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PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY  
*division 36*

# NEWSLETTER

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## DIVISION 36 SURVEY

### A TIME TO LISTEN: HIGHLIGHTS FROM A RECENT SURVEY OF DIVISION 36

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JULIE EXLINE, Ph.D., is currently serving as President of Division 36. Dr. Exline is an Associate Professor of Psychology at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, Ohio. She is a licensed clinical psychologist and has been certified as a spiritual director from the Ignatian Spirituality Institute at John Carroll University. Her research centers on issues related to spiritual struggles and forgiveness, and she has a special interest in helping people understand and cope with feelings of anger toward God.

Warm greetings to all of you from not-so-warm Cleveland, Ohio! Thanks for being part of our division and for taking the time to check out our newsletter. My Fall 2012 newsletter column described some of the vital ways in which our members contribute to the life of Division 36. I'd like to build on those ideas here by briefly outlining some key findings from a recent survey of Division 36 membership. This survey was one of my main presidential initiatives. My aim was to identify strengths in the division as well as problem areas and ideas for improvement. I also wanted to encourage self-reflection by members about their own strengths and interests and how they might use these to benefit our division and the field. Thanks so much to everyone who participated in the survey!

I'm presenting some fairly detailed results from the survey as part of my presidential address at the 2013 Mid-Year Meeting on Religion and Spirituality. However, that talk is about 45 minutes long, and you probably don't have 45 minutes to spend reading this column. So what I'll offer here is a short summary of some key findings and take-home points that I gleaned from analyzing the survey data. I'll be highlighting 10 topics in the form of action items. But first, I need to give some background on the survey itself: the method and the participants.

#### Survey Design & Procedure

I designed the survey in collaboration with Division 36's executive committee. The survey had 4 sections: 1) Demographics, 2) Your Thoughts about Division 36, 3) Self-Reflection, and 4) You and Division 36. I programmed the survey using Qualtrics, a web-based survey program. I received IRB approval from Case Western Reserve University, where I am a faculty member. Division 36 didn't have funds or staff allocated for paper mailings of surveys, which can be expensive and labor-intensive. Because we needed to disseminate the survey in a low-cost, efficient way, we decided to send a recruitment e-mail to the Division 36 announcement e-mail list, which includes all division members who have active e-mail addresses on file with APA. The initial invitation went out at the end of November 2012, and a reminder e-mail was sent in December. At the time that I'm writing this column (March 2013), there are 647 e-mail addresses on this list. There were 130 valid responses submitted, so our response rate was approximately

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20%. This response rate is not great, and it's certainly a limitation of the study; however, it's a pretty typical response rate for studies that recruit via mass mailings.

### Participants

Who completed the survey? Two-thirds of respondents were men. The mean age was 52.2 years ( $SD = 16.6$ ), ranging from 21 to 86. Most (88%) identified as White/Caucasian ( $n = 114$ ). Other groups represented included Middle Eastern ( $n = 6$ ), Asian/Pacific Islander ( $n = 3$ ), African American/Black ( $n = 2$ ), Latino/Hispanic ( $n = 2$ ), American Indian/Native American/Alaska Native ( $n = 1$ ), and other or mixed race ( $n = 6$ ). Four participants were from outside of the United States. Respondents included faculty (53%), mental health professionals (36%), researchers (25%), graduate students (16%), religious/spiritual professionals (14%), retirees (9%), administrators (4%), post-docs (2%), and other (7%). (Percentages exceed 100% because respondents were allowed to select multiple options.) Religious affiliations included Christian (71%), nonaffiliated/atheist/agnostic (9%), spiritual but not religious (9%), Jewish (5%), Muslim (1%), and other (6%). Christian subtypes included Catholic (33%), Evangelical or Conservative Protestant (23%), Mainline or Liberal Protestant (20%), Christian unspecified (10%), Protestant unspecified (9%), Mormon (2%), and Orthodox Christian (2%).

