variable had a low degree of dispersion, with most of the individual's identifying as non-religious and the rest being dispersed among the other two categories of 'atheist' and 'agnostic (Figure 3).'

The dependent variable, an additive index measuring an individual's level of helping behavior, placed individuals into five categories based on their response to four separate questions asking whether they were involved in volunteer or community oriented groups. The mode of the index was the part of the additive index labeled 'no helping behavior' while the median was the part of the additive index labeled 'little helping behavior.' The variable had a moderate degree of dispersion with a positive skew (Figure 4).

Next, the study examines the cross-tabulation of the independent and dependent variables to test for an initial confirmation of the hypothesis. Again, the cross-tabulation seems to support the hypothesis posed by the paper. To test the hypothesis, multiple chi-square tests with proportional reduction in error measurement were analyzed. Chi-square tests were run for the two variables without controls.

The results of the chi-square test show that the dependent variable, an individual's level of helping behavior, has a p-value of .000 (Table 3)

. This makes it significant at the $p \leq .00$ level. This is the strongest level of significance. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, has a value of .112, showing that 11.2% of the dependent variable can be explained by the independent variable. This is a moderately strong relationship, and supports the hypothesis posed by the paper.

Since the results were statistically significant at the $p \leq .00$ level, control variables will be tested. The first variable controlled for was the respondent's marital status. When controlling for

marital status, the results are only significant for those who are single, married, together under common law, or widowed. There is no significance among individuals who are separated or divorced. The single respondent's have a p-value of .058, which is significant at the $p \leq .10$ level. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, is .077. The married respondents have a p-value of .011, which is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, is .087. The common law respondent's have a p-value of .029, which is significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. The PRE measure here is .198. Finally, the widowed respondent's have a p-value of .065, which is significant at the $p \leq .10$ level. The PRE measure for this group of respondents is .130. The final two response options yield non significant data. This control variable is therefore interactional, because it is only significant in relation to some of the categories when the control variable is broken down.

The second control variable tested is the respondent's age. Here, significance was found for each age group. The respondents between the ages of 18-30 had a p-value of .011 and the PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, was .094. The respondents between the ages of 31-50 had a p-value of .088 and the PRE measure was .075. Finally, the respondents over age 51 had a p-value of .082 and the PRE measure was .090. This control variable is not interactional, since significance was found at each level the control variable was broken down into.

The third control variable tested was the respondent's gender. While significance was found among both males and females, the p-value found among females was much stronger. The male respondents had a p-value of .082 and the PRE measure, Lamda, was .090. The female respondents, on the other hand, had a p-value of .001 and a PRE measure of .148. Again, the control variable was not interactional.

The fourth control variable tested was the respondent's income. Here, significance was only found among those who make 60-79,999K a year and those who make 20-39,999K a year. For individuals who made between 60-79,999K a year, the p-value was .019 and the PRE measure was .193. For the respondents that made between 20-39,999K a year, the p-value was .056 and the PRE measure was .097. This control variable is interactional.

The final control variable tested was the respondent's education. The only significant result was among high school students. Among high school students, the study found a p-value of .035 and the PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, was .078. The other response options yielded non-significant data. Therefore, the control variable education is interactional. All of the data from the second survey regarding significance is summarized in Table 3 in the Appendix.

To further study the control variables, chi square tests were run with the control variables as independent variables to see the effects on the dependent variable (Table 4). Education, measured as the highest degree level completed, was significant in regards to helping behavior with a p-value of .000. The relationship between education and levels of helping behavior rejected the null hypothesis at the $p \leq .00$ level. The PRE-measure, Kendall's Tau-C, was .185, meaning compared to how accurately we can predict the helping behavior of individuals by not knowing their education level, knowing their education level improves our prediction by about 18.5%.

Age was also significant in regards to helping behavior with a p-value of .000. The relationship between age and levels of helping behavior also rejected the null hypothesis at the $p \leq .00$ level. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, was .093. This is a moderately strong relationship.

The next control variable tested as an independent variable was gender. Here, the relationship was only significant at the $p \leq .10$ level, with a p-value of .065. The PRE measure, Lambda, was .018. This indicates an extremely weak relationship.

The next variable tested, income, was also significant in regards to helping behavior with a p-value of .000. The relationship between income and helping behavior rejected the null-hypothesis at the $p \leq .00$ level. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, was .194. This indicates a strong relationship.

