

PERSONALITY CORRELATES OF ONE'S IMAGE OF JESUS: HISTORIOGRAPHIC ANALYSIS USING THE FIVE-FACTOR MODEL OF PERSONALITY

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This research obtained ratings of Jesus on a comprehensive, well-validated personality instrument, the Adjective Check List. Ratings from 77 women and 38 men (ages 17 to 75) were obtained, and the resulting historiographic profile portrayed Jesus as being sympathetic and supportive of others, although he was perceived as maintaining an autonomous and detached presence. Using the five-factor model of personality as the organizing framework, we found that about 11% of the variance in the Jesus ratings overlapped with self-ratings of personality. We outlined the utility of historiographic analysis employing comprehensive models of personality by discussing it in terms of attachment theory.

Despite a written historical record, images of Jesus Christ remain fluid and subject to multiple cultural and personal influences. John Meier noted this phenomenon by commenting on "the legion of scholars who have peered narcissistically into the pool of the historical Jesus only to see themselves" (1991, p. 3). The same question could be asked of religious believers, namely, to what extent does their image of Jesus reflect aspects of their own nature? Aside from the critical methods of the historical sciences, empirical research on this specific issue is lacking. The only religious research relevant revolves around images of God (IOG).

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Although no study has yet examined the equivalence between images of Jesus and images of God, many Christian believers see Jesus as representing divinity. Image of God research, therefore, may suggest models for understanding images of Jesus.

Theoretical Overview

Three streams of thought in psychology relate to understanding the origins of IOG and their relations to human behavior. The first, *primary interpersonal*, reflects the earliest tradition and points to the influence of parental figures or primary care-givers. Freud (1913/1950) viewed the idea of God as an illusion traceable to the person's father-figure, and one that is laid down by age six. "[An individual's] personal relation to God depends on his relation to his father in the flesh and oscillates and changes along with that relation, and that at bottom God is nothing other than an exalted father" (p. 147).

Rizzuto (1979, 1980), also in the psychoanalytic tradition, nuanced Freud's position by pointing to both primary and secondary interpersonal sources in the formation of IOG. She viewed IOG as developing both from transformations of father-images and from the images of the person's faith community or theology. Using only case studies, she described "splits" within her patients' God-language. That is, patients, at times, spoke about God in the negative terms that reflected their harsh, disapproving fathers, and at other times described God using the more positive images of theology or religious tradition. She hypothesized that a negative IOG might be a marker and/or a cause of psychopathological con-

ditions such as depression. Social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1986), although clearly distinct from psychodynamic theory, also emphasizes the importance of observational learning and early social environments. This model predicts a relationship between instruction and belief.

Empirical studies have not supported any consistent influence for primary interpersonal agents. Studies find that IOG may be similar to: (a) the opposite-sex parent; (b) the preferred parent; (c) the same-sex parent; or (d) both parents (Birky & Ball, 1988; Godin & Hallez, 1965; Justice & Lambert, 1986; Nelson, 1971; Rizzuto, 1982; Tamayo & Dugas, 1977). Women, in particular, have an IOG more similar to the preferred parent (Spilka, Addison, & Rosensohn, 1975).

The second major area of interest, termed *secondary interpersonal* emphasizes the contributions of such environmental sources as faith groups, formal theology and creeds, as well as biblical and religious writings. Images of God are influenced, according to this model, by the sum of the various sociological influences on personal belief. Rizzuto noted the importance of these influences but she gave them little emphasis in her clinical model. Carroll (1992) found that increased levels of religious commitment were related to positive IOG. Similarly, Roberts (1989) found that church attendance was related to a nurturing IOG.

Self sources represents the third approach to understanding IOG. This tradition suggests that IOG is not just a reflection of a God "out there," but that God image results, in some measure, from a projection outward of the individual's personal characteristics. Empirical studies have linked various psychological self-qualities to IOG (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Gorsuch, 1969). For example, increased self-esteem and lowered sense of loneliness were positively related to perceptions of God as loving, supportive, and kindly, while decreased self-esteem and higher levels of loneliness were related to controlling and wrathful IOG (Benson & Spilka, 1973; Schwab & Petersen, 1990). Carroll (1992) has shown that higher levels of self-reported depressive symptomatology were positively related to a wrathful IOG.