### Ten Action Items from the Survey

Given the limited space available for this column, I've chosen to highlight 10 topics from the survey. Since I have more freedom here than I do in a traditional journal article, I'm framing these in terms of "action items" rather than simply describing what I found. My hope is that we can translate the knowledge from this survey into concrete ways to improve Division 36, our field, and the lives of ourselves and others.

I'll start with the satisfaction ratings. Respondents were asked to rate their overall satisfaction with Division 36 on a scale from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 4 (totally satisfied). No one endorsed "not at all." Most said that they were quite satisfied (39%) or very satisfied (38%). Notably, however, a substantial minority (19%) said that they were just slightly satisfied, and only 4% reported being entirely satisfied. On several open-ended questions, 76% ( $n = 99$ ) listed strengths of the division, and 35% ( $n = 45$ ) listed specific concerns or problems. I drew from these questions—but also from other survey sections—to develop these 10 action items.

**1. Savor our strengths.** There was plenty of good news from the survey. Here are some strengths that were noted often: First, participants reported that they appreciated having a division that was specifically focused on religious and spiritual issues (33%). They valued the sense of community, including opportunities to connect with others with kindred interests (31%). They remarked on the benefits of having diverse perspectives represented (22%), including approaches that are more spiritual than religious. Participants noted strengths in the quality of research (21%) and the journal (15%). They also acknowledged the benefits of electronic resources such as the e-mail list and newsletter (12%) and conferences (12%).

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**2. Offer a warm welcome—and ongoing support.** When going through the survey results, my biggest concern by far was that not all Division 36 members feel welcome. A few participants used words such as cliquish, unfriendly, or insensitive in their descriptions of the division. Not surprisingly, seeing the division in this unwelcoming way was

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associated with lower satisfaction ratings. Those who expressed these concerns were more likely to describe their affiliations as “spiritual but not religious.” Granted, the number of participants who expressed concerns about feeling unwelcome was small ( $n = 7$ ), but small numbers don’t make the problem any less important. And are the numbers really so small? I wondered how many people who did not complete the survey might also be feeling unwelcome—and whether some responders might have felt this way, too, but didn’t want to speak up for fear of being identified. Of all the issues raised in the survey, this problem of feeling unwelcome was the one that troubled me the most. So I’m going to go into more detail on this than the other points.

I followed up on the “unwelcome” finding by looking at a related set of items. The survey assessed how supported people felt, from 0 (not at all) to 5 (totally), in terms of their interests in the psychology of religion and spirituality. On average, participants reported that their interests were reasonably well supported by their organizations, colleagues, religious groups, mentors, friends & family, and the field in general ( $\alpha = .79$ ). The mean rating for feeling supported was 3.4 ( $SD = 1.1$ ) on the 0–5 scale. At first glance this seems OK, but a full 1/3 of respondents reported scores of 3.0 or lower—meaning that they were feeling somewhat isolated in terms of their interests.

I took a closer look at some of the factors that were associated with feeling supported, although I won’t list all of the statistical details here. In terms of professional interests, certain people felt more supported: those with academic interests (e.g., quantitative research, writing, teaching, mentoring) and those who liked to attend conferences, network with others, and present their work. Demographically, those who felt more supported were younger, female, and Christian (especially in comparison to those who identified as spiritual but not religious). Also, on the item assessing overall satisfaction with Division 36, satisfaction levels were marginally ( $p = .06$ ) lower for persons who endorsed an ethnicity other than white/Caucasian.

When I first came into the division, I felt very welcome. Division 36 has always felt like a secure base for me. But I must also consider these not-so-fun facts: At the time that I joined the division, I was a young, white, Christian woman who was involved with quantitative research, writing, and teaching. As an introvert, I’m not much of a networker—but the rest of the profile fit me like a glove. No wonder I felt so welcome!

To say that these findings were sobering would be a gross understatement. But it is vital for us to know that some of our members do feel alienated—and many more feel isolated. It’s clear that we need to be more welcoming and supportive to one another.

