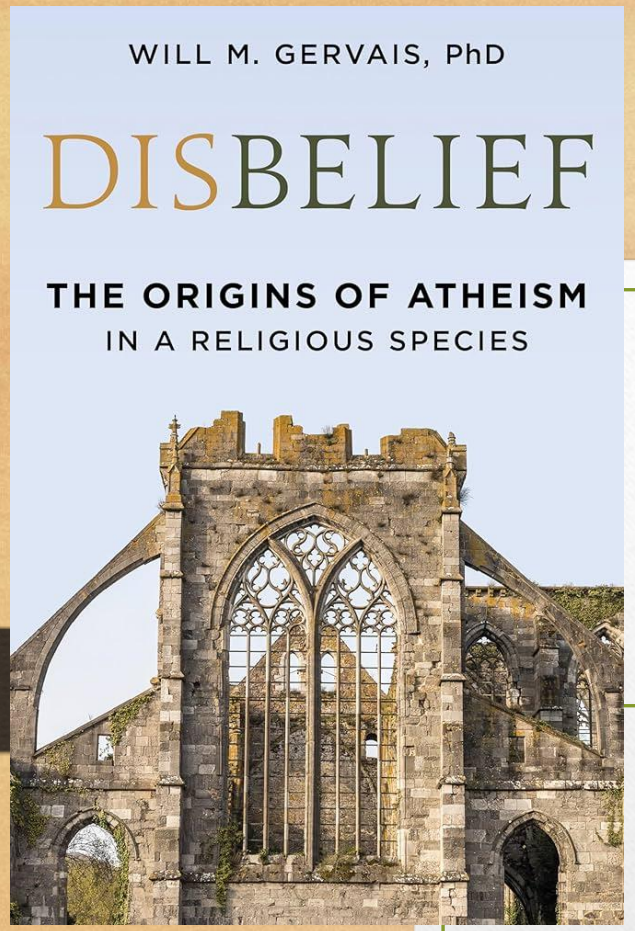


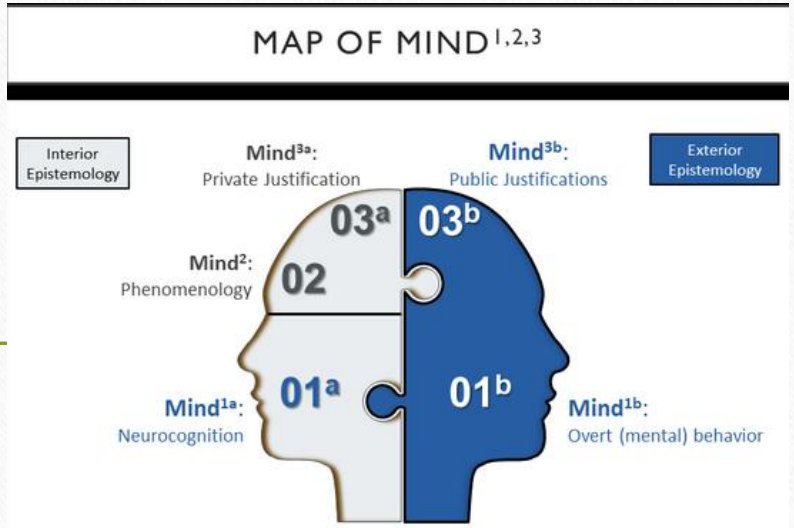
Scientific Study of Religion 6

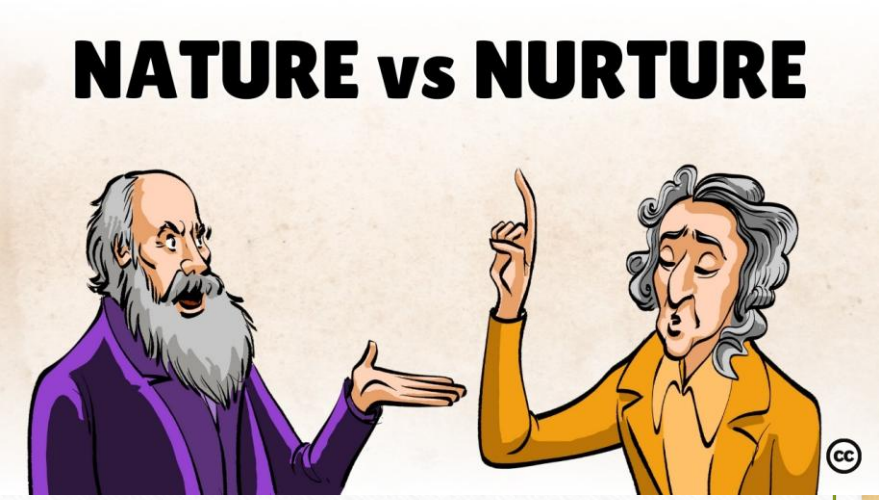
Dr. Saeed Garmaroudi



Previously discussed

- Blank slate vs. mental structure
- Cultural evolution
