

Belief in God associated with ability to 'mentalize'

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Belief in God or other higher powers may be crucially linked to humans' cognitive ability to infer other peoples' mental states, called "theory of mind" or "mentalizing," according to research published May 30 in the open access journal *PLoS ONE*.

The researchers, led by Ara Norenzayan of the University of British Columbia, found that deficits in mentalizing, as associated with the autism spectrum, were related to decreased [belief in God](#).

Norenzayan explains, "Religious believers intuitively think of their deities as personified beings with mental states who anticipate and respond to human needs and actions. Therefore, mentalizing deficits would be expected to make religious belief less intuitive."

However, the researchers caution that there is a combination of reasons, some of them psychological, others historical and cultural, why some people believe more than others; mentalizing is only one contributing factor among many.

Additionally, the researchers explored the [gender gap](#) in [religious belief](#). According to Will Gervais, who co-led the investigation, "Mentalizing deficits are known to be more common in men than women, and in our research this explained the well-known finding that men tend to be less religious than women".

More information: Norenzayan A, Gervais WM, Trzesniewski KH

(2012) Mentalizing Deficits Constrain Belief in a Personal God. *PLoS ONE* 7(5): e36880. [doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0036880](https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0036880)

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