Roberts (1989) found that people who viewed themselves as generous, sincere, and quick-to-forgive imagined God as nurturing, but those who saw themselves as suspicious of others viewed God as disciplining. Furthermore, he found that women were significantly more likely to view God as nurtur-

ing. Other research has shown correlations between trauma experiences and IOG. Kane, Cheston, and Greer (1993) found that adult female incest survivors perceived God as more distant than a group of matched controls. Doehring (1993) found a positive relationship between traumatization (childhood physical and/or sexual abuse) and viewing God as wrathful or absent. Reciprocally, she found a negative relationship between trauma and a loving IOG.

Kirkpatrick and Shaver (1992) summarized these research outcomes between self-perceptions and IOG as complementary. That is, a correspondence exists between self-rated individual differences and God perceptions. Specifically, individuals capable of forming and maintaining secure attachments with others reported greater religious commitment and a more positive IOG. Those with unstable or avoidant attachment styles maintain a more tenuous conception of God. Kirkpatrick and Shaver argued that understanding the process by which people form attachments with others will shed light on the kind of relationship they create with God.

Although the results of these diverse studies may be descriptively useful, their frequent reliance on measuring very specific and narrow aspects of both the God image and the self makes it difficult to integrate these findings with larger psychological constructs that could illuminate more meaningful insights into the perceived motivations of both God and the individual (Lawrence, 1987). In order to develop the theoretical depth necessary to express the psychological significance of one's IOG and its formative process, appeal must be made to measurement models of individual differences that reflect a wide spectrum of psychologically salient dimensions. Such a comprehensive framework would provide an interpretively rich nomological net for constructing a sophisticated portrait of how God is imaged.

Historiographic Analysis

Historiography is the use of psychological ratings of legendary or historical personages to delineate cultural archetypes or to create psychological portraits of individuals who have helped shape history. The resulting profiles "could be examined for modal trends, for contrasts between one figure and another, or for differences in the descriptions given by the participating respondents" (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983, p. 39). Historiography provides a methodology for capturing the perceived motivations of signifi-

cant others within a meaningful psychological context that is amenable to empirical inquiry.

The value of historiography rests on the quality of the instrument used for the analysis. The current study employed an established, well-validated adjective measure of personality: the Adjective Check List (ACL; Gough & Heilbrun, 1983). The 300 adjectives that comprise the ACL provide a broad descriptive base for characterizing an individual. Further, the scored scales are useful in highlighting internal sources of psychological motivation that are not directly inferable from the adjectives themselves.

The plethora of information generated by the ACL raises two important issues. First, the 33 scales of the ACL provide a tremendous amount of material to be processed, and the need exists for a framework for organizing this information in an efficient, psychologically meaningful way. Second, there could be other personality constructs that are noteworthy regarding images of God that are not contained in the ACL. The large number of ACL scales is not a guarantor of its comprehensiveness. In order to address these concerns, appeal would need to be made to a comprehensive taxonomy of personality. Such a structure would identify the basic, substantive elements of personality and would serve as a framework for organizing personological information.

The Five-Factor Model of Personality

Over the past 30 years, researchers have converged on the existence of five orthogonal trait dimensions that have been shown to constitute an adequate taxonomy of personality characteristics (Digman, 1990; Goldberg, 1993; McCrae & John, 1992). These dimensions have become known as the five-factor model of personality (FFM) and have been labeled: *Neuroticism*, the tendency to experience negative affect, such as anxiety, depression, and hostility; *Extraversion*, which reflects the quantity and intensity of one's interpersonal interactions; *Openness to Experience*, the proactive seeking and appreciation of new experiences; *Agreeableness*, the quality of one's interpersonal interactions along a continuum from compassion to antagonism; and, finally, *Conscientiousness*, the persistence, organization, and motivation exhibited in goal-directed behaviors (Costa & McCrae, 1985). These factors have been observed repeatedly in self and observer ratings. In fact, very strong cross-observer, cross-instrument convergence has been found, indi-