- General features of evolution
  - Variability- Cartesian mind
  - Selection – Works better/more memorable
  - Inheritance – Learning and teaching
- Three metaphors
  - Sponge, Sieve, Strategic seeker





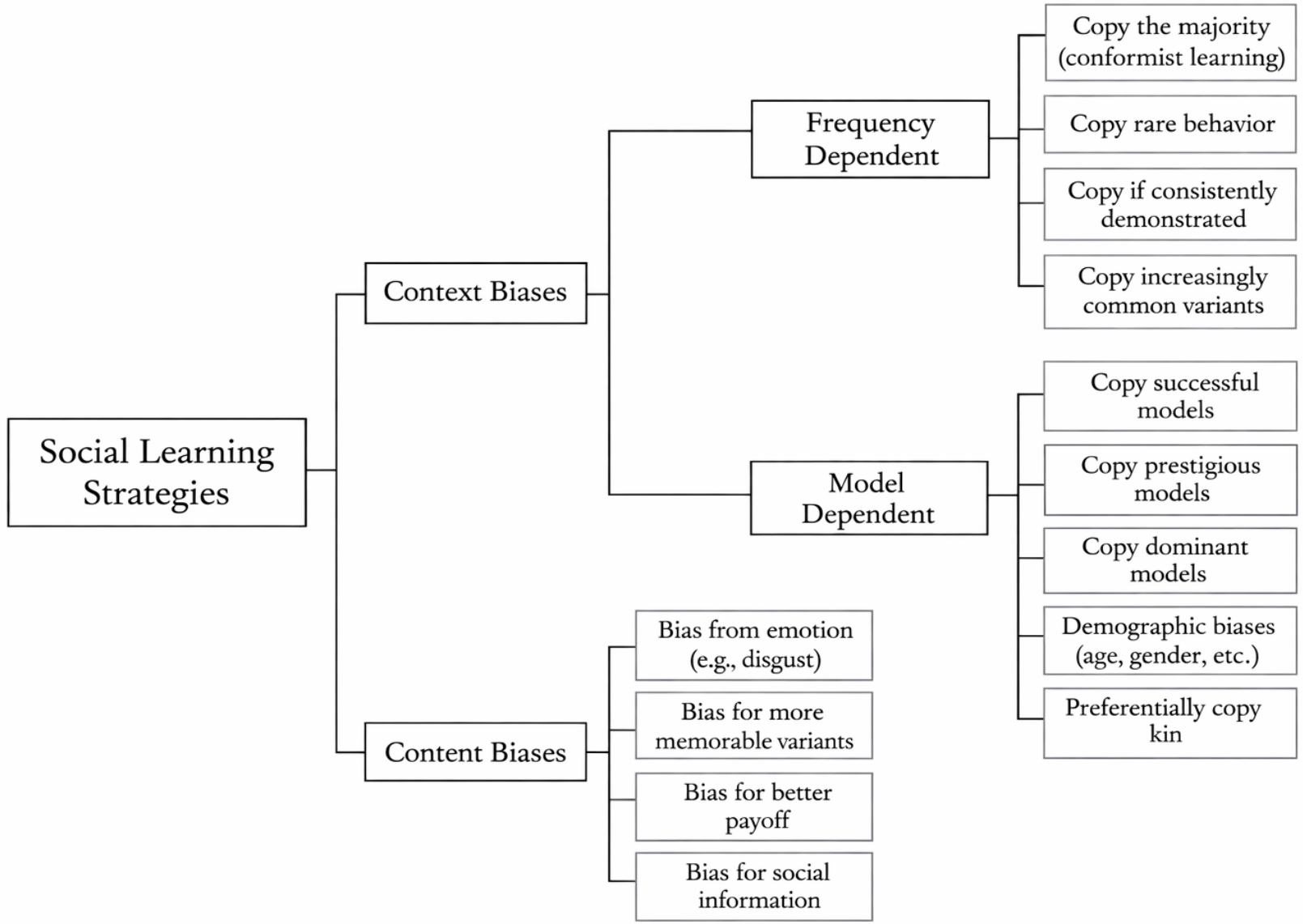
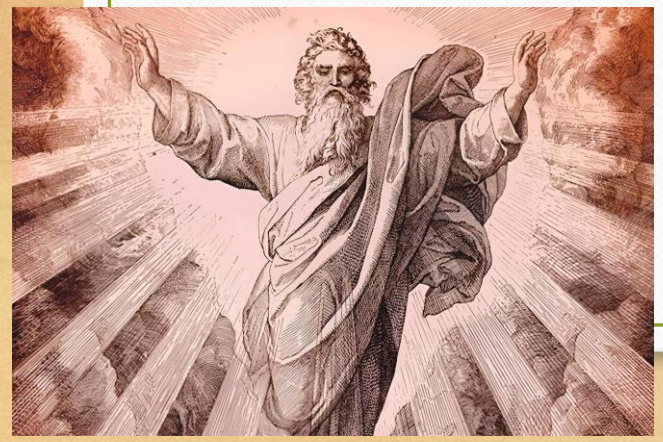


