

Proposal for a New (Anxiety) Disorder to the DSM-6 Task Force: Religious Fundamentalism

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Abstract:

Religious fundamentalism is a vicious plague that spreads death and destruction throughout the world. Health professionals cannot afford to relax when disease is running wild. Essentially fundamentalism is a mistaken form of idealism that must be challenged. A closed mind is a hard nut to crack, although a rational approach combined with a measure of humour would seem to be a plausible starting point. In this presentation, religious fundamentalism is considered half-jokingly as a mental disorder. By using the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders) as a template to define the signs and symptoms of the disorder, both the DSM and religious fundamentalism are satirized. The final result though is a description that does make sense. As religious fundamentalism is bound to be eventually recognized as a mental disorder, it is inevitable that one day the disorder will be included in the DSM. This proposal is a preview of the coming debate.

Method: Qualitative Content Analysis

Several years ago my daughter, who is now a PhD candidate in psychology, and I went to see AGORA, a Spanish film made in 2009, about Hypatia of Alexandria, starring Rachel Weisz in the role of Hypatia.



Religious Fundamentalism

- A. Profound religious conviction as evidenced by at least three of the following:
1. The correct answers to all questions about life are contained in a “Holy Book” of the subject’s religion.
 2. This “Holy Book” was revealed verbatim by God (or by an equivalent Supreme Being).
 3. What are termed “Holy Books” by other religions are false.
 4. The precepts of the subject’s religion take precedence over human rights.
 5. Critical questioning about the subject’s religion causes anxiety or discomfort.
 6. Freedom of religion is contemptible.
 7. The use of deadly force is a legitimate way of converting non-believers.
 8. Anybody who jokes about the subject’s religion must be severely punished.
- B. The disturbance does not occur exclusively during the course of a psychotic disorder and is not attributable to the physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or another medical condition (e.g., hypothyroidism, encephalitis).
- C. The disturbance causes clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.

Specify if:

Early onset: If onset is before age 18 years.

Late onset: If onset is at age 18 years or older.

Specify if:

Acute: Duration of less than 1 month.

Subacute: Duration of 1–3 months.

Persistent: Duration of more than 3 months.

Terminal: If the person in question is determined to die for his religious conviction (e.g., by explosion).

Specify current severity:

Mild: Few, if any, symptoms in excess of those required to make the diagnosis are present, and the symptoms result in minor impairment in social or occupational functioning.

Moderate: Symptoms or functional impairment between “mild” and “severe” are present.

Severe: Many symptoms in excess of those required to make the diagnosis, or several symptoms that are particularly severe, are present, or the symptoms result in marked impairment in social or occupational functioning (e.g., the beheading of non-believers).

Method (next):

The action takes place at the close of the fourth century and the early years of the fifth century CE. Alexandria is the scene of growing tension because of the steadily growing influence of the Christians. Hypatia, a brilliant philosopher and mathematician, is at work in the vast library of Alexandria, where she is the leading figure of the Neoplatonic school.

On a sad day in 415, Hypatia, the very image of virtue and scholarship, became the victim of a mob of Christian fanatics, who pulled her from her chariot, dragged her through the streets, and killed her in a church.

During the drive home my daughter and I chatted about the film. What did we find the most disturbing? Was it the sheer stupidity of her attackers or was it the brutality of their attack? Or was it perhaps a combination of the two? The result was that we started talking about fundamentalism, and that gave me the glimmering of an idea. What if fundamentalism was in the DSM, how would it be described?

The notion of “fundamentalism” originally emerged in the United States, where in the late 19th and early 20th centuries there were various conservative Christian groups that wanted to go back to the “fundamentals” of Christian teaching by way of reaction to more liberal views within the Christian community.



The Fundamentals: A Testimony to the Truth, is a twelve volume set of essays outlining orthodox Christian doctrine, published 1910-1915.