What Do Religion Scholars Really Want? Scholarly Values in the Scientific Study of Religion

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This article presents selected findings of the Values in Scholarship on Religion (VISOR) project. Conversations about the values and norms that ought to shape the academic study of religion are quite common but typically based on anecdotal evidence and personal experience. The goal of VISOR was to gather data that could ground debates about the values that scholars of religion prize. Here, we present statistical analyses of VISOR data that shed light on the values guiding members of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR) and the ways in which these compare with the values of members of other academic associations and other disciplines that study religion. Compared to current members of SSSR, members of the broader field of scholars whose approach to religion is sociological are more likely to be younger, female, liberal, and nonreligious. This sea change will put pressure on the SSSR to adapt.

Keywords: scientific study of religion, sociology, surveys, academic values, field self-studies.

INTRODUCTION

Scholars who study religion often disagree strongly over the values that ought to guide their academic work. Researchers within and across disciplines debate which methods to use, which audiences to target, the extent to which an individual's own religious faith should influence his or her scholarship, and even how to define their object of study. However, it appears to us that the environment within which these conversations typically play out is somewhat like that of an extended family gathering at a reunion: Some want to avoid discussing these disciplinary tensions, while others won't stop talking about it. Most scholars of religion seem to be aware of the quite different values that characterize the broader field, but there is no general agreement about what to do about it. Almost all members of this "extended family" of academics share common scholarly values such as commitment to critical self-reflection, openness to correction,

and a desire to avoid conflict of interest. However, there is no consensus on a host of other issues, such as whether scholars of religion should pursue the same sort of intellectual and coalitional impartiality as scholars in other disciplines in the secular academy, or whether critically reflective scholarship of religion in the academy can (or ought) to be in the service of religious communities.

Tensions around this last question were already evident among the early members of the Committee for the Scientific Study of Religion (founded in 1949), which later became the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion (SSSR), and members of the Religious Research Fellowship (founded in 1951), which later became the Religious Research Association (RRA). The former institution was focused primarily on the *scientific* study of religion whereas the latter was focused primarily on promoting research that could serve the *ecclesiastical* needs of the Federal Council of Churches. In his brief history of the development of SSSR up to 1974, William M. Newman indicated that when reviewing the documents among and between the founding members of those institutions during those years "one cannot escape the impression that the academicians were overly cautious about affiliating with the churchmen" (Newman 1974:142). He noted with apparent irony that although the SSSR wanted to "maintain its 'scientific' status apart from any religious institutional auspices," in its joint endeavors with RRA, it was in fact "cooperating with religious functionaries" (1974:145).

These tensions are sometimes suppressed in public discourse or discussed in whispered conversations at conferences and behind closed doors at organizational board meetings, but they can also suddenly burst into the open in loud conversations at conference hotel bars or in open debates at association business meetings. This has led to some notable conflicts that continue to be problematic for pedagogical, political, and job placement realities in the associated disciplines. For example, academics from other fields can perceive departments of religious studies as promoting religion, which seems to have a negative impact on the reputation of other scholars within the wider academy who engage in the scientific study of religion. These differences in scholarly values have serious practical ramifications, and we believe it is important to bring such concerns to the surface and examine them with the aid of insight-generating data.

We developed and executed the Values in Scholarship on Religion (VISOR) project to gather and analyze empirical data on the similarities and differences in values within and across the relevant disciplines and associations, so that the broader community of scholars who study religion might make progress toward a shared and stable understanding of the types of values that shape the field. By providing information about actual scholarly values across a wide variety of subdisciplines, the VISOR project aims to help foster a more transparent and informed conversation around the academic table about the fundamental assumptions and worldviews that divide (and unite) us as scholars of religion.

This article presents our initial analyses of VISOR data, which includes findings from four surveys on scholarly values. Our focus here is on the distinctiveness of the values found among members of SSSR compared to members of other associations and subdisciplines in the academic study of religion. We report on the findings most relevant to scholars engaging topics of the sort regularly discussed in the *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* (JSSR). Our goal was not (and is not) to defend or promote any particular values, beyond the values of self-awareness and mutual understanding.

Rather, we aim to discover and clarify the different virtues that are prized in actual scholarly work in the academic study of religion, and to assess the extent to which specific values are embraced or resisted by scholars of religion in various contexts. Documentation of the different ways in which researchers prioritize these virtues can serve as a "mirror" to help promote self-awareness and conversation among scholars within and among the fields that study religion. Before describing the VISOR project in more detail, we first briefly outline what seem like major fault lines between the value priorities within and across some of the relevant scholarly associations.

Scholarly Values in the SSSR

Above, we highlighted one of the tensions identified by Newman in his description of the early history of SSSR. As he pointed out, the organization went through a succession of statements about its goals over the years, each of which placed "stronger emphasis upon the scientific rather than the apologetic aspect of studying religion" (1974:139). In contrast, during the early history of the RRA, many of its members and leaders felt some ambivalence about being linked to the more secular and self-consciously "objective-scientific" SSSR, and preferred cooperation with "colleges and universities with strong religious ties" and "academic scholars who openly profess commitment to some faith" (Hadden 1974:131). Charles Glock, one of the many scholars active in both groups, attributed the fact that the two groups began holding their annual meetings together in the 1970s (which they still do) to the wisdom of the "founding fathers" of both groups (Glock 2000:425).

However, Glock also noted the shifts in the self-descriptive language of the SSSR over the years. The first statement of the association, written when it was still called the Committee for the Scientific Study of Religion, began by affirming the following goal: "bringing together the social scientist and the religious person." Later, "religious person" became "religious scholar," and by 1966 the objective read: "to stimulate intercommunication between students of religion and social scientists." But as Glock noted, this raises a host of questions. "Just why *religious scholar* was substituted for *religious person* is not known . . . why did they want religious scholars in the Committee? And, who were they talking about? What constitutes a religious scholar?" (Glock 2000:424). This surfaces the sort of question that the VISOR project was developed to help answer: What do scholars who study religion think *ought* to characterize a scholar who studies religion?

Quite different characteristics seem to have been valued by early members of the SSSR and the RRA: "The fact that SSSR members by and large insisted that the roles of faith and science were independent and that RRA members insisted on seeing the two as integral seemed to reinforce the gap between the two groups" (Hadden 1974:132). As evidence for this early tension, Hadden cites these notes from the January 1964 Board meeting of the RRA:

> What are [the] differences in the function of RRA and SSSR? RRA is ecclesiastically oriented; SSSR, academically oriented . . . There is some fear in SSSR of the bias which the religiously oriented person brings to such an organization. RRA is interested in bringing the theory and methods and empirical approach of social science research to the service of organized religion. We have assumed that the bias of the person interested in religion is no more dangerous than the person who is anti-religious. (131)

Hadden concluded: "Just as the RRA consists largely of religious functionaries who also have strong social scientific commitments, so the SSSR consists largely of academicians who have strong religious interests, if not commitments" (150-51). This may have been true in 1974, but is it still true of the SSSR today? VISOR is an attempt to block out the glare so we can see ourselves in the mirror well enough to answer this sort of question.

Eileen Barker touched on these issues in her presidential address to the SSSR, titled "The Scientific Study of Religion? You Must be Joking!" (Barker 1995). Her main topic was the way in which the "meta-values that lie at the basis of a scientific study of religion" could be affected by methods that include social involvement or trying to "make a difference" in society with (or as a result of) one's research (287). She noted that some scholars have been threatened by her (and others') claims "to have a more 'scientific' – or at least a more balanced, objective, and accurate – or, at the very least, a less biased, subjective, and wrong – understanding" of religious movements (288). One of the values that Barker saw as common among SSSR members was support for the idea that "the constructs of social science *exclude theological judgments* . . . social scientists *qua* social scientists have to remain *methodologically agnostic*" (295; emphasis in original). The

specific aims may differ from scholar to scholar, but "most would agree that they wish to present as accurate, objective, and unbiased account as possible" (294). Do "most" SSSR members agree about this today? VISOR is an attempt to answer this sort of question.