cating that these dimensions are not a product of any self-distortion or rater bias (McCrae & Costa, 1987; Piedmont, 1994). Further, these dimensions have been found to be extremely stable over the adult life span; 25-year stability coefficients indicate that 80% of the variance in these traits is unchanging, and 60% is estimated to remain constant over 50 years (Costa & McCrae, 1992, 1994). A large research base continues to document the ability of the FFM to provide a common language for conceptualizing and discussing the personological qualities that help define and direct the ongoing course of individual development (Costa, McCrae, & Dembroski, 1989; Costa, McCrae, & Holland, 1984; Magnus, Deiner, Fujita, & Pavot, 1993; McCrae & Costa, 1989a, 1989b; McCrae, Costa, & Piedmont, 1993; Ormel & Wohlfarth, 1991; Piedmont, 1993; Piedmont, McCrae, & Costa, 1992; Piedmont & Weinstein, 1994).

Given that the ACL is itself based in natural language, it is not surprising that all the ACL scales correlate significantly with at least one of the five-factor dimensions (Piedmont, McCrae, & Costa, 1991). Thus a FFM portrait of Jesus can be obtained from the ACL. Because subjects completed a measure of the FFM for themselves, correlations between these two sets of dimensions were calculated to determine the degree to which one's self conception of personality is related to one's image of Jesus.

Although this study is mostly exploratory in nature, given the above discourse we do hold three expectations. First, ratings of Jesus on the Adjective Check List will portray Jesus in a way that is consistent with traditional religious imagery. Second, when these ratings are evaluated in terms of the 33 scales on the Adjective Check List, additional motivational insights will emerge that show Jesus to possess characteristics reflective of a psychologically developed, emotionally mature individual. Finally, when these ratings are evaluated in relation to self-ratings of the five-factor personality dimensions, a significant amount of overlap will be found. At a minimum, self-rated levels of Neuroticism will be positively related to levels of emotional instability in Jesus.

METHOD

Subjects

Subjects consisted of 77 women and 38 men, ages 17 to 75 years ($M = 33.8$, $SD = 13.7$). Individuals were volunteers from traditional undergraduate courses and adult education courses from institu-

tions in the mid-west and east coast regions. A general adult sample of convenience was also included. These individuals were invited by the authors to participate and were mostly age 50 and above. On average, participants had 15 years of education (minimum 12–maximum 22) and were mostly Catholic (68%; Protestant, 25%; No religious affiliation, 7%). Given that this study evaluated images of Jesus, only those who indicated a current or previous Christian background were included. Individuals were asked to rate how religiously oriented they were on a 1 (*not at all religious*) to 7 (*very much religious*) Likert-type scale; a full range of scores were found ($M = 4.5$; $SD = 1.7$).

Measures

Adjective Check List (ACL). Developed by Gough and Heilbrun (1983), this measure consists of 300 adjectives from which individuals select those which are viewed as most self-descriptive. The Adjective Check List provides information on 33 scales from diverse theoretical orientations, including Murray's (1938) needs, Berne's (1961) Transactional Analysis, Welsh's (1975) Intellectence and Originence scales and several scales developed by Gough and Heilbrun (1983) to measure salient interpersonal qualities.

Using a panel of experts familiar with the five-factor model of personality, John (1990) created adjective marker scales for each dimension of the five-factor model by having these experts identify adjective Check List items representative of each dimension. These rational judgments were supported by empirical analyses that demonstrated both the convergence of these markers with other measures of the five-factor model (McCrae, 1994) and with relevant scales from the Adjective Check List (Piedmont, McCrae, & Costa, 1991). These five-factor marker scales were used in this study. Normative values for these scales were obtained from Piedmont (1989).

NEO Five-Factor Inventory (NEO-FFI). Developed by Costa and McCrae (1992) this 60-item questionnaire contains statements that assess the major dimensions of the five-factor model: Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness to Experience, Agreeableness, and Conscientiousness. Individuals rate each item on a 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*) Likert-type scale. Although intended as a short form for the larger, revised NEO Personality Inventory (NEO PI-R), scores on the NEO Five-Fac-

tor Inventory converge very well with domain scores from the NEO PI-R (from .77 for A to .92 for N; Costa & McCrae, 1992). Scores on the NEO Five-Factor Inventory show strong cross-observer validity and cross-time stability (Costa & McCrae, 1992).

