



# Need for Mystery: Development and Measurement of a New Construct



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## Abstract

We propose a new construct labeled, "Need for Mystery" (n-Myst) to account for some people's tendency to maintain and enjoy ambiguity regarding fundamental life issues. To develop a measure of n-Myst, we began by asking participants to rate a wide variety of theoretically-relevant statements on 5-point scales. The items were administered to 329 undergraduate students at the University of British Columbia. Exploratory factor analysis revealed two factors, which we labeled Anti-Science (dissatisfaction with technical explanations), and Pro-Magic (enjoyment of spiritual experiences). The factors represent two strategies for maintaining mystery. Confirmatory factor analysis added support to the 2-factor solution. Although moderately correlated ( $r = .34$ ), the factors show different patterns of associations with criterion variables such as religiousness and paranormal beliefs.

## Scale Construction

The scale items were theoretically constructed around six facets:

- Worldview Rigidity
- Failure of the Imagination
- Intuition
- Experience is Reality
- Animism
- Romanticism

These six facets formed two factors with Worldview Rigidity and Failure of the Imagination driving the Anti-Science factor and Animism and Romanticism driving Pro-Magic. Certain questions from Intuition and Experience is Reality loaded on different facets, suggesting that these facets have aspects that are part of either strategy and likely creating the high correlation between the factors ( $r = .34$ ,  $p < .001$ ).

## Factor Structure

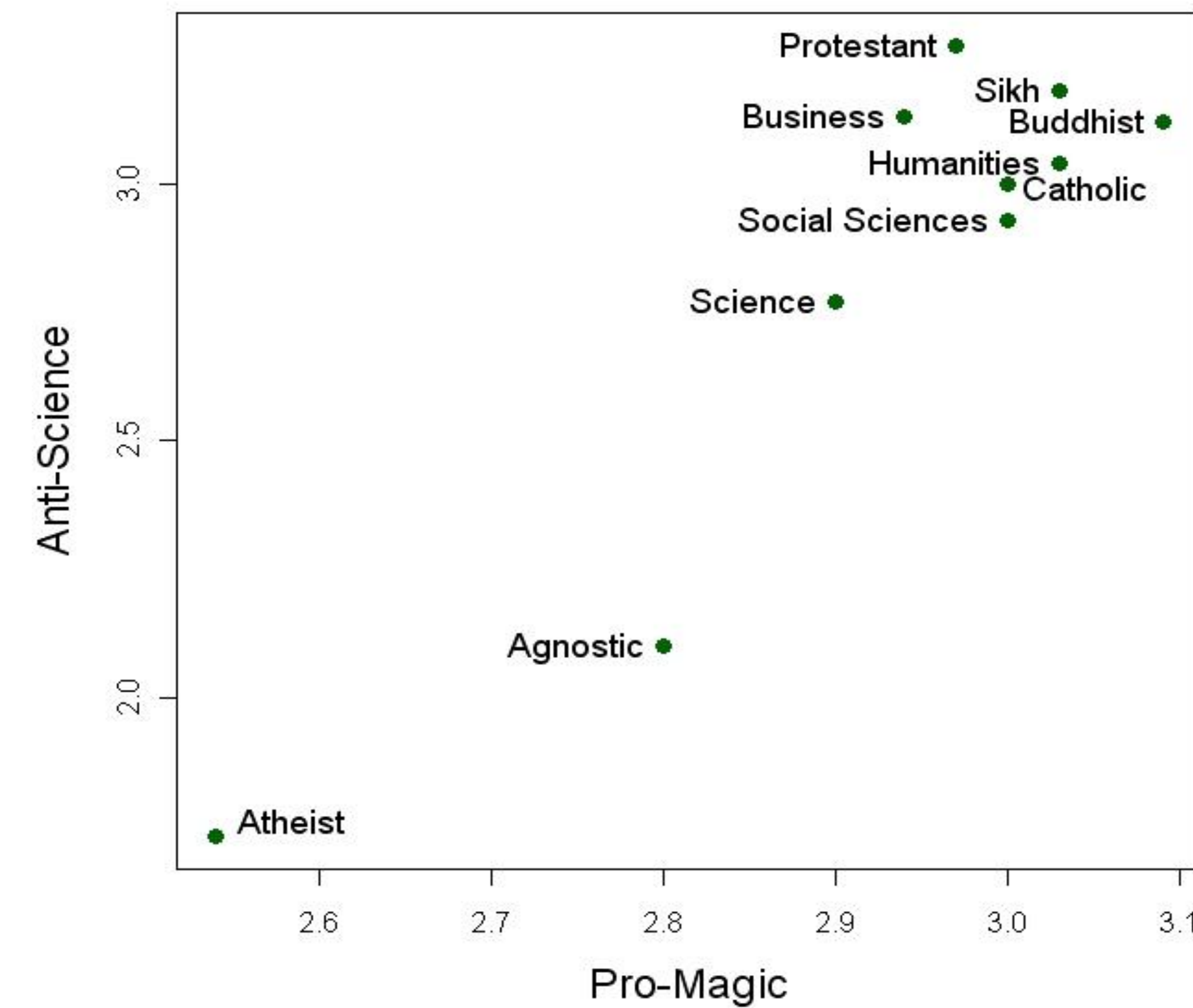
The Anti-Science factor ( $\rho = .83$ ) can be described as dissatisfaction with, or outright denial of, concrete scientific explanations of the world. A few example items are "There are some things that humans should not try to understand", "I prefer spiritual explanations for things rather than scientific ones", and "If someone told me they had a spiritual vision I would doubt it (reversed)".