**3. Stand up.** Some members expressed concern that by broadening our focus to include spirituality, we might lose our ability to serve as a “safe haven” or a sound intellectual base for those interested in religious issues (or who hold specific religious commitments). Might members lose their ability to address the needs of specific religious groups if the division becomes too broad in its focus—or too politically correct? Also, as described in the Participants section above, some members are likely to feel underrepresented in our division.

Obviously there’s no easy solution here. However, it seems crucial that the voices of all members can be heard. Personally, I’d like to encourage Division 36 members to stand up for themselves—and, where appropriate, their groups—by continuing to do high-quality work that feels connected to their own beliefs and values. I also hope that each of us can find ways to share our perspectives with others in the division and more broadly, while maintaining a stance of openness and respect toward those whose views might differ (even sharply) from our own.

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**4. Be a lifelong learner.** Several respondents suggested that Division 36 members would benefit from broadening our knowledge bases in the areas of religion and spirituality. Most of us in the division have a lot of training in psychology or closely related fields. But there is huge variability in our knowledge of topics such as comparative religion, theology, philosophy, transpersonal psychology, and religious/spiritual integration with psychology. And frankly, sometimes our lack of background in these areas can make our work seem to lack depth or relevance for colleagues who have expertise in the areas listed above.

There are many resources that can help us learn more about religious and spiritual topics, from personal study to formal coursework to collaboration. In addition, collaborating and consulting with religious/spiritual professionals (e.g., clergy; theologians and religious studies experts; pastoral counselors; spiritual directors; chaplains) not only has the potential to teach us a great deal; it will also help us to build bridges. It would be informative to have more religious/spiritual professionals give conference sessions in their areas of expertise. Several respondents suggested that we be proactive in attending meetings of other related groups (e.g., International Association for the Psychology of Religion; Society for the Scientific Study of Religion; Religious Research Association; Westar Institute) and inviting members of these groups to join us.

**5. Do rigorous research.** There is a lot of great quantitative research going on in the division. Several members highlighted the need to stay methodologically rigorous and to keep in step with other areas of psychology and the social sciences. Sometimes psychology is seen as “soft science,” and our subfield may seem even fuzzier than most. One member suggested that we offer some methodologically or statistically focused sessions at our meetings, so that those who are interested but don’t have the requisite training can improve their skills.

**6. Keep it real.** In comparison with other professional groups, satisfaction levels were higher for faculty and lower for mental health professionals. Some participants expressed concern that the division has become too focused on quantitative research. Even in papers and presentations that take a basic science approach, greater attention to practical and clinical implications would be welcomed. For some, qualitative research will open creative new doors. Professionals in the mental health and religion/spirituality fields want practical ideas that they can use in their daily work with clients, so the relevance of quantitative research to their practice needs to be clear. Continuing education credits will also help to draw more clinically oriented professionals to conference presentations.

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while maintaining a stance of openness and respect ...*

I’d like to pass along some great news for those with clinical interests: I recently learned from Dr. Lisa Miller that APA will soon be coming out with a new journal, *Spirituality in Clinical Practice*. Feel free to contact Lisa with questions: [drlisamiller@gmail.com](mailto:drlisamiller@gmail.com)

**7. Serve as a mentor.** We asked students and early career professionals about their needs for mentoring. About half of these respondents said their needs for mentoring were being met “somewhat/moderately” (25%) or “quite a bit” (21%); however, the modal response was “a little bit” (32%), and 18% said that their mentoring needs were not being met at all. When asked about their level of interest in additional mentoring, no one endorsed “not at all.” The modal response was “very” (51%), followed by “moderately” (26%). Serving as mentors may also be a way to help later-career members stay engaged; several respondents made suggestions along these lines.

What’s needed now is a way to facilitate and organize mentoring efforts in a way that is helpful, practical, efficient, fulfilling for mentors and mentees, and sustainable over the

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long term. Over the next few months, I'm planning to consult with others to develop a strategy to start to address these mentoring needs. Your input and ideas would be much appreciated.