The final variable tested as an independent variable was marital status. Again, the null hypothesis was rejected at the $p \leq .00$ level. The PRE measure, Kendall's Tau-C, was .049. This indicates a relatively weak relationship despite the high level of statistical significance.

Conclusion – Experiment 1

In summary, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between helping behavior and one's non-religious identity in self-report studies can be rejected at the $p \leq .05$ level. The correlation analysis shows that there is a positive relationship between self-reported helping behavior and identifying as either agnostic or non-religious when compared to those who identify as atheist.

Although further research is needed, the analysis from experiment 1 suggests that respondents who identify as atheist have lower levels of helping behavior than those that identify as either agnostic or non-religious. This relationship holds for all genders and age ranges. When other control variables are added, however, the relationship is only significant for individuals that are single, married, considering married under common law, widowed, have a high school diploma, or make between either 20K-39,999K or 60K-79,999K a year.

One explanation for these findings might be that atheists are more dogmatic than those who identify as either non-religious or agnostic (Hunsberger & Altemeyer, 2006). Since the two latter groups are less dogmatic, the questions regarding religion might have led them to subconsciously put down that they engaged in more helping behavior than they did. Although this effect will not be as strong among the non-religious and agnostics as it is in the religious population, it is likely to be higher than the effect found in the atheist population. Like the study by Hunsberger & Altemeyer, the statistical analysis showed this result held for all age groups and genders.

A second unique finding by the study was that the relationship only holds for those non-religious individuals that are single, married, or widowed. The relationship does not hold for those who are divorced. Recent studies have found that divorced people are the less happy than their married and never-married counterparts (Myers & Diener, 1997). Also, unlike widowed individuals, those who are divorced don't turn to others as much for support. This isolation and unhappiness may lead to decrease their helping behavior, an effect that is more influential than whether or not they are atheist, agnostic, or non-religious.

The final unique finding was that it occurred between lower income people. Since there is no feasible reason that individuals who made between 40K-59,999K did not achieve statistical significance while those that made between 20K-39,999K and 60K-79,999K the study will consider it a Type II error, where the null is accepted where it should be rejected. Generally, therefore, those with lower incomes are more likely to be affected by their non-religious status than those with higher incomes. This could be because those who make more money per year are more likely to help, and one's income level is more significantly correlated with helping behavior than their non-religious status.

There are a few limitations to this study. The first is the low number of people that identified in the surveys as either an agnostic or an atheist. Most of the individuals in both studies identified as non-religious, so the non-religious population might have been less affected by individuals that served as outliers. A second problem is that the studies gave no basis for what defines being an agnostic, atheist, or non-religious individual. Because of this, it is possible that those who would actually be considered an atheist said they were non-religious while those who were non-religious considered themselves an atheist. Future studies should conduct a study with a scale of non-religious beliefs that could produce a score on a spectrum ranging from atheist on one end to agnostic on the other.

The second limitation is the questions proposed by the study. Both studies used nominal level questions to gauge helping behavior. Those individuals, therefore, that engaged in one hour of community service a week achieved the same score as those individuals who engaged in 20 hours of community service a week. Future studies studying the helping behavior of non-religious individuals should break down the categories more and use ordinal level variables to assess self-reported levels of helping behavior.

Analysis – Experiment 2

During the lost letter experiment, 120 letters were dropped around the greater D.C. and NYC area. Letters left in religious institutions had the highest return rate, at 87.5% (n=35). 95% of the letters (n=19) left in smaller religious communities were returned while 80% of the letters (n=18) left in the larger religious communities were returned. Letters left in secular institutions had the second highest return rate, at 82.5% (n=33). 90% of the letters left in small secular institutions were returned (n=18) while 75% of the letters left in large secular institutions were returned (n=15). The smallest return rate came from the atheist community, where 65% of the

letters were returned (n=26). 70% of the letters left in large atheist communities (n=14) were returned while only 60% of the letters left in small atheist communities (n=12) were returned. Letters were more likely to be returned from small gatherings (n=51; 85%) than larger gatherings (n=43; 71.67%).