Pro-Magic ( $\rho = .75$ ) captures the tendency to embrace mystical experiences and attribute events to extraordinary causes. This captures belief in spirits, as well as more mundane experiences or simply a tendency to feel that things are spiritual in some sense. Examples of items are: "Some houses are definitely haunted by ghosts", "I often get the feeling that I've done something before – even though it's not possible (déjà vu)", and "I sometimes get a shiver thinking about mysterious things".

Using a new sample of 143 students from UBC, we performed a confirmatory factor analysis to confirm the fit of our proposed 2-factor structure. After allowing for correlated factors, the fit for the 2-factor solution is acceptable for a personality scale;  $\chi^2 = 489$  (294),  $p < .001$ , CFI = .80, RMSEA = .07. The only other theoretically valid solution would be a 1-factor solution and the fit was significantly worse for that model;  $\chi^2 = 604$  (295),  $p < .001$ , CFI = .68, RMSEA = .09.

## Results

Mean n-Myst Scores of Religions and Academic Majors



Both dimensions are scored on 5-point scales.

Paranormal Beliefs

	AS	PM
Hypnosis:	.05	.20 <sup>^</sup>
Extrasensory Perception:	.27 <sup>^</sup>	.44 <sup>^</sup>
Telekinesis:	.19 <sup>^</sup>	.41 <sup>^</sup>
Psychics/ Channeling:	.35 <sup>^</sup>	.52 <sup>^</sup>
Astrology:	.17 <sup>**</sup>	.43 <sup>^</sup>
Tarot:	.18 <sup>**</sup>	.52 <sup>^</sup>
Ghosts:	.19 <sup>^</sup>	.36 <sup>^</sup>
Exorcism:	.22 <sup>^</sup>	.16 <sup>**</sup>
Vampires:	-.01	.13 <sup>*</sup>
The Lost City of Atlantis:	-.04	.17 <sup>**</sup>
Freemasons control the world:	-.04	.16 <sup>**</sup>
Aliens:	-.21 <sup>^</sup>	.06
Alien abduction:	-.09	.13 <sup>*</sup>
Aliens were discovered at Area 51:	-.08	.17 <sup>**</sup>
UFOs:	-.11 <sup>*</sup>	.12 <sup>*</sup>

Correlations

	AS	PM
Religiosity	.65 <sup>^</sup>	.02
Political Conservatism	.29 <sup>^</sup>	-.10 <sup>*</sup>
Right Wing Authoritarianism <sup>c</sup>	.56 <sup>^</sup>	.03
IQ <sup>a</sup>	-.20 <sup>^</sup>	-.02
Awe <sup>b</sup>	.15 <sup>**</sup>	.19 <sup>^</sup>

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , <sup>^</sup>  $p < .001$

Narrative Preferences

Correlations with preferences for songs, stories, and myths

	AS	PM
I hate when people tell me the "real" story behind songs I like.	.09	.16 <sup>**</sup>
I prefer stories with a clear plot and concrete ending.	.05	-.11 <sup>*</sup>
If someone I admired did something bad, I wouldn't want to know about it.	.12 <sup>*</sup>	.16 <sup>**</sup>

## Conclusions

Our results indicated that n-Myst is a powerful construct showing a coherent pattern of associations with spiritually-relevant variables. n-Myst has theoretically consistent correlations with paranormal and religious beliefs. Both sub-scales have high reliability and a stable factor structure. For future research we plan to test n-Myst in non-student populations, especially those who have converted from one religious orientation to another.

- a) Nathanson, C., & Paulhus, D. L. (2007, June). *Validation of the UBC Word Test*. Poster presented at the 68<sup>th</sup> annual meeting of the CPA, Ottawa, ON.
- b) Shiota, M. N., Keltner, D., & Mossman, A. (2007) The nature of awe: Elicitors, appraisals, and effects on self-concept. *Cognition & Emotion*, 21, 944 – 963.
- c) Zakrisson, I. (2005) Construction of a short version of the Right-Wing Authoritarianism (RWA) scale. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 39, 863-872.