Scholarly Values in Other Professional Organizations

Of course, SSSR does not define itself merely in relation to the RRA, whose members are likely more comfortable including theological judgments in their scholarship. The SSSR is one of many academic associations devoted to the study of religion, the largest of which is the American Academy of Religion (AAR). Interestingly, the SSSR does not even list the AAR on its page of dozens of organizations related to the scientific study of religion (as of June 28, 2019: http://www.sssrweb.org/links.cfm). Founded in 1963, the AAR now boasts over 9,000 members. It has a longer history, running back to 1909 when the Association of Biblical Instructors (after 1922, the National Association of Biblical Instructors) was conceived and founded. These days, the AAR clearly states that it "neither endorses nor rejects any religious belief or practice" (www.aarweb.org), which is a sharp contrast to the commitments of its antecedent organizations.

The pluralistic approach of the AAR, its inclusion of scholars involved in religious organizations and religiously affiliated universities and colleges, and its emergence from an organization devoted to biblical instruction and the cultivation of religious virtues have provoked confusion and dissent. This appears to have been one of several reasons for the decision, beginning in 2008, to end the long tradition of joint meetings with the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL), a decision that was subsequently modified to meeting concurrently in the same city at the same time from 2011 onward. The complex standing of the AAR in relation to the interests of living religious traditions provoked the founding of a smaller alternative academic organization, the North American Association for the Study of Religion (NAASR) in 1985. In its founding document, two of the initial organizers of NAASR, Luther Martin and Don Wiebe, explained how (in their view) the failure of the AAR to embody academic values in the study of religion led to the founding of NAASR (http://www.naasr.com/Establishingabeachhead.pdf).

So far, there has not been any publicly documented charge against SSSR analogous to the accusations NAASR leveled at the AAR. The SSSR does not explicitly address these tensions about the various forms of the study of religion on its website. Neither does the AAR. But the sentiments are very real and directly influence the practical realities of doctoral training, job appointments, research funding, and departmental reputations in the setting of secular universities.

SSSR has historically been distinguished from other professional associations of scholars of religion by its emphasis on sociology (over psychology) of religion, an emphasis that is evident in the pages of the *JSSR*. The SSSR's executive council minutes record discussions of the need to redress this problem but relatively few psychologists of religion attend the annual SSSR meetings even today, and they informally report "not quite fitting in" when they do. Similarly, scholars who take biological and evolutionary approaches in the scientific study of religion, a group that has grown considerably since 1990, sometimes privately express that they do not feel fully recognized within the SSSR.

It seems to be more than mere institutional momentum within the SSSR that keeps the psychological and biocultural approaches at arms' length (even while formally welcoming them). Many influential SSSR members are perceived as thinking that only sociologists of religion are doing *real* scientific study of religion, and as dismissive of psychological and biocultural approaches, which they view as compromising academic and scientific ideals. This contrasts with Barker's observation in her presidential address to the SSSR that "social science cannot claim to be as 'scientific' as the natural sciences," although she immediately added that "it is unquestionably more scientific than its competitors" (301).

The VISOR project was designed to yield data about the actual academic values we scholars of religion share (and those we do not) in order to move this important conversation forward. In

what follows, we utilize statistical analyses of the VISOR data to help us begin to answer two broad research questions: In what ways do the academic values of members of the SSSR differ from the values of other scholars who study religious groups? And, in what ways do the values of scholars who primarily use "sociological" approaches to religion differ from scholars whose approaches are grounded in other disciplines or whose academic identities (AIs) are tied to other professional associations?

<div align="center">RESEARCH STRATEGY AND METHODS</div>

In this section, we describe the survey tools we used, the processes of recruitment, a brief description of our respondents, and an explanation of statistical analysis process. First, however, we lay out the general framework used for conceptualizing and distinguishing between clusters of scholars in the academic study of religion. We realize that disciplinary boundaries can be highly contested, and do not claim that our categorizations are ideal for all purposes. We do not intend for these categorizations to be normative. Our goal was instead to identify reasonably distinct groups in the academic study of religion in a way that could generate insights through meaningful statistical analysis and thereby lead to a fruitful conversation about scholarly values in the relevant fields.

Based on the self-descriptions of VISOR participants in the Academic Identity Survey (AIS), we have four ways of making group contrasts.

- **Affiliation Groups** are based on current and former membership in scholarly organizations. Affiliation Groups may overlap but the groups used for comparison always eliminate overlaps. For this article, the key Affiliation Groups are Sociology (including members of the SSSR and the Association for the Sociology of Religion [ASR]; variable name ai_af_soc) and Psychology (including members of the American Philosophical Association and the International Association for the Psychology of Religion; ai_af_psy). We compare these using a variable (ai_af_psyvssoc) that reflects current affiliations and excludes people who are currently members of both Affiliation Groups, creating a nonoverlapping contrast.
- **Specialization Groups** are based on participant answers to the question about which of six specializations they most strongly identify with (ethics, groups, histories, ideas, minds, texts; see below for descriptions). These are nonoverlapping groups, so comparing them is straightforward. For this article, the key Specialization Groups are Groups (ai_spec_groups) and Minds (ai_spec_minds) and the comparison runs through a combined variable (ai_spec_mindsvsgroups).
- **Specialization-Mentioned Groups** are derived from whether participants mention one of the six Specialization Groups as their first, second, or third priority, ignoring the summary self-classification used to generate the Specialization Groups. These groups overlap significantly and, being larger than Specialization Groups, may reflect the actual research and teaching activities of scholars more accurately. For this article, the key Specialization-Mentioned Groups are Groups Mentioned (ai_spec_groupsmentioned) and Minds Mentioned (ai_spec_mindsmentioned). The comparison eliminates overlaps and runs through a combined variable (ai_spec_mindsmentionedvsgroupsmentioned).
- Finally, **AAR Cluster Groups** are based on information provided by participants about their current and former AAR unit attendance patterns. These Cluster Groups naturally overlap significantly. For this article, the key AAR-Cluster Groups are Society-Focused (ai_aarcl_34_thm_soci) and Scientific-Study-of-Religion-Focused (ai_aarcl_15_tma_scie).

The six specializations we created for classifying scholars of religion need a word of explanation. Although scholars in different contexts might be studying the same basic phenomenon or dimension of religion, their approaches and relation to values within the secular academy are

often quite different. Nevertheless, it seemed clear to us that various categories of scholars of religion can be identified by looking at the primary focus of their research, as follows.

- **Studying Religious Texts** (variable name: ai_spec_texts): Subclusters include Torah studies, Christian biblical studies, Qur'anic studies, Vedic studies, Confucian and Taoist classics, and comparative religious texts. Some scholars who study sacred documents are in religious studies or philology departments in large state or private, secular universities, while others are in Bible departments in seminaries and religiously affiliated colleges. The perceived difference between how texts are approached in these contexts played a role in the tension described above, which was manifested in the separation (and eventual reunion) of the annual meetings of the AAR and SBL.
- **Studying Religious Minds** (ai_spec_minds): Subclusters include psychology of religion, cognitive science of religion, neuroscience of religion, religious pedagogy, pastoral counseling, spirituality and mental health. Here too, it appears that there may be differences between the values that guide scholars who study religious individuals in secular universities and those who study them in religiously affiliated institutions.
- **Studying Religious Groups** (ai_spec_groups): Subclusters include sociology of religion, ethnic studies and religion, gender and religion, anthropology of religion, practical theology and polity studies, and the study of religion in disciplines such as archaeology, economics, law, and political science. VISOR attempted to discover the extent to which scholars in these different contexts (with divergent professional goals) shared similar values in their study of the social practices of religious groups.
- **Studying Religious Ideas** (ai_spec_ideas): Subclusters include philosophy of religion, systematic theology, phenomenology of religion, apologetics, and the study of religion in relation to science or fine arts. Are there differences in values about the nature of good scholarship about conceptual expressions within religion driving debates such as those in the philosophy of religion over the appropriateness of apologetic arguments for the truth of a particular religion (in secular academic contexts)?
- **Studying Religious Ethics** (ai_spec_ethics): Subclusters include religious ethics, theological ethics, philosophical ethics, social ethics, and moral theology. Scholars within seminaries or divinity schools may approach the question of religious ethics (or norms) quite differently than professors of ethics or religious studies in secular universities, the former clarifying and defending one set of norms or ethical sources while the latter focus on comparing and contrasting approaches to ethics in various religious traditions.
- **Studying Religious Histories** (ai_spec_histories): Subclusters include church history, new religious movements, and the study of the development of religious traditions in various time periods or geographical regions. We wanted to find out whether there are distinct values shaping the work of scholars who study the historical dynamics of religious group cohesion and change within a tradition to which they are professionally committed, on the one hand, and those who approach such traditions as outsiders, on the other.