To conclude whether the results were statistically significant, chi-square tests with proportional reduction in error measurement were analyzed. Significant results would reject the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between where the letter was dropped and the likelihood a Good Samaritan engaged in helping behavior. The results of the chi-square test show that the dependent variable has a p-value of .037. This makes it significant at the $p \leq .05$ level. The PRE measure, Lambda, has a value of .085 which means that knowing where the letter was dropped can improve our prediction of whether it was returned or not by 8.5%. The study found no significance ($p = .137$) for the likelihood of a Good Samaritan returning the letter based on whether the institution was small or large. The results are summarized in Table 6 and located in the Appendix.

Conclusion – Experiment 2

In conclusion, the null hypothesis that there is no relationship between helping behavior among members of the atheist, secular, and religious communities can be rejected at the $p \leq .05$ level. The correlation analysis run shows a positive relationship between the likelihood that a letter is returned and the type of institution the letter was lost in.

This is the first study to note an actual difference in helping behavior among specific members of the religious and atheist population. Previous studies concluded that there is no relationship in helping behavior between the religious and non-religious. The first experiment run by this study, however, suggested that helping behaviors among the non-religious can vary.

Atheists reported the lowest levels of helping behavior. Since atheists make up a small percentage of the non-religious population, it is likely that the relationship regarding helping behavior between religious and atheist individuals was never directly tested.

One reason for these results might be that religious individuals and those in the secular communities are more likely to do the right thing because they have a subconscious fear that there is a higher power. Norenzayan's (2007) results suggested that non-religious individuals are able to be primed by God concepts. The results found by this study can further that speculation, theorizing that the thought of a higher power might lead individuals who either believe there is a God or consider the possibility that there is a God to engage in similar levels of helping behavior in everyday life when the direct priming of God concepts are not involved. Under this theory, the only group that would exhibit lower levels of helping behavior in situations without religious priming would be seen among atheists. Atheists are unique through their certainty that there is no God and contribute our existence on this planet exclusively to science. Hunsberger and Altemeyer (2007) suggested that dogmatism is particularly high among American atheists, meaning that their beliefs are generally rigid and inflexible. Future studies regarding behavioral methods of helping should characterize individuals into groups based on whether or not they believe that any higher power could exist.

Although the results of this study are unique, there are many limitations to the study. The first is the confounding variable of in-group bias. Previous studies have found that religious people tend to help more when the individuals they are helping are members of their own religion (Yinon & Sharon, 1998). Since all the letters left in religious institutions were left in a Church, it could be likely that the religious individuals only helped because they were helping someone within their own community. Future studies should look at the helping behavior of

atheists both in-group and out of their group in order to determine the effects that in-group bias might have had on this study.

The second problem with the study might have been a subconscious bias towards the religious institutions. The study tried to control for this as much as possible. Both letters left in religious institutions and those left in secular institutions were left inside the building near either an aisle or door where the maximum number of people would see them on their way to the exit. Although this precaution was taken, subconscious bias could exist in other ways. Although churches were chosen based on size and religious orientation, most of them were located in areas where those in attendance were members of the upper middle class. While most of the individuals attending the atheist conference were also upper middle class, they were mostly white males. Previous studies have shown that helping behavior is more common among women than men, and when gender was used as a control variable in the first study significance was found at .000 level. Therefore, the results may have been obtained partly because of the confounding variable of gender.

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- “God & Society in Norther America, 1996, [hp://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Downloads/QUEENS_DL.asp](http://www.thearda.com/Archive/Files/Downloads/QUEENS_DL.asp), whose data was used by permission here and collected from The Association of Religion Data Archives, www.TheARDA.com, and were collected by The Anugs Reid Group, under the direction of Dr. John Green, Dr. Jim Guth, Dr. Lyman Kellstedt, and Dr. Corwin Smidt.

Table 1: Chi-Square Test and PRE Measure, Kendualls Tau-C, for the individual's non-religious identification (the Independent Variable) and the respondents level of helping behavior (the Dependent Variable).