**8. Connect.** Many of us connect with other Division 36 members at conferences, and conferences were noted as strengths of the division. Yet when asked about conference attendance in the past 5 years, respondents reported relatively low attendance on average. The majority (64%) had not attended the mid-year conference in the past 5 years, 19% had attended only once, and only 4% had attended every year. In terms of the annual APA convention, the picture was only slightly brighter: 45% had not attended in the past 5 years, 18% had attended only once, and only 12% had attended every year. The clearest take-home point, then, is that many of our members are not attending our big conferences—at least not regularly. Also, despite extensive advertising, a few respondents were not aware that we had an annual mid-year conference.

In terms of the preferred mid-year conference location, respondents were “all over the map” geographically. The one clear preference was that only 16% expressed a preference to keep the mid-year meeting at the same location each year. A slight majority (56%) wanted to alternate locations, and 28% didn't have a preference. Several expressed interest in smaller regional conferences as well. It could take considerable energy and time to get new meetings (or mid-year locations) ready to go. But if anyone out there would like to propose a new conference or new location, please speak up—especially if you can help with coordinating logistics.

These findings got me thinking about the many ways that we can connect. Our regular conferences readily come to mind, but not everyone enjoys large conferences. Also, many can't afford the high prices of long-distance travel, conference fees, and hotels, especially in big cities. Sometimes it might make sense to gather with a small group of colleagues. We can visit others and invite them to visit us. Small groups with common interests could hold informal meetings—even via conference call or Skype if an in-person gathering is too costly or complex. Modest investments of time and money could lead to new or deepened connections.

**9. Be a gem.** I enjoyed looking at the Self-Reflection part of the survey, where members described some of their major strengths and interests. There is such a wide array of talent within our group, and we all have distinctive ways to contribute. As I described above in the Participants section, most of our respondents were from academic, clinical, or religious/spiritual settings, so it makes sense that many reported strong interests and skills in these areas. But these are not the only areas in which our division (and, more broadly, our field) has needs. For example, we would routinely benefit from having more help in areas such as recordkeeping, computers and technology, cross-cultural interests and skills, editing and reviewing for our journals, hospitality, and finances, to name just a few. And we can virtually always benefit from the help of visionaries and “connectors” (a la Malcolm Gladwell's *The Tipping Point*).

We do need people to run for office in the division, and I hope that you'll consider doing so. But it's not necessary to have a formally elected or appointed position in order to play a special role in the division. Whatever your unique skills and abilities might be, we hope that you will use them to help build our division and our field. Some of these ideas might be things that you would pursue on your own. But if you have a specific idea about how to make our division more effective—and especially if you can provide concrete steps and some leadership in carrying out your idea—please let us know. We would love to hear from you.

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**10. Tell someone.** When asked how they found out about Division 36, the largest proportion learned about us through another person (42% total; 34% through an individual; 8% through graduate programs). In short, a large number of our new members come through *relationships*. So here's a key question: Who can *you* tell about Division 36? Anyone who is interested can go to the website [www.division36.org](http://www.division36.org) and follow the links to become a member. People don't even have to remember the web address or division number. They can find us easily by typing in search terms like these: "APA psychology of religion and spirituality" or even just "psychology religion spirituality." When I did this a few minutes ago, Division 36 was one of the first websites listed. For questions about membership, please feel free to contact our membership chair. This person should always be listed on the Division 36 website. At the time of this column, the membership chair is Dr. Carissa Dwiwardani, [cdwiwardani@regent.edu](mailto:cdwiwardani@regent.edu).

*Whatever your unique skills and abilities might be, we hope that you will use them to help build our division and our field.*

### Concluding Thoughts

Thank you again to everyone who took the time and energy to complete our survey. I wish that I could have reported more details here, but hopefully some of these take-home points will be helpful to you. Over the long term, my goal is that the results from this survey will help Division 36 to grow in terms of breadth and depth—and I also hope that they will help us to provide an environment that all members will find supportive and engaging.



