

Quantifying and Qualifying the Religious Habitus: Substantiating Post-Secularism on a Liberal Arts College Campus

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Introduction

- Post-WWII era: religion became primarily confined to academia, studying it as a piece of history rather than a present day force on modern individuals and institutions
- 1990s followed by 9/11: sociologists understood that religion was resurging, categorizing today's era as "post-secularism" (Jacobsen & Jacobsen 2008)
- My study looks to quantify and qualify the religious habitus (Bourdieu 1979) on a secular, multicultural college campus to substantiate the claim that we are living in a post-secular society

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

- Because studies found that religious participation, on campuses and in the US, was declining, sociologists believed religion's significance was as well (Stark & Bainbridge 1985)
- Cherry, DeBerg, & Porterfield's ethnographic study in 2001, however, disproved this idea, arguing that students who don't participate in religion on campus are not necessarily not influenced by religion/hold religious beliefs
- The habitus can be defined as a "system of dispositions [which are] lasting acquired schemes of perception, thought, and action" (Grusendorf 2016:7). Even if one does not identify as religious, being raised with a particular religion inevitably impacts one's habitus.
- The religious habitus may take on the form of an entire lifestyle (Hadia 2007; Shanneik 2011), but the literature lacks a studies that analyzes the religious habitus on a secular college campus beyond Stevenson's 2012 study of religious students.
- Drawing on the literature that analyzes gendered differences in religiousness and spirituality based on believing in God (especially Bryant 2007), I study differences in self-perceptions of religiousness across religions and levels of participation on campus.

Analysis

- I do not look to conclude whether or not the study body is 'religious,' in so far as answering if students actively participate in religion more often than not. Rather, I study how an upbringing within a particular religion, without religion's presence, and/or actively participating in religion on campus has shaped the habituses of college students today.
- Participation in religious life on campus statistically significantly impacts the mean of how religious one identifies as. For each religious group, the P value is below .001. A similar result arises when asked about religion's importance to one's identity. My qualitative data helps to explain some differences in the means between the two groups, mostly arises to different beliefs in what qualifies as 'religious' between religions. For Christian subjects, a belief in God was usually the largest indicator for religion's importance to one's identity and religiosity, while for Jewish subjects, there are more cultural practices that subjects qualified as contributing to one's religiousness.
- There is a significant difference between the means for religion's influence on politics between those who participate and those who don't for each group of religion except the Other group. There is also a significant difference between the means for those who were raised with religion but do not participate and those who were raised with no religion. Religion influenced politics in a multitude of ways, including using religion texts to influence and justify liberal political leanings, directly influence one's beliefs on abortion, as well as others believing that religion should not influence politics at all.
- There are statistically significant differences in religion's influence on beliefs about gender between the means of the two groups for each religion except the Other category. Protestant and Jewish students have the least statistically significant difference with a P-value below .05 and the difference between the Catholic groups is the most significant with a P-value below .001. There is also a significant difference between the means for those who were raised with religion but do not participate and those who were raised with no religion. While some, mainly those who participate in religion, believe that God intended for there to be two sexes and genders, but gender roles are not dictated by God/religion, others believe that their religion indicates that God made everyone exactly as they are and we should not interfere with His intentions. Others believe that total gender equality is fully supported by their interpretations of their religions. Meanwhile plenty of subjects and respondents believe that religion gets gender completely wrong and it should not influence how one views/understands gender and gender roles.
- There is a significant statistical difference in the means between those who participate in organized religion on campus and those who do not when studying how religion influences who one may choose to date. Jewish students have the largest discrepancy between the means, yielding a P-value below .001. Catholic and Protestant groups yield significant P-values below .01. However, Jewish non-participants still believe in the importance of continuing Judaism, but this does not necessarily mean they must marry within the religion. Many individuals believe in sharing values with a partner, regardless of religion; however, participating subjects generally believed that sharing core values could only stem from sharing a religion with their partner.

Methodology

- I used a google survey to collect quantitative and qualitative data, as well as to find interview subjects. Questions were asked on a Likert scale of 1 through 10 with space below each question for respondents to elaborate on their numbered responses. I collected 240 completed survey responses (leaving 33 incomplete responses out) and conducted 13 in-depth interviews, all with individuals I was connected with through my survey.
- I conducted my quantitative analysis using R, dividing my data into four different sheets based on religious group: Jewish, Catholic, Protestant, and Other. I assigned a 1 for active participants and a 9 to non-participants before running a t-test to determine if there was any statistically significant difference between the means of those who are involved in religion on campus and those who are not involved for the categories of religiosity, religion's importance to one's identity, likeliness to continue practicing post-college, and religion's influence on politics, gender, and relationships. I conducted an additional t-test to look for significant differences between the means of those who are not involved in religion on campus but were raised with religion and those raised with no religion at all for gender and politics.
- I conducted my qualitative analysis by coding my interview transcripts and the information provided by respondents on my survey.

Conclusion

- Religion remains a significant influence in the lives of college students. Although religion is scarcely relevant for those who were raised with no religion, drawing statistical and qualified comparisons between this group and those who do not participate but were raised with religion reveals that religion significantly impacts various aspects of the habitus.
- Although social scientists have conducted ethnographic and qualitative studies to show how religious participation is not always the strongest indicator of religiousness, my study quantified and qualified this believe in a way that had not previously been done.
- College students on this campus will go on to work across all areas of society. In studying the religious habitus of college students, social scientists are able to more holistically understand the role that religion will play in the future of policy. Religion persists as an influential factor in the lives of college students, which is indicative of the role that religion may potentially have over huma affairs in the near future.
- My study opens the doors for further areas of inquiry which may use a mixed methods approach to study the influence of religion on the habitus. Methods that may have improved my study include studying differences across varying types of colleges as well as studying multiple groups over an extended period of time.