Procedure

As part of a larger study on values, participants completed both the Adjective Check List and NEO Five-Factor Inventory. The order of these tests was counterbalanced to control for any order effects. The NEO Five-Factor Inventory was completed as a self-evaluation. The Adjective Check List provided an adjectival picture of Jesus, reflecting the kinds of impressions he generated in subjects. The profile of Jesus was then compared to self-rated personality profiles to evaluate the degree to which images of Jesus are related to one's own self structure.

Subjects completed the materials either at home or during class. Some subjects may have received course credit for their involvement. Once materials were collected, subjects were debriefed and thanked for their participation.

RESULTS

Descriptive statistics for the NEO Five-Factor Inventory scales revealed that the overall profile of this sample was well within normative values (mean T-scores between 49 and 52) with the exception of the Openness to Experience scale (mean T-score = 56). Such a high value is not surprising given the relatively high education level of the group. Although a demographically diverse sample, scores on the NEO Five-Factor Inventory show it to be representative. Two multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) failed to indicate any significant gender or religious affiliation effects concerning ratings of Jesus on the five factor dimensions, suggesting that subjects could be collapsed over these groups.

The first issue examined concerned the general perceptions of Jesus over the entire sample. Table 1 presents those adjectives used by over 80% of the sample as descriptive of Jesus as well as those items selected by less than 1% of the sample as being descriptive. Together, these items portray an image of who Jesus is and is not perceived to be.

Jesus was perceived to be a compassionate, considerate, warmly embracing individual. Although accepting, he was perceived as having many surgent qualities, such as being active and courageous, and

Table 1
Adjective Check List Items With High and Low Endorsement Frequencies (N = 115)

Adjective Check List Item Endorsement Frequencies				
High ^a			Low ^b	
active		alert	blustery	cruel
patient		understanding	quitting	rattlebrained
wise		peaceable	shiftless	unfriendly
capable		courageous	unintelligent	unkind
generous		warm	weak	dull
appreciative		considerate	hasty	infantile
intelligent		kind	slipshod	slow
gentle		dependable	smug	spineless
affectionate		friendly	undependable	whiny
honest		forgiving		

^a Adjective Check List items endorsed by more than 80% of the respondents.

^b Adjective Check List items endorsed by 1% or less of the respondents.

not spineless or whiny. At the other end of the spectrum, Jesus was not perceived as emotionally distressed, selfish, or slipshod.

In order to determine if these descriptive ratings of Jesus could be meaningfully understood within the context of well-defined psychological constructs, the Adjective Check List was scored for the 33 content scales and for the five-factor model markers. Results are presented in Table 2.

A distinct personality profile emerged (T-scores of 55 or greater and 45 or less are considered identifying). High scores on the Intracception and Nurture scales and a low score on the Femininity scale suggest that this sample perceived Jesus' inner world as being complex and differentiated. He was logical and foresighted. Although perceived as sympathetic and supportive of others, Jesus was seen as maintaining an autonomous and detached presence. Scores on the Heterosexuality, Counseling Readiness, Self-confidence, and Ideal Self scales portrayed a well-adjusted, self-confident, uninhibited individual who was compassionate, warm, and tender. The Transactional Analysis scales of Critical Parent and Nurturing Parent portrayed perceptions of Jesus as tolerant of the weaknesses of others, wanting to bring people together and to reduce conflicts among them. There was also the perception of Jesus as wanting to maintain a continuity in values and to foster increased feelings of respect among people, and to empower them.

In scoring the five-factor marker scales, perceptions of Jesus clearly reflect an emotionally stable,

confident, peaceful individual who maintains a compassionate, straightforward, tender orientation toward others. Secure and self-satisfied on the inside, he was perceived to be soft-hearted, forgiving, altruistic, and good-natured in his relations with others. Individuals high on Agreeableness and low on Neuroticism are perceived as trustful, tolerant, peaceful, generous, and charitable (Hofstee, de Raad, & Goldberg, 1992).

Clearly, the above ratings capture Jesus as a compassionate and loving individual. These ratings are certainly consistent with images of God found in many established religions. In order to determine if these ratings of Jesus have any relationship to one's self-perceptions, self-reported scores on the NEO Five-Factor Inventory were correlated with the Adjective Check List rating markers of the five-factors. The results are presented in Table 3.