## INTIMATE PARTNERS

### INTIMATE PARTNER RELATIONAL STRENGTHS: IS GOD A STRENGTH?

JUSTIN HOPKINS, ELIZABETH WINE, TIFFANY ERSPAMER,  
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REGENT UNIVERSITY

The literature on intimate partners has disproportionately focused on relational conflict, often neglecting positive qualities and relational strengths (Fincham, Stanley & Beach, 2007). This bias is also reflected in practice, as traditional couples therapy, has centered on couples' complaints (Dinkmeyer, 1993). With such emphasis on relational distress, therapists may understand the presenting concern, but lack direction on how to resolve conflict and improve relational quality. As such, it is equally important to acknowledge positive traits and develop strategies that build upon couple's strengths (DeFraim and Asay, 2007).

Religion has been observed as an important construct of intimate relationships. Past studies have revealed a weak correlation between religiosity and marital satisfaction (Ellison, Henderson, Glenn & Harkrider, 2011), yet marital quality seems to be higher among couples who have common religious beliefs and practices (Brandt, 2004; Ellison, Burdette & Wilcox, 2010). In addition, religious orientation is a common function of healthy, enduring relationships (Robinson and Blanton, 1993).

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The purpose of the current study was to address the lack of research on positive relational qualities by examining religion as a relational strength. With archival data, the researchers explored whether proximal (religious) and distal (general relationship) measures of couple functioning can predict whether they perceive religiosity variables as a strength in their relationship. It was hypothesized that couples would perceive religion to be a relational strength as evidenced by self-report and observed measures. It was also hypothesized that relational satisfaction, relational experiences, religious commitment, and religious experience, would predict couples' perception of religion as a relational strength.

This study examined 152 couples from the Southeastern Virginia region who were interested in receiving couples counseling through a university counseling program, over a two year period. Prior to intake, couples completed the Revised Dyadic Adjustment Scale (RDAS; Crane, Middleton & Bean, 2000) to measure couple satisfaction, the Manifestation of God Scale (Mahoney et al., 1999) and Sacred Qualities of Marriage Scale (Mahoney et al., 1999) to measure the couple's experience of God in the relationship, the Religious Commitment Inventory (Worthington et al., 2003), and an open-ended question about their perceptions of their strengths as a couple. Their responses to the open-ended question about their relational strengths were dichotomized by whether or not they identified a warm emotional connection, and whether or not they specifically mentioned God or religious concepts as a strength.

A multiple regression was used to explore couple's perception of religion as a relational strength. Predictor variables included: gender, couples rating of their own and partner's positivity on a 10 minute video communication exercise at baseline, decision to seek religious vs. standard couples therapy, couple's endorsement of warmth-based strengths, as well as, the aforementioned baseline inventories. The overall model was predictive ( $R^2 = .35$ ); however follow-up correlations indicated that only religious commitment ( $r = .48^{**}$ ), couples decision to seek religious counseling ( $r = .35^{**}$ ), manifestations of God in marriage ( $r = .34^{**}$ ), sacred qualities of marriage ( $r = .28^{**}$ ), and warmth-based strengths ( $r = .22^{**}$ ) were meaningful predictors. Couples' satisfaction was not a meaningful predictor of religion as a strength ( $r = .13$ ).

The findings of this study suggest that religion is viewed as a common and meaningful construct among intimate partners. Religion, as a relational quality correlates with other religious constructs both individual and relational. It does not, however, relate strongly to general dyadic adjustment. Similar to the study by Mahoney et al., (1999) proximal measures of relationship were predictive but distal measures (like satisfaction) were not. Nevertheless, the couples in the current study spontaneously reported religion as a relational strength. Given this finding, might there be multiple pathways to predict relationship health? Past research has frequently acknowledged that a "healthy" relationship is a complex and somewhat abstract construct (Moore et al., 2004). One set of predictors may relate to traits, others to processes, but values and religion may also be a separate and independent path that has not been well researched.