Within each of these Specialization Groups of scholars, debates continue to rage (or are carefully suppressed) about the extent to which cognitive biases and coalitional preferences are shaping researchers in various religious and secular contexts. Moreover, across all of these clusters, disputes simmer (or boil over) about the extent to which the academic study of religion is *best* carried out in "scientific" disciplines that focus on quantitative and qualitative data or in the "humanistic" disciplines that attend to the hermeneutical complexities of religiosity.

The collection of data in the VISOR project depended exclusively on surveys filled out online at http://www.visorproject.org. The surveys unique to VISOR were constructed by the authors of this article to identify and examine the operative values of scholars working in the academic study of religion. Interpretation of data is based on straightforward statistical analysis, which is

described in each case as results are reported below. For a full description of variables in each of the surveys, see Supporting Information (https://github.com/IBCSR/VISOR-JSSR).

Instruments

AIS

After filling out a brief registration form online, respondents were first asked to take a survey that requested some basic demographic information and the identification of the sorts of academic institutions and associations to which they belong. These data enable us to compare groups of scholars (described earlier) in relation both to their scholarly values and demographic variables such as gender, age, and region.

Scholarly Values Questionnaire (SVQ)

The SVQ was composed of three parts. The first two parts are the well-known Schwartz values scale (Schwartz 2012), modified very slightly to fit the scholarly values of experts in the academic study of religion. Respondents were asked to rate how important a list of values was "as a guiding principle" in their "academic and scholarly life." To clarify, they were instructed: "What you think others should value is not relevant here. What matters are the values that you personally express in your actions. Try to distinguish as much as possible between the values by using all the numbers. Before you begin, read the values [and] choose the one that is most important to you and rate its importance. Next, choose the value that is most opposed to your values and rate it -1. If there is no such value, choose the value least important to you and rate it 0 or 1, according to its importance."

The third part of the SVQ was constructed based on review and analysis of university and academic websites. Respondents were invited to apply the Schwartz-style numbering scheme to a list of values that included items such as intellectual freedom, avoiding conflict of interest, synthetic theory building, shared governance, respect for senior scholars, capacity to communicate to a popular audience, collegial networks, and gender and cultural diversity.

Methodological Naturalism-Methodological Secularism (MNMS) Scale

The MNMS scale was designed to measure academic preferences for or against methodological naturalism (MN) and methodological secularism (MS), as these preferences are expressed in a variety of academic practices, including classroom teaching, administration, public statements, research, and publication. The constructs for this survey are:

- *MN*: Preference for academic arguments that optimize the use of theories, hypotheses, methods, evidence, and interpretations that do not appeal to supernatural agents or forces or authorities.
- *MS*: Preference for academic practices that optimize the use of scholarly strategies that are not tied to the idiosyncratic interests of a religious coalition.

The MNMS captures the differences among scholars of religion on issues related to the appropriateness of appealing to supernatural agency or supernatural authority in scholarly activity *per se*. Some scholars who study religion are also personally religious and some are not, but this scale did not ask about the religiosity of individual scholars. Its purpose was to assess the extent to which they, *qua* scholars, value naturalistic and secular approaches when doing academic work.

The MNMS scale was administered online with the other VISOR surveys. Answers to all MNMS scale items are measured on a six-point Likert scale, as follows: strongly disagree (1), moderately disagree (2), slightly disagree (3), slightly agree (4), moderately agree (5), strongly agree (6). High scores indicate strong preference in *favor* of academic strategies conforming to the MN and MS constructs. Low scores indicate strong preference *against* academic strategies conforming to the MN and MS constructs. The scale also included two reliability-item pairs,

which are opposite-pole versions of the same item; and two "catch and calibration" items, which forced respondents to use extreme ends of the scale. These were used to exclude answers from unreliable or insincere respondents.

Scale reliability coefficients, assessed by Cronbach's alpha, were .91 for the MN subscale and .86 for the MS subscale. Exploratory factor analysis isolated three factors with eigenvalues above 1.0, cumulatively explaining 57 percent of the variance. Factor 1 encompassed the entire scale, indicating that the MNMS as a whole is a coherent measure, even though findings for the two subscales are reported. Factor 2 suggests that the MN and MS subscales make sense individually. Factor 3 separates the positively and negatively valenced items within each subscale reasonably clearly. Rotating this factor solution yielded no further insight.

Scholarly Values Scenarios (SVS)

The SVS presented conditional-reasoning items to survey respondents. Its purpose was to enable us to detect respondents' *implicitly* operative values, which might differ from the values they *explicitly* claim as guides for their scholarship. What follows is a brief description of the conceptual apparatus we used to define the main construct of the SVS ("objectivity") and the strategy we employed to generate items that enabled the SVS to measure that construct.

Conditional reasoning assessment is a procedure for measuring the *relative motive strength* between the implicit components of two sets of motives. To do this, it is necessary to develop two distinct constructs; that is, constructs of two competing "motives" in relation to which a person can experience a conflict or tension, which that person resolves in ways that are dependent upon (or conditioned by) one or another set of implicit *justification mechanisms* (JMs). JMs are "unrecognized (implicit, unconscious, automatic) biases to reason in ways that enhance the rational appeal of self-deceptive explanations," enabling the reasoner to construct ostensibly plausible rationalizations for a behavior (James and LeBreton 2012:29). The SVS helps detect *implicit* biases that shape the different values and actions of scholars in the study of religion—*not* to assess the truth (or even the plausibility) of particular sorts of beliefs.

The two motives driving the design of the SVS are the motive to pursue and maintain academic "objectivity" and the motive to incorporate elements of "religiosity" into scholarly reflection. For our purposes here, "scholarly objectivity" ("objectivity" for short) refers to the motive to seek correction of idiosyncrasy and avoid conflict of interest in the construction and criticism of interpretations, hypotheses, theories, evidence, and methods. In this context, we operationalize "reflective religiosity" ("religiosity" for short) as the motive to defend interpretations, hypotheses, theories, evidence, and methods that use or support appeals to the idiosyncratic interests of religious groups.

Scholars can experience a conflict between these two sets of motives (tendencies, proclivities, or implicit dispositions expressed in different concrete practices), as when a person who is religiously affiliated feels torn between supporting the beliefs of her religious group and avoiding an apparent conflict of interest. The "VISOR Conflict of Motives" chart (Figure 1) provides a visual representation of this *conflict* (the boxes on the left), and the way in which implicit JMs (the central box) can mediate the explicit conscious output of *expressed rationalizations* for integrating "religiosity" within the academic study *of* religion (the box on the right); additional information is available in the online Supporting Information.

Based on empirical findings and theoretical developments within the biocultural sciences that study religion (e.g., Atran 2002; Boyer 1994), it can be argued that the phylogenetic heritage of contemporary humans includes *evolved tendencies* that contribute to the emergence and persistence of "religiosity." This includes tendencies such as the proclivity to *infer the presence* of hidden supernatural forces when confronted by ambiguous or frightening phenomena and the proclivity to *give preferential treatment to* those with whom one regularly engages in religious in-group ritual practices.

Conflict of motives in scholarship on religion (more information is available in Supporting Information)
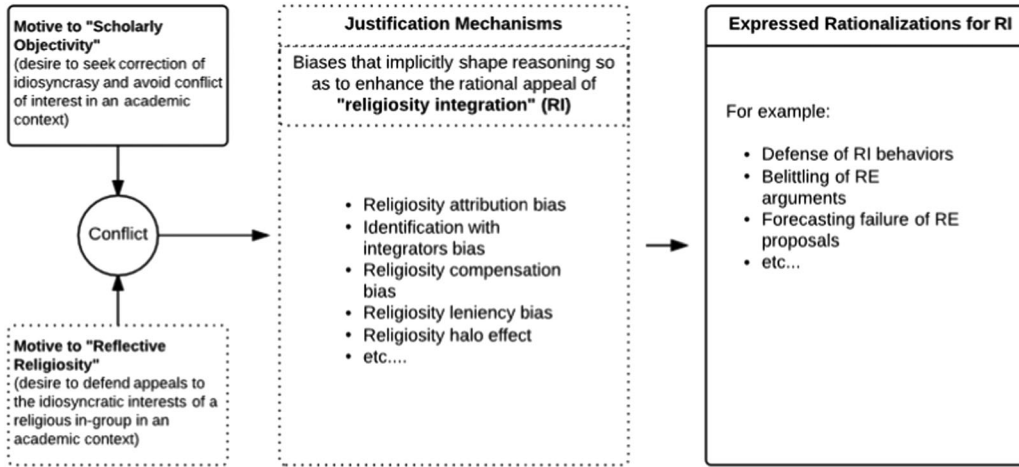
Note: Boxes with dotted lines indicate processes that are mostly implicit, while boxes with solid lines indicate processes that are mostly explicit.