There are numerous significant associations between one's self-ratings and one's ratings of Jesus' personality. Of interest is that one's level of education correlated significantly with ratings of Jesus' level of Neuroticism, $r(113) = -.27, p < .01$, and Conscientiousness, $r(113) = .20, p < .01$. More educated subjects saw Jesus as being more emotionally stable and dutiful than those with less education. Further, self-ratings of religiosity were significantly correlated with ratings of Jesus' levels of Conscientiousness, $r(113) = .26, p < .01$. Individuals claiming to be very involved religiously perceived Jesus as more dutiful, self-disciplined, and deliberate than did less reli-

Table 2
Historiographic Profile of Jesus (N = 115)

Adjective Check List SCALE	MEAN T-SCORE	Adjective Check List PROFILE				
		40	45	50	55	60
NEED SCALES						
Achievement	54					
Dominance	54					
Endurance	54					
Order	51					
Intracception	55					
Nurturance	59					
Affiliation	54					
Heterosexuality	55					
Exhibition	50					
Autonomy	49					
Aggression	47					
Change	48					
Succorance	49					
Abasement	48					
Deference	49					
TOPICAL SCALES						
Counseling Readiness	45					
Self-Control	50					
Self-Confidence	55					
Personal Adjustment	55					
Ideal Self	60					
Creative Personality	52					
Military Leadership	52					
Masculinity	49					
Femininity	44					
TRANSACTIONAL ANALYSIS						
Critical Parent	45					
Nurturing Parent	56					
Adult	52					
Free Child	53					
Adapted Child	46					
ORIGINENCE-INTELLECTENCE						
A-1	51					
A-2	49					
A-3	51					
A-4	49					
FIVE-FACTOR MODEL MARKER SCALES^a						
Neuroticism	43					
Extraversion	51					
Openness to Experience	49					
Agreeableness	57					
Conscientiousness	52					

^a Norms used for standardization from Piedmont (1989).

Table 3
Correlations Between Self-ratings on the NEO-FFI and Adjective Check List Five-Factor Ratings of Jesus (N = 115)

Self-rating Variables	Adjective Check List Christ Ratings					Multiple R
	N	E	O	A	C	
NEO-FFI Neuroticism (N)	.18*	.14	-.09	-.09	-.15	.24
NEO-FFI Extraversion (E)	-.24**	.07	.21*	.18*	.27**	.33*
NEO-FFI Openness (O)	-.15	.17 ^a	.23**	.01	-.05	.32*
NEO-FFI Agreeableness (A)	-.19*	-.19*	.06	.08	.17 ^a	.28
NEO-FFI Conscientiousness (C)	-.05	-.04	-.10	.01	.05	.16
Religiosity	-.13	-.09	.16 ^a	.07	.26**	.31*
Education Level ^b	-.27**	-.03	.07	.08	.20**	.32*
Multiple R	.39**	.33 ^a	.40**	.21	.41**	

* $p < .10$.

^b Age has been partialled out from these scores.

^a $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ two-tailed.

giously committed subjects.

In order to determine the degree of overlap between the self-reports and the Adjective Check List ratings of Jesus, two series of multiple regression analyses were undertaken. The first series used each Adjective Check List marker scale as the dependent variable and entered the seven self-rated dimensions as predictors. The resulting multiple *R*s are presented at the bottom of each column. These values indicate the amount of variability in each Adjective Check List dimension that is associated with self-rated personality. The next series of regressions used each of the self-rated variables as the criterion and entered the five Adjective Check List marker scales as the predictors. These analyses indicate the degree to which each self-assessment dimension contributed to Jesus' Adjective Check List profile. The obtained multiple *R*s are presented in the last column of Table 3.

Looking down each column of Table 3 it is clear that, with the exception of Agreeableness, self-rated perceptions of personality are significantly associated with perceptions of Jesus' personality. The lack of associations found with Agreeableness may be a function of restriction of range on that dimension, in that Jesus' interpersonal orientation is very much determined by popular images of who God is supposed to be (i.e., loving and caring). In looking across each row, it is seen that subjects' dimensions of Extraversion and Openness to Experience had the most influence in forming their impressions of Jesus.