The findings of this study also indicate that it is possible for a couple to report religious strengths in their relationship, but experience low satisfaction as measured by typical dyadic measures. Warmth-based emotions such as love and friendship were also a poor indication of whether religion was a relational strength. It is yet to be determined whether these couples were in fact satisfied given their religious experience, or if they were disillusioned by relational conflict, expecting their religious strength alone to produce relationship health. High scores on the RCI-10 was the best predictor, indicated

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that extrinsic devotion, was a major function of couples who viewed religion as their strength.

The limitations of the study include a somewhat homogenous sample. Almost all participants were married heterosexual middle class couples who ascribed to a Christian identity. The couples were also a clinical sample (not general population) interested in receiving couple's counseling. Furthermore, due to sample size, the data was examined on an individual level, rather than dyadic analysis. Future research should investigate whether highly religious couples function similarly to non-religious couples, and whether there are separate pathways to healthy relationship. In addition, future studies should further the discussion on couples' strengths, in an effort to balance the negative disposition of available research.

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BOOK REVIEW

**PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNTS**

**By Jacob A. Belzen (Editor)**

New York: Springer, 2012. vi + 281 pp. \$99.99 hardcover

REVIEWED BY:

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For anyone with interest in the psychology of religion movement, Jacob A. Belzen's most recently edited volume will have strong appeal. It is an enjoyable read that offers a glimpse into the lives of some leading psychologists of religion, some who have been read as far back as the 1940s. Within the pages of this book, we learn details of personal experiences—some even from childhood—that helped to shape worldviews and flame interest for particular areas of research. Regrettably, we too often know little of the life experiences that influenced the concern and work of the most notable researchers in our field; fortunate for us, this book attempts to address this void, at least for 15 such people. The self-stories of these authors afford a context for better understanding of their life work, which makes their contributions even more compelling for those who have read and continue to read them.

As Belzen addresses in the introductory chapter, taking on this book was no small task for at least two reasons. First of all, the question must be answered as to whether the psychology of religion has sufficiently recovered from its post World War I decline to even declare its “comeback” into the twenty-first century, and thus merit a book about those who may have contributed toward such a prospect. In view of recent achievements in the sub-discipline—that is, best-selling textbooks/handbooks, well-received journals, and significant research funding—Belzen concludes that the naysayer pronouncement of an obituary for the psychology of religion was a bit premature. If the psychology of religion has indeed experienced a resurrection, it then becomes a burden to decide who shall occupy the limited space in a volume that will commemorate but a few of those most responsible in helping this revival along—and Belzen steps to this task with deliberation. The invited contributors are fairly recent leaders “who have made contributions to the psychology of religion on the level of content itself, not so much those who were primarily involved in organizing the field” (p. 10). Those selected also are said to approximate the gender ratio (2/13) of longtime reformers in the psychology of religion. The contributors are further meant to be representative of religious affiliation/non-affiliation in the field, methodological traditions, and religious/theological training. However, the editor intentionally decided upon a continental imbalance in favor of Europeans over Americans for two reasons: (1) important work by Europeans often has been overlooked by Americans, in no small part because of language barriers; and (2) European work in the psychology of religion has tended to be more theoretically-based than American work, which largely has been empirically-driven. With settlement on the current status of the psychology of religion and the selection criteria for contributors, Belzen sets about the task of organizing the book.