Figure 5.1. Social learning strategies. *Source:* R. L. Kendal, N. J. Boogert, L. Rendell, K. N. Lala, M. Webster, and P. L. Jones, "Social Learning Strategies: Bridge-Building between Fields," *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 22, no. 7 (2018): 651–65.

What causes belief?

- Mickey Mouse, Santa Claus, Zeus, and Yahweh
- Content biases?
- Very different pattern of belief






The Mickey Mouse Problem

- Minimally counterintuitive
  - Usual properties we associate with mousehood,
  - Also has humanlike psychology



Santa

- If it is all about content, why isn't Santa a God
- Justin Barrett/ anthropomorphism
  - A rock that hovers in the air
  - A rock that can talk and engage in intentional actions
  - Agents who can possess strategic information
  - Agents who have detectable interactions with our world
  - motivates ritual practice



Criticism of Barret

- There are plenty of ancestor gods whose knowledge isn't especially strategic, or whose interactions with the world aren't especially impactful.
- It stops well short of specifying that key missing ingredient why Santa Claus is not a god



The Zeus Problem

- We can learn about his minimal counterintuitive features, his strategic knowledge, his ability to interact with our world— and still not come to believe in Zeus.
- But crucially they tend to believe in only the gods of their group.



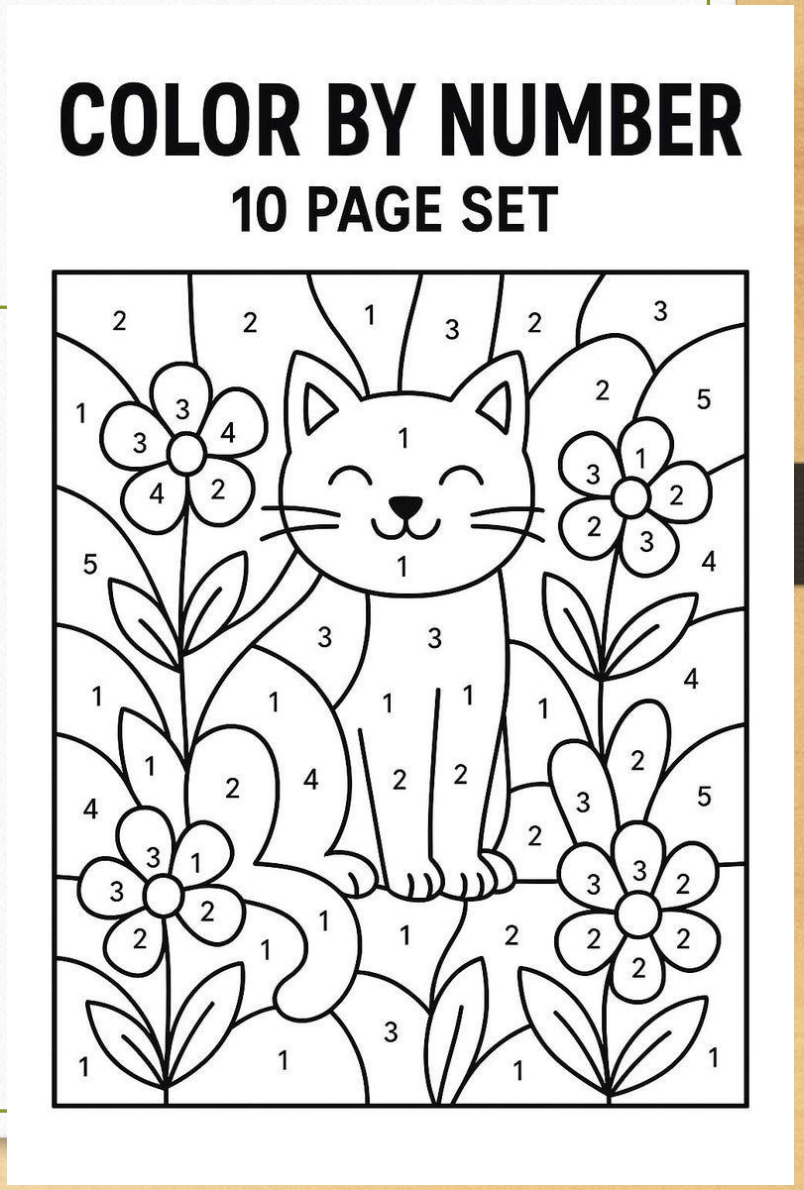
The Zeus Problem

- Papa Gede, Vishnu, Mithra, Papatūānuku, Senawahv, Yahweh, or Zeus—without coming to believe in any of them.
- When people from different religions run into each other, why don't they leave believing in both their original gods and the gods of their new friends?



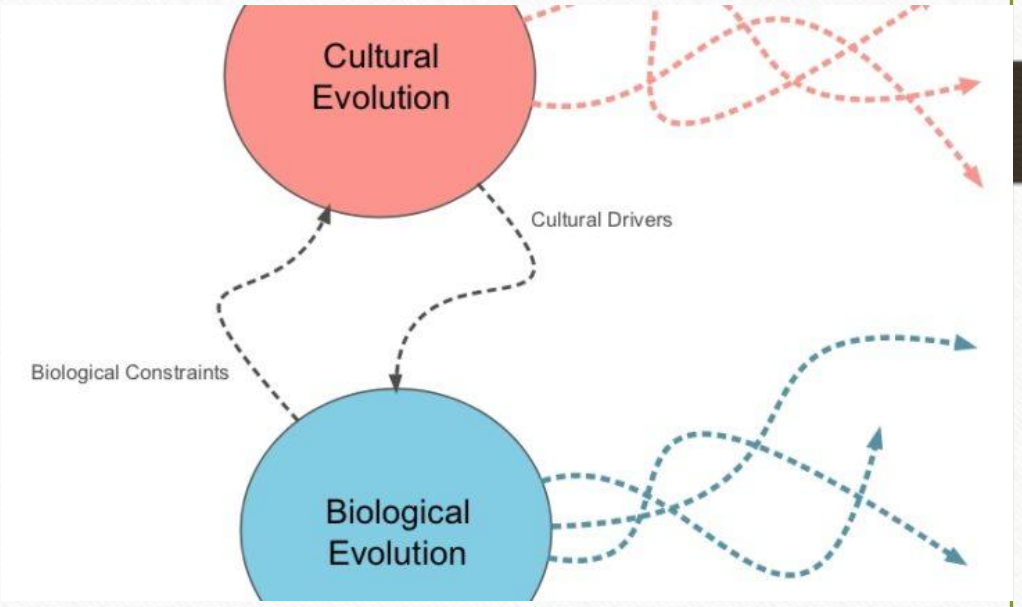
Is it all about content?