The outgoing, empathic style of these subjects coincided with an image of Jesus that was secure, emotionally stable, and empathic as well. A redundancy analysis indicated that 11% of the variability in the ratings of Jesus was associated with subjects' self-perceptions, a moderate sized association (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Stepdown *F* tests indicated that it was the self-rated dimensions of Extraversion, $F(5, 108) = 2.67, p < .05$; Openness, $F(5, 107) = 2.43, p < .05$; and Religiousness, $F(5, 104) = 2.22, p < .05$, that constituted the overlap with ratings of Jesus.

DISCUSSION

Based on the psychological meanings of the Adjective Check List scales (Gough & Heilbrun, 1983), a personological sketch can be drawn of Jesus' personality. Overall, the results presented here portray Jesus to be imaged as a caring and concerned individual who yet maintains a degree of detachment from those around him. In some ways, this profile is reflective of the self-actualized person as described by Maslow (1970). The acceptance and compassion for others is balanced by a need for privacy; he has a concern to bring others into harmonious relationships while not always encouraging stereotypic roles and values. No doubt the historiographic profile that emerged here reflects a Jesus who is perceived to have a complex inner world.

In many ways this profile reaffirms biblical presentations of Jesus. That such perceptual consistency is found within our relatively heterogeneous sample

underscores the power of these New Testament images. Yet despite such influence, the results show that individuals do not veridically internalize these portrayals. Perceptions of Jesus are significantly related to the needs and temperaments of the individuals themselves. The exploratory nature of these data do not answer the why or how of this process; this is a task for future research to pursue, but the findings do offer some interesting hypotheses.

Using the five-factor model of personality as a measurement paradigm for research in this area provides two advantages. First, to date, most studies have related IOG to mostly negative characteristics (e.g., depression, self-esteem), which occupy only a limited bandwidth in the larger spectrum of personality functioning. By including more diverse individual difference variables, we were able to identify Extraversion and Openness to Experience as other significant correlates. Thus, the multidimensional nature of religious images can be better evaluated. Second, the FFM represents a salient set of psychological constructs that can provide a useful empirical and heuristic context for discussing the perceived qualities of religious figures. By using the established language of the FFM, future researchers make it possible to integrate their results with the theories and findings of the larger scientific community.

The present study parallels findings similar to those with IOG. Our results are consistent with findings that have linked self-esteem, depression, and traumatization experiences to IOG (e.g., Carroll, 1992; Kane et al., 1993; Spilka et al., 1975). That the personality dimensions of Extraversion and Openness emerged as the primary predictors of one's image of Jesus is particularly consistent with attachment theory (Kirkpatrick, 1992; Kirkpatrick & Shaver, 1992). These dimensions reflect an individual's levels of warmth, gregariousness, empathy, and acceptance—qualities which underlie an ability to seek out, form, and maintain emotionally sustaining relationships with others. Not only do these findings support the complementarity model proposed by attachment theory, but they also show that ratings of Jesus will provide insights into people similar to those obtained with an IOG paradigm.

Although there can be no doubt that perceptions of divine figures are influenced by many variables, this study has determined that one's own personality accounts for about 11% of the variance in ratings of Jesus, a moderate sized effect (Cohen & Cohen, 1983). Although attachment theory provides a com-

plementary explanation of the origin of this complementarity, future research needs to study further the parameters of this reciprocity. For example, does the complementarity between self-personality and IOG represent something special about one's relationship to a divine figure, or is such overlap merely a general phenomenon found in ratings of other personages religious or otherwise (e.g., saints, historical figures)? If extending historiographic analysis to these other figures reveals that personality's overlap with their ratings varies as a function of emotional intimacy (i.e., complementarity is stronger for religious and personal attachment figures than for non-intimate acquaintances), then attachment theory would prove an invaluable asset for furthering our understanding of how and why people make religious commitments.

Another intriguing test of the propensity to project self into images of Jesus would be to contrast historiographs representative of biblical scholars with those of believers from diverse faith communities. This might provide interesting empirical data on the age-old question of the relationship between the Jesus of history and the Jesus of faith. Such a test, however, requires appreciating the limits of scholarly consensus about the historical Jesus (Meier, 1991). In this way empirical research may obtain a more complete picture of the impact religious writings, community beliefs, and self-psychology have on faith images. The present study provides a methodology to address these questions.

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