The selected contributors include 15 autobiographies. In alphabetical order, Americans include Donald Capps; Ralph W. Hood, Jr.; H. Newton Maloney; Argentinean-immigrant to the US Ana-Maria Rizzuto; Bernard Spilka; and David M. Wulff. Also in

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alphabetical order, Europeans are represented by Mario Aletti (Italy); Heije Faber (the Netherlands); Bernhard Grom (Germany); Nils G. Holm (Finland); Kate Miriam Loewenthal (the United Kingdom); Pavel Říčan (the Czech Republic); Joachim Scharfenberg (Germany); Daniel Anders Hjalmar Sundén (Sweden); and Antoine Vergote (Belgium). Space here does not allow for summaries of the interesting lives and contributions of these individuals, although it can be said collectively that their stories unfold with a sense of humility, and often with unexpected surprises. For examples, some had never entertained the thought of becoming a psychologist of religion, let alone the prospect of doing something of significance in the field; some did not have the advantage of institutions in their countries that offered psychology programs or psychological training; some studied with major figures such as Heidegger, Otto, Piaget, Lacan, and Merleau-Ponty; and at least one described himself as an “amateur” (though not simply a hobbyist) in the psychology of religion, as his profession is in the practice of psychoanalysis. All this makes for a very interesting read.

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Belzen’s selection of autobiographies for this book will necessarily leave some readers wondering why this or that person of renown was not included; even Belzen himself laments that space was not allowed for other major figures in the psychology of religion, such as Richard Gorsuch and Kenneth Pargament. (A case might be made that even Belzen himself is deserving of a chapter in his own right, given his contributions to the psychology of religion, although he does disclose some of himself in the introduction when providing a context for the book.). However, if Americans—in particular—are not familiar with at least some of the book’s contributors, it will be an opportunity for them to broaden their horizons and become more fully aware of contributions made to our field on a global scale, which, after all, seems an important perspective to have for the times in which we live.

Readers of this volume likely will come away with a greater appreciation for the psychology of religion and for the autobiographers who have helped pave a road more widely traveled today. It may be that this or that important leader is missing from its pages, but that would always be the case, regardless of who was included in such a short manuscript. Nonetheless, Jacob Belzen has produced an important work that gives attention, long overdue, to some of the most exceptional people in the psychology of religion around the world—and for this effort, he is to be commended.



*W. PAUL WILLIAMSON is a professor of psychology at Henderson State University. He was the 2001 recipient of the Margaret Gorman Early Career Award from Division 36 and is a past editor of the division’s newsletter.*

LAB CENTER

**THE MEANING, SPIRITUALITY, AND HEALTH LAB AT THE  
UNIVERSITY OF CONNECTICUT**

**CRYSTAL L. PARK, Ph.D.**

The Meaning, Spirituality, and Health Lab at the University of Connecticut, led by Dr. Crystal L. Park, currently consists of Crystal, six graduate students, and approximately 25 undergraduates (our largest group ever!). We really love our lab, and feel very lucky to be a part of such an amazing and productive group.

Research projects within our lab center on topics of meaning, spirituality, and/or health but are quite diverse under that general umbrella. Amy Hale-Smith and Ian Gutierrez study religion and spirituality and stress and coping, Dalnim Cho looks at health behaviors in cancer populations and issues of stress-related growth, Tosca Braun studies yoga and embodied cognition, Login George is interested in meaning and existential concerns, and Kristen Riley studies rumination and stress. We value camaraderie and collaboration and work together on many different projects, including designing and implementing studies and writing papers and chapters together. We enjoy our time together outside of school as well, both working (e.g., group writing or study sessions at Starbucks) and playing (dinners or a group day trips).

We meet every Wednesday during the semester for two hours, in which we discuss literature, develop research ideas, and brainstorm solutions to specific project-related issues. The first hour consists of a discussion among graduate and undergraduate students, usually a journal club discussing a recent research article. Many of our undergraduates become integral team members and assist the research progress in many critical ways. Undergraduates are frequently authors on papers and chapters published from the studies in our lab. The second hour of lab, grad lab, is just for Dr. Park and the graduate students. In this meeting, we discuss and brainstorm about nascent research ideas, current difficulties or issues in our work, or ongoing manuscripts. In addition to these meetings, we frequently have ad hoc meetings during the week, conference calls, and nearly constant email communications. Many of the graduate students develop their own mini-teams from the larger lab and meet with their own smaller groups of students dedicated to their specific project.