	P-Value	PRE
No Controls: Teenagers (13-17)	.032**	.070
No Controls: Parents	.827	---
Gender: Male	.007**	.162
Gender: Female	.037**	.037

Table 2: Chi Square Tests and PRE Measure, Kendalls Tau-c, for the Control Variables in the Initial Study as Independent Variables and Levels of Helping Behavior as the Dependent Variable

	P-Value	PRE
Are You Religious (IV) and How much have you helped others.	.002**	.057
Gender (IV) and Helping Behavior (DV)	.000****	.072

**** Significance at the $p \leq .00$ level

*** Significance at the $p \leq .01$ level

** Significance at the $p \leq .05$ level

* Significance at the $p \leq .10$ level

No * Not Significant

Table 3: Chi-Square Test and PRE Measure, Kendalls Tau-C, for the relationship between the individuals non-religious identification (the Independent Variable) and the respondents level of helping behavior (the Dependent Variable).

	P-Value	PRE
No Controls	.000****	.112
Marital Status: Single	.058*	.077
Marital Status: Married	.011**	.087
Marital Status: Common Law	.029**	.198
Marital Status: Separated	.582	---
Marital Status: Divorced	.513	---
Marital Status: Widowed	.065*	.130
Age: 18-30	.011**	.094
Age: 31-50	.088*	.075
Age: 51+	.080*	.163
Gender: Male	.082*	.090
Gender: Female	.001***	.148
Income: Less than 20K	.106	---
Income: 20K-39,999K	.056*	.097
Income: 40K-59,999K	.924	---
Income: 60K-79,999K.	.019**	.197
Income: 80K-99,999K	.107	---
Income: 100K+	.188	---
Education: High School	.035**	.078
Education: Some College	.578	.036
Education: 4 Year College Degree	.199	---
Education: Graduate School	.636	---
Are You Religious (IV) and Have you Helped Others (DV)	.000****	.104

Table 4: Chi Square Tests and PRE Measure, Kendalls Tau-c, for the Control Variables in the Initial Study as Independent Variables and Levels of Political Intolerance as the Dependent Variable

	P-Value	PRE
Education (IV) and Member of Volunteer Organization (DV)	.000****	.185
Age (IV) and Member of Volunteer Organization (DV)	.000****	.093
Income (IV) and Member of Volunteer Organization (DV)	.000****	.194
Gender (IV) and Member of Volunteer Organization (DV)	.065*	.018
Marital Status (IV) and Member of Volunteer Organization (DV)	.000****	.049

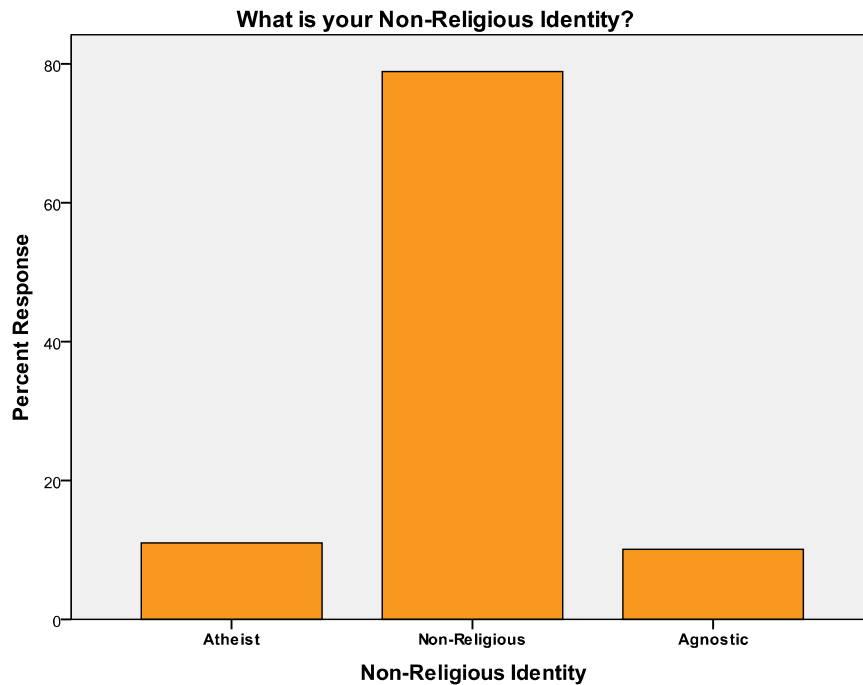


Figure 1: The percent of the 417 respondents that answered in each category. The most common response found when asking the identity of those that were non-religious teens was 'Non-Religious' (n=329; 78.9%). It was followed by 'Atheist' (n=46; 11.0%) and 'Atheist' (n=42; 10.1%).

