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Research

Prayer and Personality (Bates et al.)

In this study we had participants take MMPI-2 tests and then record their prayers. We have transcribed those prayers and are examining correlates to the MMPI-2. Currently in the write-up for publication phase. Presentations include:


Psychophysiology of Prayer (Bates et al.)

This project is actually a multi-year project in which we attached physiological monitoring sensors to people and asked them to pray silently in various ways, including prayers of thanksgiving, adoration/praise, confession, and supplication for others. Our control was thinking about telling your friend about your day.

The idea behind this project was that a great deal of research has shown positive relationships between various health measures and the person engaging in prayer, but the jury is still out on why that might be. Some have posited that prayer is similar to relaxation and hence, the benefits may just be that these people get a chance each day to relax. My thinking was that prayers in the South are really not that relaxing and could indeed be stressful. Praying for someone's health that is at death’s door doesn’t sound relaxing. If prayer isn’t really relaxing, then finding the health benefit lies somewhere else.

At this stage I am in the write up and submit for publication stage. We have presented portions of this multi-year study at several places:


extemporaneous silent prayer. Presentation at the 9th Annual Troy University Psychology Conference, Troy, Alabama.


Fundamentalism and Taboo (Bates, Hudiburg, et al.)

This multi-year project is now in its 3rd phase and 9th overall project. Basically this examines the concept that fear is a central emotion of those who are religious fundamentalist. The idea that fear is central to fundamentalism is widespread in the media and popular press, the actual science confirming that is rather sparse. So what we are trying to do in our lab is look at one specific area of fear…namely, fear of taboo, to determine if religious fundamentalists actual fear beer (for example) or whether they just think beer is a bad idea, without the element of fear. Fear is traditionally expressed through three channels: psychophysologically, cognitively, or behaviorally. And hence, we have organized our studies around that concept.

PHASE 1: Fundamentalism & Taboo – Psychophysiological Assessment

In these studies, we attached physiological monitoring equipment to participants and showed them computer images of taboo scenes (e.g. someone gambling) and neutral scenes (e.g. someone playing chess) and examined that from the perspective of scores on religious fundamentalism scales.

PHASE 2: Fundamentalism & Taboo – Subjective & Cognitive Interference Assessment

We began with an assessment of what items religious fundamentalists found to be discomforting and then used those items in a variety of fashions to determine whether such items would result in cognitive interference and whether they would result in negative evaluations (e.g. of nude art). We had an enormous amount of fun coming up with these projects and would not have been possible without some creative students. These included using

- a modified Flicker Test – images flicker back and forth very rapidly with only one small element changing (which seems to flick at a different rate). Some photos were of taboo settings (an abortion rally) and others were neutral (a Olympic rally). Idea was to capture if religious fundamentalists were slower to detect flickering portions in taboo images.

- a modified Stroop Test – basically this was showing neutral words and taboo words in different colors and the participant had signify the font color of the words. Generally it takes longer (just a few milliseconds) to respond to words that disturb us.

- a modified Wisconsin Cart Sort Test (called the Fundamentalist Card Sort Test) – in this one we changed the images on the WCST to taboo or neutral images (e.g. beer bottles) to see if that interfered with performance on the card sort test.
- cleaning product ratings – this one flashed subliminal images of taboo silhouettes while people rating cleaning products and non-cleaning products. We got this idea from the Macbeth Effect studies.

- nude art ratings – this was pretty simple and just involved getting photos of rather neutral art and nude art and have people rate the aesthetic quality of those photos.

**PHASE 3: Fundamentalism & Taboo – Behavioral Approach Tests**

This is a series of three studies. In the first two we are taking known taboo objects and having participants rate these for quality or aesthetics while we assess behavioral avoidance to the objects via time and distance. The third study will involve maze completion where the target is either a taboo or neutral object (e.g. help Joe find his keys vs help Joe find his beer).

**Presentations and publications from these studies include:**


Hiking Behavior Trail Ethics (Hudiburg, Bates, et al.)

This study is now in its second phase. In phase one, headed up by Mary Katherine Osborn, her team travelled to many hiking meccas and gave out carabineers engraved with our website address. Participants logged into the website, completed surveys concerning religion, environmental attitudes, hiking behavior, rate some photos for aesthetic appeal, and complete our newly constructed Hiking Behavior Trail Ethics Scale. Unfortunately our response was rather
limited (near 100 hikers out of 1000 carabineers given out). At this point, we are trying to write up our findings for publication.

In the second phase, we plan to actually place our questionnaires on handheld devices (tablets) and gather the data in the field. Hopefully, hikers won’t mind doing this while hanging out in a shelter or campsite. Our idea is to find correlates with good trail ethics. Presentations from these studies include


**Mysticism in Hiking Literature (Kersen, Bates, & Hudiburg)**

We are currently in the second phase of this study in which we are reading hiking literature about hikes on the Appalachian Trail and looking for instances of mysticism in those writings. This literature is extensive. In phase 1, we read 14 different trail books and presented that work. In phase 2, we are extending this to a total of about 28 books. This one is headed up by our good friend and sociologists, Dr. Michael Kersen at Jackson State University. Presentations include


**Hiking Fears (Hudiburg, Bates, et al.)**

This study is just getting started in which we are trying to develop a measure of fears that hikers might have while hiking (e.g. breaking a leg, vandalism of automobile, etc.). Learning from our earlier studies of hiking research, we’ll be collecting this data in the field.

**Bluegrass: Religion & Violence (Bates, Hudiburg, et al.)**

In this study we went and recorded several bluegrass festivals and are coding the performed songs for religious content and violence. Bluegrass seems to be almost wedded to religion, specifically Christianity, but paradoxically contains a significant amount of brutal violence in its content.