The kind of "objectivity" most commonly valued in academic contexts seems to require the contestation of both of these evolved dispositions. This sort of evaluation is reflected in Barker's presidential address to the SSSR discussed above. Academic contexts often foster a tendency toward MN and MS. Doctoral training typically reinforces these research orientations, although this can vary considerably depending on the institutional context. Such training typically encourages researchers to avoid defending their arguments by referring to insights (or revelations) that are only available to members of a particular religious group.

Most scholars *explicitly* desire to pursue and maintain (or at least perceive themselves and want to be perceived by other scholars as pursuing and maintaining) scholarly "objectivity" in the sense described above. However, it may be illuminating to discover and measure the different ways in which individual scholars *implicitly* reason about this apparent conflict between the motives toward objectivity and religiosity. *Religiosity integrators* (RIs) are defined as people whose implicit motive to defend the deliverances of religiously salient commitments is stronger than the implicit motive to "objectivity." The behavior of RIs is shaped by an implicit resolution of the conflict that *allows or promotes* the incorporation of beliefs (or attitudes, behaviors, etc.) engendered by religiously salient cognitive and coalitional commitments into scholarly activity within the academic sphere. By contrast, *Religiosity Excluders* (REs) are defined as people whose implicit motive to pursue and maintain objectivity is stronger than their implicit motive to defend the deliverances of religiously salient commitments. RE approaches to research, argumentation, and even academic politics are shaped by the (more or less explicit) acceptance of MN and MS.

The resolution of the apparent conflict in either direction (RI or RE) can be manifested in socially (or academically) undesirable ways. REs may be perceived as reductionistic, closed-minded, and elitist. RIs may be perceived as superstitious or engaged in special pleading. The rationalization of either kind of explicit behavior can be shaped in part by implicit reasoning. Note that biases in implicit reasoning are not necessarily problematic. The bias toward self-care, for example, enables us to survive. In this context, then, "bias" is not intended as a value judgment about survey participants but as a factor that may contribute to participants' judgments about value.

Procedure

Pilot Testing and Data Collection

The VISOR project piloted its surveys four times during 2015 and 2016 with PhD students in the academic study of religion. Incremental changes were made after each round of piloting before finally releasing the surveys at http://www.visorproject.org on October 1, 2016, just prior to the annual meetings of the AAR and the SBL in San Antonio and the annual meetings of the SSSR and the RRA in Atlanta. We ran the surveys for the next 15 months, concluding data collection on December 31, 2017, shortly after the annual meetings of the AAR and the SBL in Boston and the annual meetings of the SSR and the RRA in Washington, D.C. We promoted the surveys through direct contact with the leaders of various AAR, SBL, and SSSR units, some of whom elected to notify their members about the survey using their in-house mailings lists, and also through many other scholarly organizations. The VISOR surveys were open to scholars with a PhD and PhD students in the academic study of religion.

The recruitment process ruled out probability sampling but we attempted to mitigate the resulting possibility of bias through a comprehensive invitation strategy. For example, every unit of the American Academy of Religion, rather than a convenient selection of units, was contacted and asked to participate, and flyers and postcards were distributed randomly through professional meetings. We also sought as large a sample as we could generate in the 15 months during which the VISOR survey was live to increase diversity and representativeness. Despite these efforts, it is still possible that the word-of-mouth nature of news about the VISOR survey may have produced bias of the kind we would expect in snowball sampling methods.

After registering on the site and supplying basic demographic information, the participant was presented with the four core surveys that constitute VISOR. A total of 704 participants registered by completing the demographics survey and attempting at least one of the VISOR surveys. Some participants chose to complete a selection but not all of the surveys. The VISOR surveys are listed below, with the number of participants attempting (not necessarily completing) each one.

- AIS ($n = 499$; created for VISOR)
- MNMS ($n = 332$; created for VISOR)
- SVQ ($n = 312$; based in part on the Schwartz Values Survey)
- SVS ($n = 364$; created for VISOR)

For the purposes of our analyses, the universe of participants that matters most is defined as those who filled out the AIS, from which we learned about the disciplinary orientation and professional affiliations that generate the four approaches to group-based comparison described above. Thus, 499 participants completed the AIS and their data were analyzed and are presented below. The remaining 205 are excluded from the present analyses. The 499 respondents tended to answer surveys with few or no skipped items. In the case of missing data, there was no imputation; rather, we used pair-wise deletion. Thus, the *N* available for any given set of statistical tests may vary slightly.

Sample—Demographics

The universe of participants ($N = 499$) has the characteristics set out in Table 1 (note: mean = *M*, standard deviation = *SD*).

Sample—AIs

Participants were asked to designate their primary academic specialization grouping by selecting one from among the six clusters described above (see Figure 2). These groups are used to report results for disciplinary areas.

Table 1: Demographic characteristics of the VISOR sample ($N = 499$)

Age	Born in 1930s 12, 1940s 55, 1950s 93, 1960s 124, 1970s 106, 1980s 95, 1990s 14 ($M = 1966$, $SD = 14$ years)
Gender	Female 197, male 294, other 5, refused 3
Ethnic origin	African 8, Caucasian 429, East Asian 11, Hispanic 11, Middle Eastern 8, Native American 3, South Asian 6, multiracial 9, declined 14
Affluence	On a 10-point scale with 1 = not well off and 10 = extremely well off relative to the national economic context, respondents self-rate as follows: 1–4: 30, 5–6: 96, 7: 119, 8: 164, 9–10: 13 ($M = 7.26$, $SD = 1.48$)
Students	Full-time 50, part-time 18 (all PhD students)
Location	Resident in USA 330, resident in Canada 30, resident elsewhere 125, refused 14
Region for USA residents	Midwest 64, Northeast 81, Southeast 99, West 83, no data 3
Politics	On a four-point scale (1–4), 478 participants said they were interested (3) or very interested (4) in politics ($M = 3.62$, $SD = 0.55$). On a seven-point scale from 1 = extremely liberal through 4 = moderate to 7 = extremely conservative, the average response leans liberal on economic issues ($M = 2.53$, $SD = 1.50$), on social issues ($M = 2.03$, $SD = 1.34$), and overall ($M = 2.22$, $SD = 1.26$). U.S. voting registration is Democrat 180, Republican 19, Independent 75; the U.S. political party of participants not in the United States is closer to Democrats 130, closer to Republicans 7.
Religion	On a four-point scale (1–4), 365 participants said they were interested (3) or very interested (4) in religion ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 1.09$). On a seven-point scale from 1 = extremely liberal through 4 = moderate to 7 = extremely conservative, the average response leans toward liberal on orthodoxy ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 2.03$). For religious service attendance frequency: never 104, once a year or less 62, once or twice a month 54, almost every week 78, every week or more 100, declined 4.