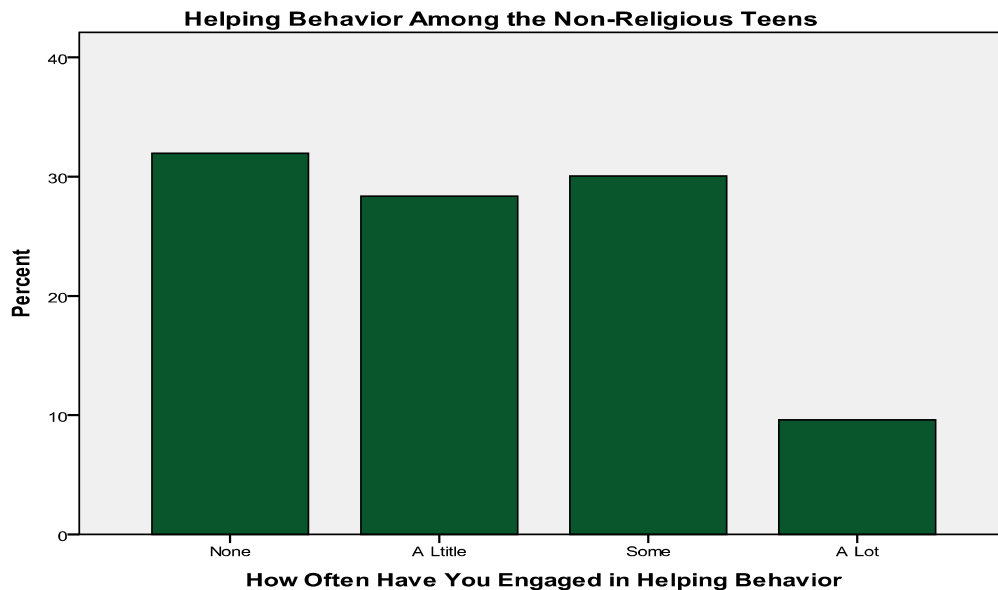


Figure 2: The percent of the 417 respondents that answered in each category. The most common response found among the non-religious was 'None' (n=133; 31.9%). It was followed by 'Little Some' (n=125; 30.0%), 'A Little' (n=118; 28.3%), and 'A lot' (n=40; 9.6%).

