Understanding Atheism and Its Stereotypes in the United States

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Introduction

In the United States, about 1-3 percent of the population lack belief in God’s existence—they’re atheist. Despite increasing religious tolerance, tolerance toward atheists has scarcely improved. Many Americans are prejudiced against atheists.

What prejudiced beliefs do some Americans hold against atheists?

Prejudice against atheists is anchored in their morality. This graph reveals numerous moral concerns.

- Moreover, Americans also describe atheists as angry, untrustworthy people.

How Do Atheists React to Prejudice?

1. Conceal their identity:
   - Some atheists keep their identity hidden out of fear.
   - Atheists who expect stigma suffer from low physical and psychological well-being.

2. Express their identity:
   - Coming out as atheist comes with risks.
   - Atheists have reported lost job opportunities.
   - Shattered relationships between friends, family, religious community.

3. Activism:
   - Activism goes beyond just expressing non-belief.
   - Activists form an organized community.
   - They broaden the meaning of atheism. Activists associate atheism with scientific values, critical thinking, skepticism and reason.

Activists’ goals: encourage concealed atheists to express their identity and improve the public image of atheism.

- Activists such as Richard Dawkins promote positive images of atheism using advertisements, social media, and public gatherings. Dawkins in particular wrote books supporting nonbelief in God.

Conclusion—Atheists Are Varied

Many Americans specifically think atheists are immoral. This belief stigmatizes atheists. Atheists respond to stigma in different ways: concealing their identity, expressing it to friends and family, or publicly promoting it through activism.

References


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