Participants were asked about their academic rank (see Figure 2), tenure status (tenured 209, tenure track 47), and any senior administrative posts held (department chair 128, dean 21, provost 4, other 49). Thirty-five participants reported belonging to an institution that requires signing a statement of faith. Institution types include:

- not religiously affiliated research universities—doctoral degrees offered (223),
- not religiously affiliated colleges—no doctoral degrees offered (60),
- religiously affiliated undergraduate colleges (54),
- religiously affiliated research universities—doctoral degrees offered (48),
- denominational or independent seminaries (29),
- research university divinity schools (23),
- community colleges—no 4-year bachelor's degrees offered (two),
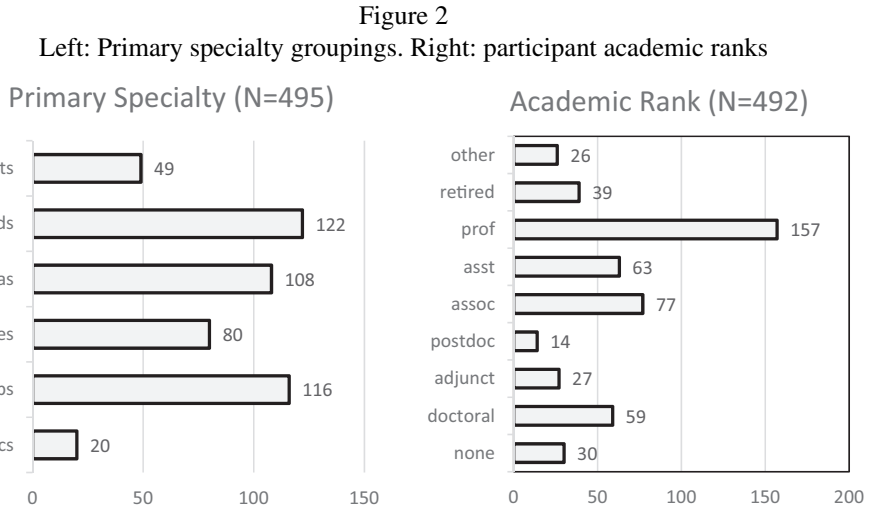- other (32), and
- not applicable (16).

Figure 2
Left: Primary specialty groupings. Right: participant academic ranks

Table 2: Rating importance of audience for scholarly work (Likert 1–5 scale)

Audience	N	Mean	SD
Scholars of religion	491	4.31	.94
Secular academy	490	4.11	1.01
General educated public	491	3.68	1.08
Scholars within religious institutions	487	3.59	1.19
Members of religious institutions	490	3.18	1.25
Leaders of religious institutions	486	3.05	1.31

Using a scale from 1 (not important) to 5 (very important), participants rated the importance of various audiences for their academic work. Table 2 displays the rank ordering of the various audiences in decreasing average importance. Note that SDs increase as means decrease, indicating increasing variation of opinion.

RESULTS

The results presented below are those we judge to be particularly pertinent to SSSR members and JSSR readers. The findings that focus on the scientific study of religion, including the SSSR and the SSR units within the AAR, are especially highlighted, as are contrasts between sociological and psychological approaches in the academic study of religion. Significance is reported at the $p < .10$ level. Bonferroni correction compensates for multiple comparisons whenever relevant.

"Studying Religious Groups" Versus Other Specializations

Respondents in the "Groups Specialization" of scholarly work ($N = 116$)—those who identify studying groups as their primary orientation to research—were the youngest of the six categories: 19 percent were born before 1960, whereas 35 percent of those in the combined other five categories were born before 1960. Similarly, 47 percent were born before 1970, versus 58 percent for the other categories. The Groups Specialization also had the highest frequency of self-identified

female respondents (47 percent, vs. 38 percent for the other five categories). Respondents in the Groups Specialization rated themselves as relatively less affluent, with 30.2 percent in the lower part of the affluence spectrum; by comparison, the Ethics Specialization had 20.0 percent and the Minds Specialization (home of psychology of religion) 15.6 percent, while the average of all specializations excluding groups was 24.5 percent. Those in the Groups Specialization showed no significant differences on ethnic origin but were twice as likely to come from the Western region of the United States (ratio = 2.00) and roughly half as likely to come from the Midwest (ratio = .38) or Northeast (ratio = .61).

Most (82 percent) of the Groups-Specialization respondents reported being very liberal or liberal in political orientation, which is similar to the Ethics (79 percent) and the Histories (82 percent) Specializations, but contrasts sharply with Ideas, Minds, and Texts Specializations (average of 66 percent). Deeming religion as not at all or not too important was more common in the Groups (31 percent) and Histories (28 percent) Specializations than in the others (17 percent). Similarly, respondents in the Groups Specialization described themselves as the least orthodox in religious outlook, with 73 percent answering 3 or less on a 7-point scale (where 7 means high orthodoxy), versus 58 percent for the other five Specializations. The same trend was evident for frequency of attending religious services, with 67 percent attending no more than a few times a year versus 49 percent for the combined other Specializations. The frequency of agnostics, atheists, and nones is proportionately twice as high within the Groups (35 percent) and Histories (30 percent) Specializations as within the Texts (14 percent) and Ethics (15 percent) Specializations.

The Groups-Specialization respondents ($N = 116$) had diverse and overlapping professional associations, including the following.

- SSSR: 32
- ASR: 20
- American Academy of Religion: 69
- NAASR: 8
- SBL: 7

Almost half of respondents (232) identified a groups-related sub-specialization as one of their top three research areas. Among these, the group-related sub-specializations ranked as most important were as follows:

- anthropology of religion 62;
- sociology of religion 59;
- cultural and ethnic studies and religion 38;
- gender, sexuality, and religion 33;
- practical theology 12;
- political science and religion 8;
- law and religion 7;
- liturgy, homiletics, and worship 6;
- economics of religion 4;
- archaeology and religion 2;
- social work and religion 1.

On the MNMS scale, a one-way ANOVA comparing the six Specialization Groups showed significant differences for both MN ($F = 1.92, p = .090$) and MS ($F = 3.78, p = .002$). The Groups Specialization scored highest on the methodological-secularism orientation, and significantly higher than the Ethics ($p = .083$), Ideas ($p = .005$), and Minds ($p = .074$) specializations (correcting for multiple comparisons). In a direct comparison with the Minds Specialization, the Groups Specialization scored far higher on MS ($p = .014$).

On the SVS, the Groups Specialization contrasted significantly with others on three of the scenarios. Scenario 4 poses the following situation: "Dr. Jones is a well-respected senior scholar in New Testament studies. For over thirty years, he has been a professor at a Christian seminary, a favorite among students and often sought out for advice on ministry situations. He is also editor of a scholarly book series, in which several of his former students have been published. Many people associate outcomes of this sort with likely nepotism. Which of the following can more easily be inferred from this association?" The Religious Excluders option was "People are often able to detect nepotism even when it is veiled by claims to scholarly objectivity," whereas the Religious Integrators option was "People can often confuse advocacy for brilliant young researchers with favoritism." The Groups Specialization leaned significantly toward the Religious Excluders pole compared to the Minds Specialization ($p = .026$) and also compared to all other respondents ($p = .003$).

The distinctiveness of the Groups Specialization was also manifest in participants' responses to Scenario 6: "An associate professor at a State University, who is also an Eastern Orthodox priest, has begun wearing his religious robes and a cross on his neck while teaching. The administration has heard complaints from several students. At his annual review, the Dean asks him not to dress in this way when engaged in official school activities. The associate professor argues that his behavior is appropriate. Which of the following assertions, if true, would be more relevant for strengthening the associate professor's argument?" The Religious Excluders option was: "Freedom of expression in a University classroom should not be curtailed for either students or faculty." The Religious Integrators option was "The learning experience is enhanced when teachers express their own sense of identity, including their commitment to a faith community, in their lectures." The Groups Specialization leaned significantly toward the Religious Excluders pole compared to all other respondents ($p = .017$).

By contrast, the Groups Specialization leaned significantly more to the Religious Integrators pole, compared to the Minds Specialization ($p = .040$), in responses to Scenario 1: "There is considerable disagreement about the value of having joint meetings between the Society for Biblical Literature (SBL), which focuses primarily on the holy texts of the Abrahamic religions, and the American Academy of Religion (AAR), which includes a broader range of disciplines and scientific approaches to the study of religion. Some argue that the joint meetings are particularly valuable for those AAR members who are not themselves religious, because it gives them a chance to interact with SBL scholars whose research is grounded in a particular community of faith. Whether or not you agree with this argument, which of the following statements (if true) would support it most?" The Religious Excluders option was: "Secular AAR members do not get very many opportunities to interact with religiously affiliated people." The Religious Integrators option was "The scholarship and collegiality of religiously active SBL members is often strengthened by their commitment to a faith community." This result might reflect the widespread interest of those who study diverse cultures (prominent in the Groups Specialization) to integrate the cultural particularities of others into social and institutional realities.