- Why people nowadays believe in Yahweh but not Santa Claus.
- Why Christians or Sikhs today don't start believing in Zeus
    - Jehovah's Witnesses



Dual inheritance theory

- Two parallel and interacting streams of inheritance:
  - One genetic, one cultural.
- Conformist transmission
- Prestige-biased transmission
- CREDs allow people to prove their faith with their behavior.



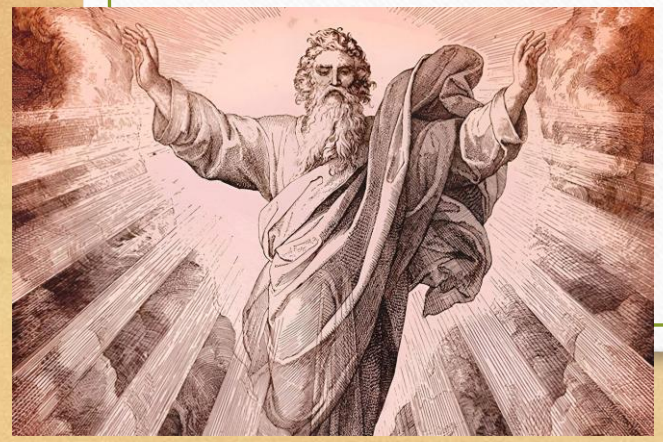
Growing up in a religious context

- As a learner, you're getting wave after wave of consistent context-based cues that you ought to believe in this god, and only this god.



Mickey, Santa, and Zeus Revisited

- Micky may or may not have the right content to inspire belief, but he has never enjoyed the context that breeds belief.
- As kids grow older, Santa's content remains identical, yet belief in him dwindles to zero.
- They stop seeing consistent and credible cues that other people believe in Santa









Conclusion

- content biases constrain what gods are about, context biases determine degrees of belief in them.
- Isn't This Just Childhood Gullibility?
- Religion Is All About Indoctrination?
- Harry Potter Character
- Star wars



Transformative learning

- “Perspective transformation"
  - Psychological (changes in understanding of the self),
  - Convictional (revision of belief systems),
  - Behavioral (changes in lifestyle)

Figure 1. Explaining different types of identification among Amway distributors via the success and failure of sensebreaking and sensegiving practices.

