

## **Editorial:**

## Psychology, Psychotherapy and Religion:

## Research and Therapy Trends

Shiva Khalili & Klaus Boehnke

Sigmund Freud Private University in association with the International Society for Science and Religion hosted the Vienna International Congress on Science and/or Religion: a 21st Century Debate, in August 2015. The congress offered an opportunity for interdisciplinary, interreligious, and intercultural conversation. During the three days of the event 116 papers and posters were presented by participants from 32 countries.

Beside discussions about the focal topics of science and religion in 21st century, the congress provided an extra section for the scholars and students interested in the field of psychology, psychotherapy and religion to exchange their views and experiences.

The papers of this issue are selected from that part of the congress and represent the major

topics and trends in the field. The progresses of modern sciences and technology have led to remarkable insights into the nature of human life and functioning, challenging or transforming the former traditional worldviews and narrations. In this regard culture and religion have turned to an important field for scientific investigation. A major focus of the related research in 21st century is to explore the neurocognitive processes required and involved in experiences related to religion and religiosity.

This approach is presented in the paper by Hans-Ferdinand Angel and Rüdiger J. Seitz. The very special meaning and personal value of beliefs and the processes of believing, which the authors call credition are described in a model of mental operations that underly these beliefs. In this model based on the role of prefrontal cortex



in the associations and representations of personal values and meanings, the similarities and differences of personal secular and non-secular belief formations and their components are discussed.

The second paper investigates the relationships between personal beliefs and other psychological variables. Reza Nasseri's empirical study in the United Kingdom focusses on the role of locus of control and religious faith in the development of paranormal beliefs. 'Locus of control' stands for the belief in individual capacities to control events (internal) vs. the belief in chance and external elements to govern events and outcomes. It appears to be the case that—for the studied religious affiliations (Muslim, Christian, Jewish, Hindu, Atheist/Agnostic)—an external locus of control is associated with stronger paranormal beliefs. However, the relationship between basic religious beliefs, self reported devotion, and strength of religious faith, as well as the border between paranormal and religious beliefs seem to be more complex and in need of multi-disciplinary revisions in definitions and measuring instruments.

Gholamreza Sohrabpour, Shiva Khalili and Javid Takjoo further investigate the associations of religious beliefs with personal values, moral foundations, and identity styles among Iranian adolescents. His results highlight the role of contextual factors in the formation of all the investigated variables. Adolescents with what the author describes as normative and informative identity styles in the collectivist religious society of Iran exhibit religious beliefs that include transcendence, whereas the more sceptic beliefs (disaffirmation of religious beliefs) are related to an avoidant/diffuse identity style.

Mohammed Sanaa and Abdullsattar Mohanad from Iraq touch upon the sensitive issue of youth's effort for finding their place in a crisis

environment filled with insecurity and instability, violent ideologies, and promises of utopia. The available collective and group identities provide inclusion and support and cover the feelings of uncertainty for the adolescents. Extremist groups in the region seem to benefit from this need and vulnerability of adolescents.

Thomas Benesch's research offered psychometric evidence from a study of Austrian youth with different religious affiliations. The intensity of their religious affiliation was examined using a modified religious socialization index that measured, among others, "centrality" of religion for the personality of youth. The study confirmed the validity of the measurement approach for the three Abrahamistic religions Jewry, Christianity, and Islam.

Fatma Tuba Aydin explores the psychotherapy experience of multicultural therapists with their diverse Muslim clients in Austria. In the last two decades the culture and value sensitive approach has established itself in the curriculums and training programs of mental health practitioners in their academic education. Psychologists and psychotherapists are paying more attention to the person's cultural context and religious beliefs. Hence the necessity of developing specific ethical codes for using spiritual or religious elements in the therapeutic setting and/or while applying a culture/religion sensitive approach is quite obvious for mental health practitioners.

The six papers in this special issue provide a good sample of the range of issues that are currently being discussed on the interface of psychology, psychotherapy and religion. As these papers show, according to our changing environment in 21 st century we can look forward to the development of better measuring instruments and multi-disciplinary investigations to contribute to our understanding of the complex



meaning of beliefs, their formation and function, changes and relationships with other profound psychological concepts and processes.

## **Authors**

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