Sociologically Oriented Organizations Versus Others

Respondents belonging to a variety of sociology-focused scholarly organizations were combined into a "Sociology" Affiliation Group. These organizations included the ASR, Association of Social Scientists of Religion of MERCOSUR (politico-economic bloc of five Latin American countries), and SSSR ($N = 98$). Pearson chi-square tests showed that scholars in the Sociology Affiliation Group were significantly less interested than other scholars of religion in engaging the members of religious institutions ($\chi^2 = 8.42$, $df = 4$, $p = .077$), higher in university rank ($\chi^2 = 26.21$, $df = 10$, $p = .003$), more likely to be tenured ($\chi^2 = 15.58$, $df = 6$, $p = .016$), and older ($\chi^2 = 14.03$, $df = 6$, $p = .029$; note the age contrast with respondents in the Groups Specialization, who tend to be younger, which implies that self-identified professional sociologists are

an older cohort within the VISOR sample's Groups Specialization). On the economic dimension of political ideology, the Sociology Affiliation Group was significantly more conservative than others ($\chi^2 = 13.31$, $df = 6$, $p = .038$) but not on the social dimension or on overall political ideology.

The Psychology Affiliation Group ($N = 65$), defined above, showed significant differences from the Sociology Affiliation Group ($N = 71$, with overlaps excluded). For example, those in Psychology were far more likely than those in Sociology to be interested in engaging through their scholarship with leaders ($\chi^2 = 20.38$, $df = 8$, $p = .009$), members ($\chi^2 = 16.75$, $df = 8$, $p = .033$), or scholars ($\chi^2 = 16.75$, $df = 8$, $p = .033$) of religious institutions. In contrast, those in Sociology were more likely than those in Psychology to engage with Religious Studies scholars ($\chi^2 = 13.90$, $df = 8$, $p = .084$). Respondents in the Psychology Affiliation Group were far more likely than those in Sociology to work in institutions requiring a signed statement of faith ($\chi^2 = 10.90$, $df = 6$, $p = .092$). The Psychology Affiliation Group was significantly more affluent than Sociology ($\chi^2 = 18.79$, $df = 8$, $p = .016$) and significantly less liberal in overall political ideology ($\chi^2 = 30.31$, $df = 12$, $p = .003$) and in the social dimension of political ideology ($\chi^2 = 31.52$, $df = 12$, $p = .002$). Scholars in the Psychology Affiliation Group were also significantly more likely to attend religious services frequently ($\chi^2 = 27.38$, $df = 10$, $p = .002$)

On the MNMS scale, the Sociology Affiliation Group did not score significantly different than others. This was so even though, as noted above, scholars in the "Groups" Specialization were significantly more methodologically secular than others. Similarly, the Sociology Affiliation Group did not score significantly differently from others on the SVS, despite the fact that scholars in the "Groups" Specialization did.

On the SVQ, one-way ANOVAs disclosed that SSSR members prized two academic values significantly more highly than nonmembers: Intellectual Capacity ($F = 5.16$, $p = .024$) and Depth of Knowledge ($F = 3.03$, $p = .083$). SSSR members also prized significantly more highly than nonmembers the not-necessarily-academic values of Power ($F = 5.88$, $p = .016$) and Achievement ($F = 5.17$; $p = .024$). Meanwhile, members of the larger Sociology Affiliation Group ($N = 71$) contrasted significantly with the Psychology Affiliation Group ($N = 65$; overlaps excluded) on three academic values (see the radar graph in Figure 3). The Sociology Affiliation Group rated Humanities Approaches ($F = 6.52$, p $= .013$) and Multidisciplinary Approaches ($F = 3.85$, $p = .53$) more highly, while the Psychology Affiliation Group rated Administrative Fairness more highly ($F = 4.13$, $p = .046$).

SSSR Versus AAR

When we compared respondents who were past or current members of AAR ($N = 235$) to those belonging to SSSR ($N = 86$, with current and former overlaps assigned to SSSR), AAR members were significantly less interested in using their scholarly work to engage the leaders ($\chi^2 = 10.20$, $df = 4$, $p = .037$) or the members ($\chi^2 = 9.16$, $df = 4$, $p = .057$) of religious institutions.

A one-way ANOVA indicated that AAR respondents were significantly more liberal than SSSR members on all dimensions of political ideology—economic ($F = 16.90$, $p < .000$), social ($F = 8.96$, $p = .003$), and overall ($F = 10.80$, $p = .001$). For the SVQ, there were several significant differences (see Figure 4 for Academic Values): AAR respondents prized the value of humanities approaches more than SSSR respondents ($F = 2.83$, $p = .094$), while SSSR respondents more highly prized Intellectual Capacity ($F = 2.91$, $p = .090$), Approach-Empirical ($F = 15.83$, $p = .000$), Achievement ($F = 2.94$, $p = .088$), Self-Direction ($F = 4.06$, $p = .046$), and Openness to Change ($F = 3.89$, $p = .050$).

Within the AAR, we compared members of units related to the scientific study of religion (AAR-SSR) with others, yielding marked contrasts on religious worldview from a variety of optional surveys (see Supporting Information for details). AAR-SSR people were younger than

Figure 3

Academic values for Psychology Affiliation Group ($n = 65$) and Sociology Affiliation Group ($n = 71$; overlaps excluded). *Significant difference with $p < .10$

Academic Values for Psychology and Sociology Affiliation Groups
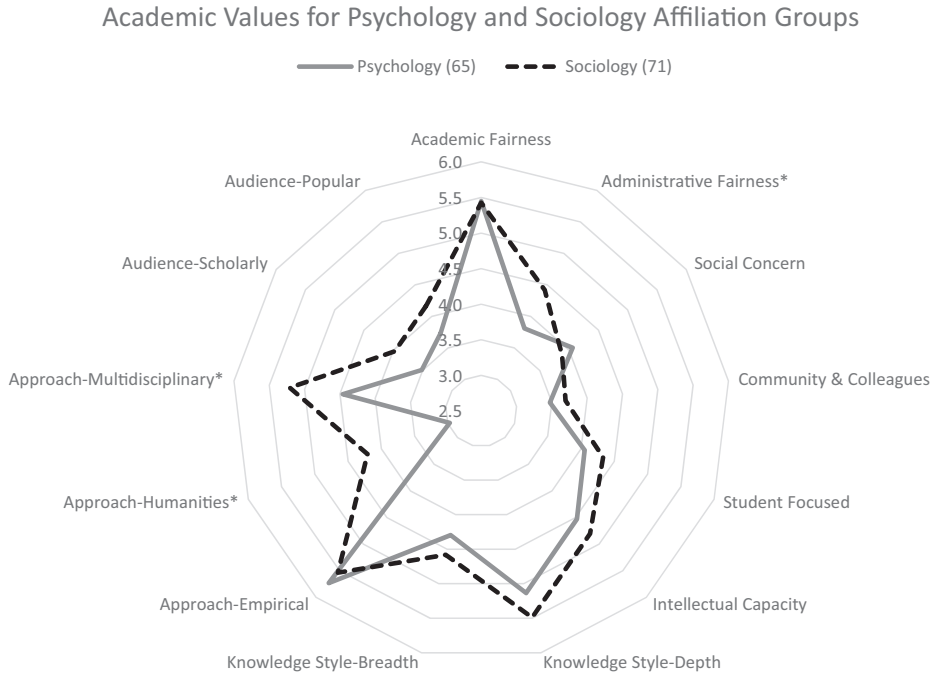
the rest of the VISOR sample ($F = 3.46$, $p = .63$, mean difference $= 2.5$ years). They were less likely to rate themselves as orthodox ($F = 5.28$, $p = .026$), to attend religious services ($F = 7.06$, $p = .010$), to read sacred texts ($F = 8.51$, $p = .005$), to believe in an afterlife ($F = 3.21$, $p = .078$), including heaven ($F = 4.47$, $p = .039$) and hell ($F = 13.45$, $p = .001$); to believe in supernatural beings ($F = 3.07$, $p = .085$), angels ($F = 5.59$, $p = .021$), or a deity ($F = 3.20$, p $= .079$); and to think of a deity as a personal being ($F = 5.93$, $p = .018$). They were less likely to describe themselves as religious ($F = 4.57$, $p = .036$); more likely to describe themselves as spiritual but not religious ($F = 3.02$, $p = .087$); less likely to identify as Christian and more likely to identify as agnostic, atheist, or humanist ($\chi^2 = 18.69$, $df = 9$, $p = .028$); and more likely to consider themselves spiritually or religiously liberal ($F = 4.06$, $p = .048$). The AAR-SSR people scored higher in openness on a Big-Five Personality Inventory ($F = 5.88$, $p = .017$). They were more likely to have a spirituality oriented to awe ($F = 6.41$, $p = .015$) and mystery ($F = 2.86$, $p = .098$), and less likely to have a spirituality oriented to religious traditions ($F = 3.92$, $p = .053$) or "belief and belonging" ($F = 2.86$, $p = .087$). Finally, the SSR people within the AAR tended to value Breadth of Knowledge ($F = 3.62$, $p = .058$), and they prized both Empirical Approaches ($F = 4.45$, $p = .036$) and Humanities Approaches ($F = 4.54$, $p = .034$) to research more highly than others.