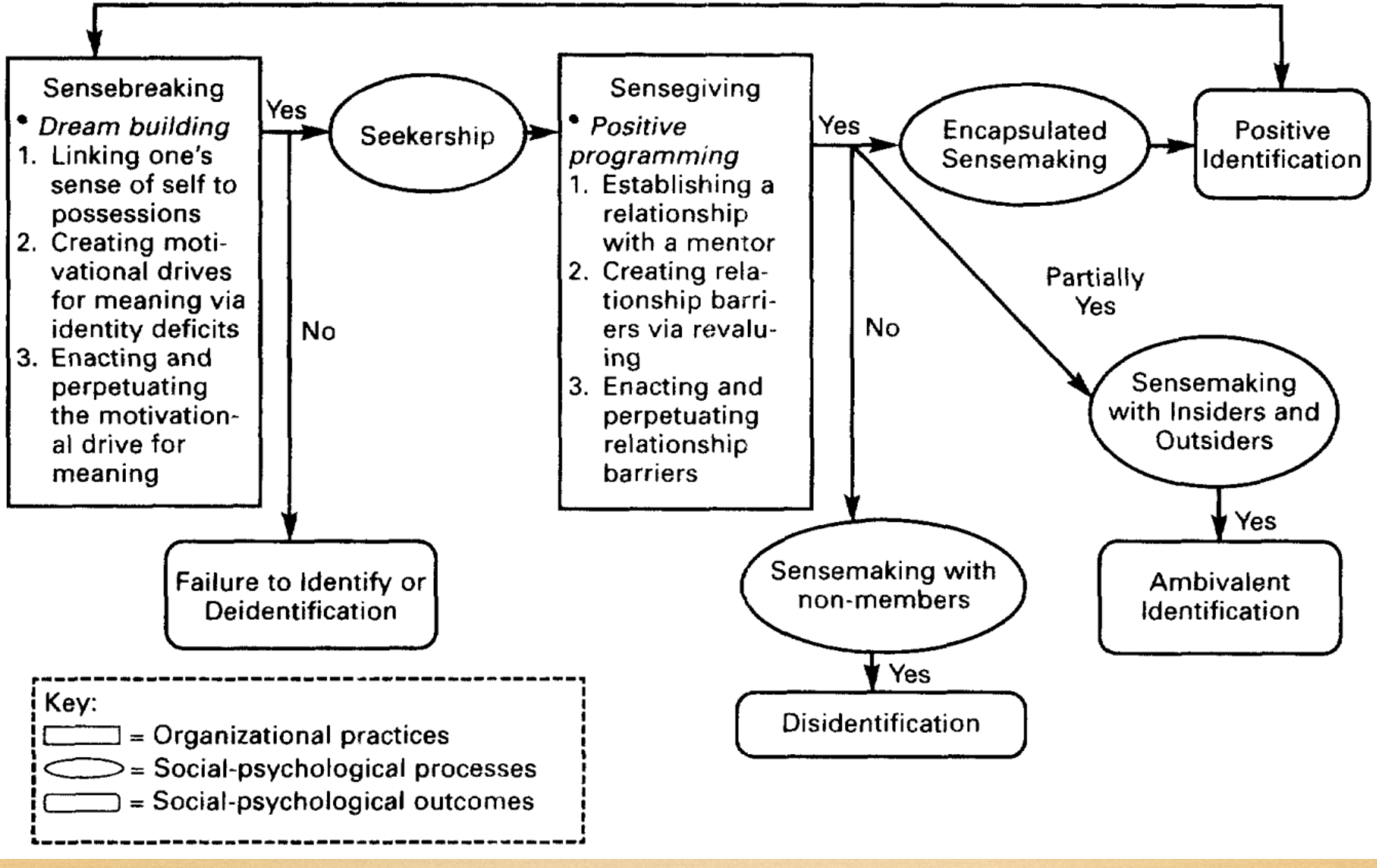
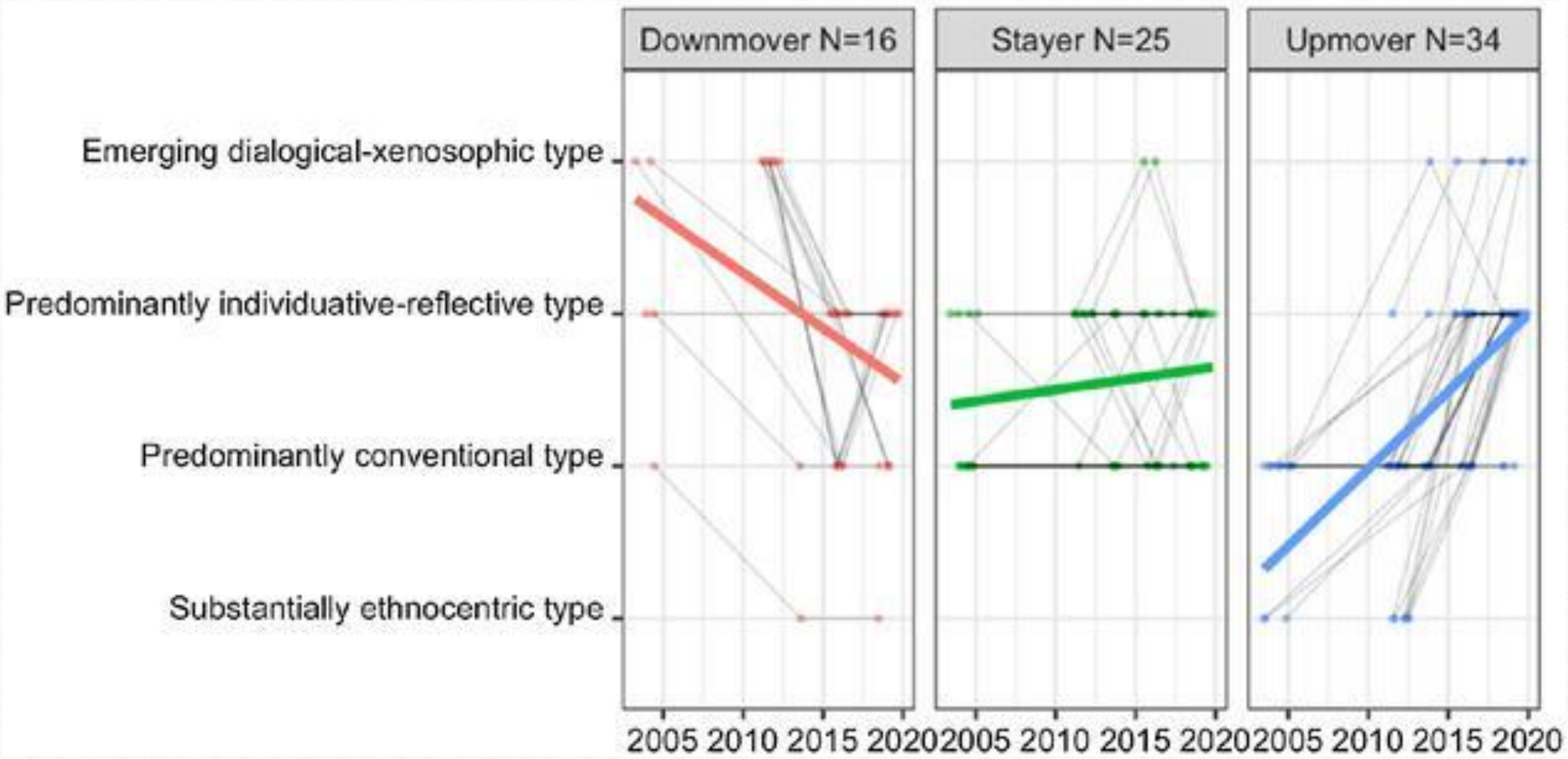


Table 1.1 Typology of religion and spirituality

	Religiosity	
	High Engaged, Participatory (US Percentage)	Low Disengaged, Uninvolved (US Percentage)
Spirituality		
High	Traditional Integrated (59–74%)	Spiritual Seeker Individualistic (14–20%)
Low	Cultural Dogmatic (4–15%)	Uninterested or Antagonistic (3–12%)

Note: Figures for relative proportions are from multiple US studies as reported by Marler & Hadaway (2002). For use of the terms "Spiritual Seeker" and "Dogmatic" see Roof (2003).


Downmover N=16
Stayer N=25
Upmover N=34
Emerging dialogical-xenosophic type
Predominantly individuative-reflective type
Predominantly conventional type
Substantially ethnocentric type
2005 2010 2015 2020
2005 2010 2015 2020
2005 2010 2015 2020

- Model-dependent social learning
- Imaginal function
- Spiritual experience
- Chaos-order