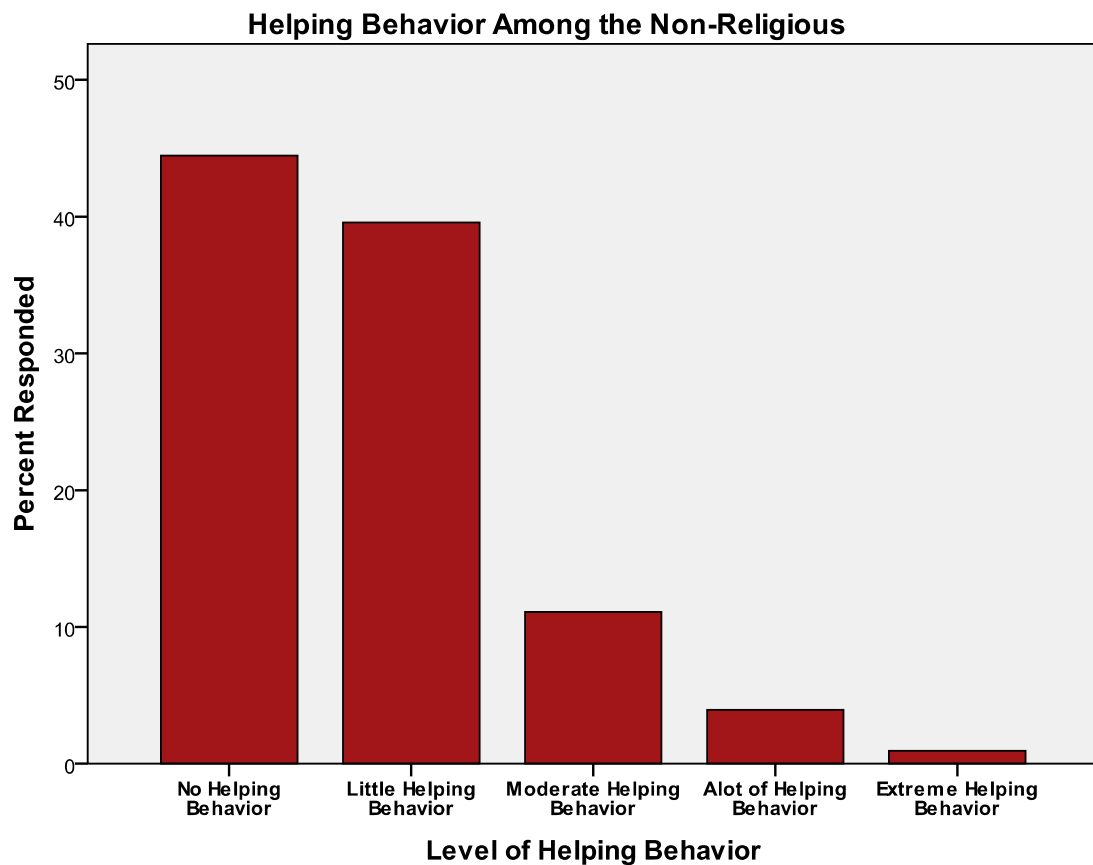


Figure 3: The percent of the 1,064 respondents that answered in each category. The most common response found among the non-religious was 'No Helping Behavior' (n=473; 44.5%). It was followed by 'Little Helping Behavior' (n=421; 39.6%), 'Moderate Helping Behavior' (n=118; 11.1%), 'A lot of Helping Behavior' (n=42; 3.9%), & 'Extreme Helping Behavior' (n=10, .9%).

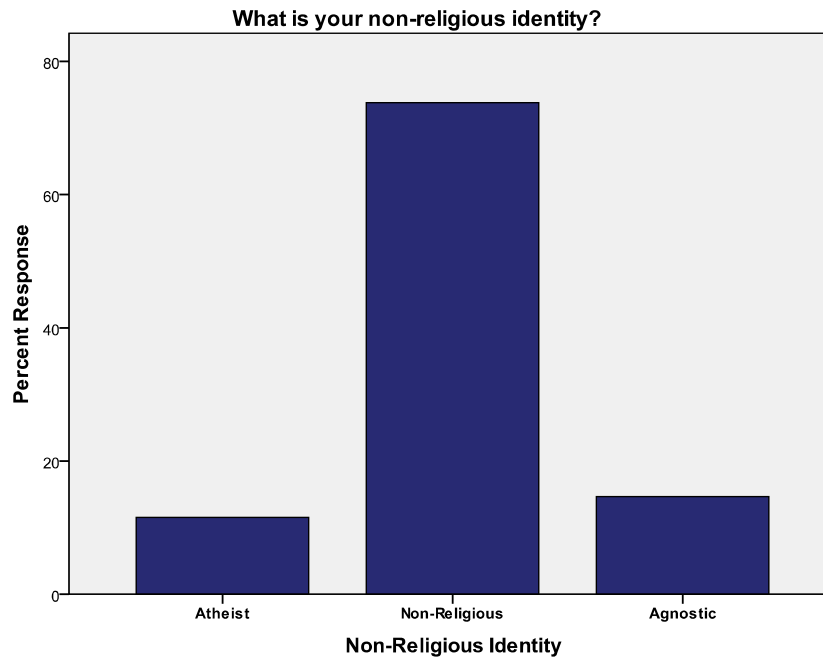


Figure 4: The percent of the 1,064 respondents that answered in each category. The most common response found when asking the identity of those that were non-religious was 'Non-Religious' (n=785; 73.8%). It was followed by 'Agnostic' (n=156; 14.7%) and 'Atheist' (n=123; 11.6%).

Table 5: Chi-Square Test and PRE Measure, Lamda, for the relationship between where the letter was found and whether or not it was returned..

	P-Value	PRE
Institution Letter Left In (IV) & Was It Returned (DV)	.037	.085
Size of the Institution (IV) & Was the Letter Returned (DV)	.137	---

Table 6: Number of Letters Dropped and the Number of Letters Returned in Each Location

	Letters Dropped	Letters Returned
Atheist	40	26
Secular	40	33
Religious	40	35
Large Gathering	60	51
Small Gathering	60	43
Atheist - Large	20	12
Atheist - Small	20	14
Secular - Large	20	15
Secular - Small	20	18
Religious - Large	20	16
Religious - Small	20	19