Values in Sociology Versus Psychology

While the sociological wing of the scientific study of religion espoused values similar to those of the entire VISOR sample, the psychological wing showed marked differences. In terms of explicitly academic values, the Minds Specialization (note: but not the Psychology Affiliation Group) stressed Student Focused ($F = 3.64$, $p = .058$) and Approach-Empirical (F $= 16.44$,

Figure 4

Academic values for American Academy of Religion ($n = 125$) and Society for the Scientific Study of Religion ($n = 53$; overlaps excluded). *Significant difference with $p < .10$
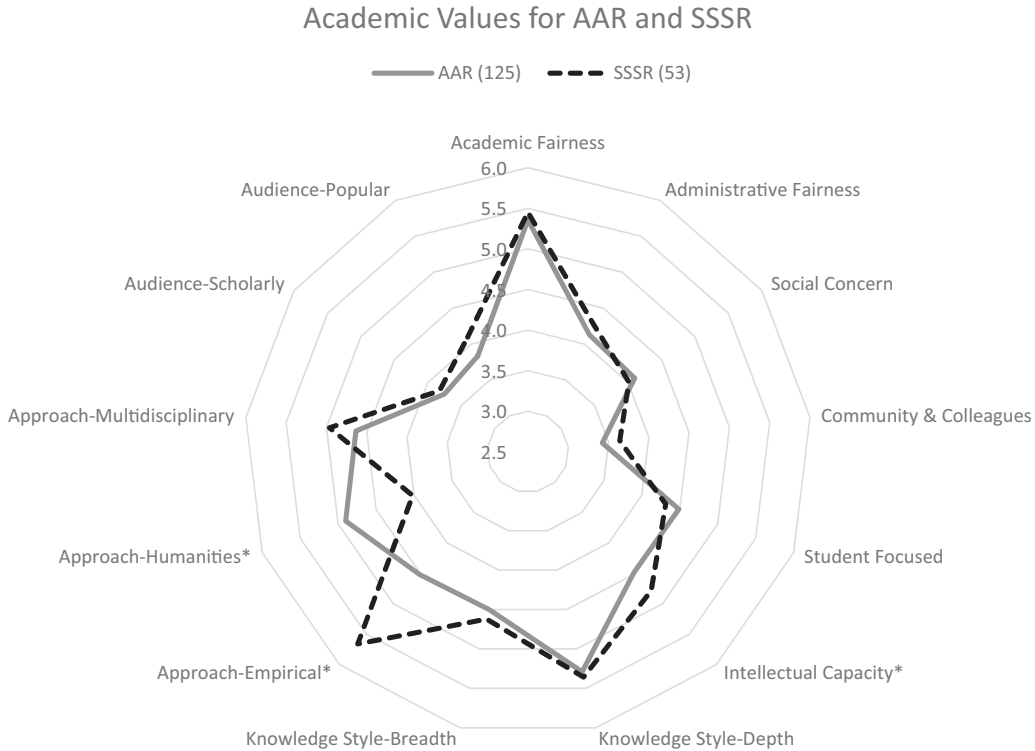
p < .000), but deemphasized Administrative Fairness (F = 3.83, p = .055), Approach-Humanities (F = 35.31, p < .000), and Audience-Popular (F = 3.34, p = .069).

Inside the Groups Specialization

VISOR respondents indicating that they study religious groups in one of their top three specializations ($N = 232$; the GroupsMentioned Specialization) include SSSR members ($N = 49$) but include others as well ($N = 183$). We ran chi-square and one-way ANOVA tests (using variable ai_spec_groupsmentioned1vssssr2) to compare this group of 183 non-SSSR members with all current or former SSSR members ($N = 86$), yielding valuable information about who is studying religious groups aside from SSSR members.

Compared to the non-SSSR subgroup of the GroupsMentioned Specialization, SSSR respondents are more senior in terms of academic rank ($\chi^2 = 32.41$, $df = 10$, $p = .000$), tenure ($\chi^2 = 19.91$, $df = 6$, $p = .003$), and age ($F = 12.04$, $p = .001$, mean difference = 6.26 years); less likely to be employed part-time and seeking more work ($\chi^2 = 16.00$, $df = 7$, $p = .025$); more likely to be a U.S. resident ($\chi^2 = 16.04$, $df = 2$, $p = .000$) from the Western region of the United States ($\chi^2 = 11.62$, $df = 4$, $p = .020$); more likely to want to engage members ($\chi^2 = 9.09$, $df = 4$, $p = .059$) and leaders ($\chi^2 = 14.73$, $df = 4$, $p = .005$) of religious institutions with their scholarship; less politically liberal with regard to economics ($F = 9.61$, $p = .002$), social issues ($F = 3.78$, $p = .053$), and overall ($F = 3.28$, $p = .071$), and more likely to lean away from Democrat and toward Republican within the U.S. political context ($\chi^2 = 9.29$, $df = 3$, $p = .026$), though still heavily Democrat; more likely to regard religion as important ($F = 3.23$, $p = .073$) and to attend religious

services ($\chi^2 = 9.49$, $df = 5$, $p = .091$); less methodologically secular in academic orientation ($F = 5.57$, $p = .019$), more interested in Empirical Approaches ($F = 7.00$, $p = .009$) and less interested in Humanities Approaches ($F = 3.05$, $p = .083$).

<div align="center">DISCUSSION</div>

One of the main purposes of the VISOR project was to foster a healthy conversation among scholars who study religion about the values that guide our various approaches across disciplines and subfields, and we hoped that our findings would provide information useful for framing and promoting such conversations. We think they do. Here, we offer possible interpretations of some of these results, paying special attention to issues that are likely to be of importance to scholars who operate within (or around) SSSR. We organize this presentation by discussing the demographic information, then the AIS, SVQ, MNMS, and SVS.

Several demographic features of the category of scholars who specialize in the study of religious Groups stand out. The fact that respondents with this Specialization were the youngest and had the highest percentage of self-identified females (compared to the other five Specializations) suggests that this field is doing a better job of recruiting broadly and regenerating itself—and a better job of promoting internal gender diversity. Of course, the data set does not speak to the causal processes of group recruitment and change but the results are striking; the Groups specialization appears to be more welcoming of younger people and women. This could be connected to the findings that scholars in this Specialization Group were also the most liberal (tied with Histories), least religiously orthodox, least frequent religious service attenders, and had a higher percentage of agnostics, atheists, and nones. Because younger generations are increasingly more gender open and less religious, the relationships obtained among these characteristics within scholarly fields should not be surprising.

On the other hand, respondents belonging to the Sociology Affiliation Group were significantly older and significantly less liberal than others in the economic dimension of political ideology. The finding that scholars in the Groups Specialization were significantly more liberal across the board, whereas those in the Sociology Affiliation Group were not, indicates that the most ideologically liberal people in the Groups Specialization are not members of sociology-focused academic organizations but are studying religious groups in other venues. Moreover, respondents from the Sociology Affiliation Group were less likely than others to be interested in engaging members of religious institutions, suggesting a professional identity built around secular academic inquiry.

To us, this suggests a value gap between those studying religious groups within the academic study of religion generally (more likely to be young, women, very liberal) and those studying religious groups within sociologically oriented professional organizations specifically (more likely to be older, men, less liberal). Projecting this gap forward a decade or two may be a thought-provoking strategic exercise for the leadership of groups such as the SSSR, raising pointed questions. Is the SSSR going to remain the leading scholarly organization for the academic study of religious groups or will their leading role be ceded to others? And, will the SSSR be able to continue to influence the methods and rigor of the academic study of religious groups to the degree they intend? Pondering these questions, with VISOR data in mind, may prompt changes in recruitment, outreach, and self-understanding within SSSR and other sociologically oriented scholarly organizations.

Some differences between respondents who fell into the Psychology and Sociology Affiliation Groups may shed light on why the SSSR has not been as successful as many of its members might like in its attempts to include psychologists along with sociologists in its core membership and activities. Those in the Psychology Affiliation Group were more likely than those in the Sociology Affiliation Group to be interested in engaging religious institutions and people (clergy and lay).

Psychology Affiliation Group respondents were also significantly less liberal in their overall political ideology and more likely to attend religious services frequently than their Sociology counterparts. Moreover, those who belong to the Psychology Affiliation Group were far more likely than those in the Sociology Affiliation Group to work in institutions that require faculty to sign a statement of faith, though this may be related more to institutional hiring realities than to the preferences of psychologists and sociologists. Specifically, there are fewer job openings in psychology departments in secular universities for someone in the psychology of religion than at small religious colleges in the United States, where requirements to sign a statement of faith are sometimes in force. Even in Europe, many psychology of religion positions are in departments of theology, although a few are in departments of psychology. This suggests that value differences may be contributing factors to the difficulty of incorporating psychologists of religion into sociologically oriented professional organizations within the academic study of religion.

While respondents in the Groups Specialization and the Sociology Affiliation Group are more liberal and less explicitly religious than respondents in the Minds Specialization and the Psychology Affiliation Group, it is important to recall that the contrast with the AAR runs in the opposite direction. Respondents in the Groups Specialization and the Sociology Affiliation Group are less liberal and more explicitly religious than respondents in the AAR, and especially for respondents within the AAR who conduct research in scientific study of religion (the AAR-SSR cluster). Similarly, SSSR members are more conservative, more religious, older, and academically more senior to those in the Groups Specialization who are not in the SSSR.

The SVQ survey revealed another interesting difference between SSSR members and other groups. SSSR members are significantly more likely than others to embrace the academic values of Intellectual Capacity and Depth of Knowledge, and to embrace the general (Schwartz) values of Power and Achievement. These findings could be interpreted in a variety of ways. Perhaps the SSSR provides a haven for individuals who value rigorous analysis within a single discipline (e.g., sociology of religion) over broad interdisciplinary or more fluid humanities endeavors. Perhaps it attracts individuals who are particularly driven to succeed in the academy—or to transform the academy. Now that we have this sort of data, the debate over interpretation can begin in earnest.

Also, respondents in the AAR-SSR Cluster—these are AAR members engaged in the scientific study of religion, and often members of the Groups Specialization—also displayed a significantly stronger commitment than others to the values of Breadth of Knowledge, and both Empirical Approaches and Humanities Approaches. Recall that, compared to others, this group is younger, more secular, and less religious. This up-and-coming group of scholars sees no problem emphasizing both humanities approaches and empirical approaches, and evidently believes that their research is strengthened by incorporating both. We suspect that we are detecting here the beginnings of a kind of solution to the so-called crisis of the humanities, at least as far as the academic study of religion is concerned: this younger cohort of SSR researchers unselfconsciously demonstrates the values of humanities approaches in close coordination with empirical approaches in multidisciplinary research efforts.

The finding from the MNMS survey that respondents in the Groups Specialization are significantly more secular than others could be related to the operationalization of MS as a "preference for academic practices that optimize the use of scholarly strategies that are not tied to the idiosyncratic interests of a supernatural coalition." This makes sense in light of the other findings that indicate that the Groups Specialization is more liberal and less religious than others in the VISOR sample. Although SSSR members form a subset of the Groups Specialization, they are less liberal and more religious than others—mainly AAR members—within the Groups Specialization. However, we did not find significant differences on the MNMS scale between SSSR members and other groups. On average, SSSR members are *as* methodologically secularist and naturalist as their counterparts but, compared to the Minds Specialization, they are *less* religious in what they believe and in their desire to engage religious audiences, while compared

to the AAR-SSR Cluster and the non-SSSR members of the Groups Specialization, they are *more* religious in what they believe and in their desire to engage with religious audiences.

As noted above, responses to the scenario involving the potential nepotism of a New Testament scholar in the SVS revealed a distinction between scholars who study religious Groups and those who study religious Ideas (such as philosophers of religion and theologians). The former were significantly more likely to prefer the "Religious Excluders" option than the latter. We acknowledge that the findings from the SVS, which was designed to get at implicit bias, may be more controversial than those from our other survey tools. However, if this item did in fact capture a difference in the implicit motives of these two Specialization Groups, this would suggest that those in disciplines such as sociology of religion are less likely to defend the deliverances of evolved religiously salient biases (such as inferences related to beliefs in supernatural agents and preferences for normative practices regulated by religious authorities) and more likely to be implicitly oriented toward what they might be willing to call "objectivity." Once again, this finding cannot be attributed directly to members of the SSSR given the differences we have observed between SSSR respondents and members of the Groups Specialization in general.

Limitations and Future Directions

With usable data from 499 respondents, VISOR has sufficient power for analyses at the levels of Affiliation Groups (e.g., SSSR vs. AAR or Sociology vs. Psychology), Specialization Groups (e.g., ethics vs. groups vs. histories vs. ideas vs. minds vs. texts), and AAR-Clusters (e.g., AAR-SSR Cluster). However, save for the AAR-SSR Cluster, the VISOR study is underpowered for certain highly fractionated analyses involving surveys that were recommended but optional (e.g., surveys on religious beliefs, spirituality, and personality). We think the field would benefit from studies with larger participant pools that incorporate personality and other variables. The Groups Specialization has characteristics quite different from the Sociology Affiliation Group, though both include SSSR members. Knowing more about that contrast would help to clarify the meaning of the differences in characteristics that VISOR has detected. It would be worthwhile to investigate this question, as well as questions akin to it in other Specialization Groups. Despite these limitations, we believe that the empirical findings of the VISOR project provide a good starting point for conversations around the academic table about the values that ought to characterize scholarship in the disciplines that study religion.

The VISOR survey was advertised widely and benefitted from a wide variety of respondents, but the sample is not formally representative of the academic study of religion. Indeed, it is not even obvious what could count as a formally representative sample given the diversity of research being conducted. Nevertheless, the field would benefit from analyzing the values of a sample of scholars that a significant part of that field acknowledges is representative of the field, if an appropriate sampling procedure could be devised.

Conclusion

What does all of this mean for scholars who identify professionally with the *SSSR*—and for the association itself? As noted above, SSSR respondents tend to sit between respondents in the Psychology Affiliation Group on their ideological and religious right, and members of the AAR engaged in the scientific study of religion on their ideological and religious left (as judged by responses related to political ideology, religious service attendance, and preferred audiences for academic engagement). We also noted that, compared to other scholars in the VISOR sample, SSSR members more highly prize the academic values of Intellectual Capacity and Depth of Knowledge, and the general (Schwartz) values of Power and Achievement. These strike us as

somewhat traditional values, reflecting the way many well-organized scientific fields of inquiry have tended to operate over the last few decades.

The possibility—and even likelihood—of an imminent sea change in the scientific study of religion becomes clear when we compare SSSR respondents with (1) the larger category of scholars in the Groups Specialization and (2) AAR members engaged in the scientific study of religion (the AAR-SSR Cluster).

First, when compared to other Specialization Groups (Texts, Ideas, History, Minds, Ethics), members of the Groups Specialization are more likely to be younger, female, liberal, and agnostic or atheistic, and less likely to hold orthodox religious beliefs or attend religious services. SSSR members who belong to the Groups Specialization are atypical—both demographically and in their maintenance of relatively traditional values. Like all academic associations, and indeed the disciplines they represent, the SSSR will experience pressure to adapt as younger scholars with different values emerge and try to take over the reins. Alternatively, the SSSR may begin to lose influence over the academic study of religious groups as younger scholars with different values find the SSR an uncongenial scholarly home. The strategic implications for SSSR's recruitment efforts and internal structural dynamics are thought-provoking.

Second, of all the subgroups we uncovered in our statistical analysis of the VISOR data, AAR members engaged in the scientific study of religion (the AAR-SSR Cluster) are the most secular, naturalistic, nonreligious, and open. They are also committed to both humanities and empirical approaches within the academic study of religion. They are younger and they are on the rise. This generational shift will inevitably put pressure on the SSSR to adapt or risk disciplinary isolation.

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