Thanks to Crystal's efforts, most graduate students receive partial if not full funding through external research grants. Recent funding sources include grants from the Templeton Foundation, National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM), Livestrong Foundation, National Cancer Institute (NCI), and faculty research grants from the University of Connecticut's Center for Health, Intervention, and Prevention. Graduate students also receive teaching fellowships as teaching assistants or instructors of record.



**LAB CENTER**  
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The lab currently has eight major ongoing projects. Two studies focus on Congestive Heart Failure (CHF): one longitudinal study examining the pathways through which religiousness/spirituality is related to better subsequent physical and mental health, and one pilot study of a mail-based psychosociospiritual intervention. Two other studies focus on measure development: one for quality of life for young cancer survivors, and another of the essential properties of yoga that will allow researchers to provide detailed information on the levels of various components of specific yoga interventions. A fifth project is a randomized clinical trial called “Targeting the Teachable Moment Intervention for Breast Cancer Survivors,” testing the effectiveness of using a strengths-focused mail-based intervention focused on changing health behaviors. Another major project investigates resilience in an OEF/OIF veterans. We are also completing a pilot randomized controlled trial of yoga and stress management in the transition to the first year of college, and a final project is looking at relations between religious beliefs about suffering and well-being in community samples.

We publish our work frequently and in a variety of journals, including, recently, *Psychological Assessment*, *International Journal of the Psychology of Religion*, *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, *Psycho-Oncology*, *Journal of Positive Psychology*, and *Psychology & Health*. In addition, we get our work out at conferences: each graduate student presents posters and presentations at several national conferences each year. We typically present at the Division 36 Midyear Conference, the American Psychological Association Annual Convention, the Association for Psychological Science, the Society of Behavioral Medicine and the Symposium on Yoga Research. Dr. Park accepts one graduate student to join the lab as part of the UConn Clinical Psychology Ph.D. Program; if you have questions for her regarding this work or the lab, contact her at [crystal.park@uconn.edu](mailto:crystal.park@uconn.edu).



## Welcome New Members of Division 36!

Dena Abbott	En-Ling Chiao	Aurimar Gutierrez	Jeffrey Leighton	Danika Perry	Shefali Vatsa
Mona Abo-Zena	Joshua Craig	Treniece Harris	Kristin Lenihan	Leah Power	Anthony Walker
Chananya Abraham	Harold Cullen	Jon Hartman	Casey Lloyd	Cheryl Puryear	David Wang
Thomas Altro	Rosimar Dias	Krystal Hernandez	Peggy Loo	Nina Reynolds	ShawnaLee Washam
Chinyere Amadi	Jonathan Doner	Benjamin Jeppsen	Ronald Ma	Stephanie Riccardi	David Washburn
Deena Ata	Shauna Dowden	Jeremy Jinkerson	Leonard Matheson	Ruth Riding-Malon	Amanda Waters
Maggie Benedict-Montgomery	Carissa Dwiwardani	Patrina Johnson	Mark Mayor	Scott Shapiro	Kaylyn Watterson
Kathy Bharrathsingh	Robert Eberwein	Thomas Johnston	Mark McCormack	Jerrell Smith	Alyssa Weaver
Elizabeth Bott	Kristen Eliason	Ira Katz	Lynnette McLain	Starkka Stacy	Abi Weissman
David Bradley	G W Bill Elliott	Nancy Kehoe	John Mendoza	Mark Tanabe	Garrett Woods
Amanda Burrows	Fernando Estrada	Cynthia Kimball	Edward Moody	Virginia Thomas	Elena Wu
Claudia Canales	Carla Farcello	Patricia Kress	Martin Nolasco	Don Uslan	Carrie York
Charles Cederberg	Marisa Glivings	John Lace	Charlynn Odahl	Alex Uzdavines	
	Ian Gutierrez	Daniel LaPonsie	Cori Pansarasa	Jamie Van Leuwen	

HUMANITARIAN

**NEW PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND DISASTER APPLIED  
RESOURCES: HELPING SUPER STORM SANDY AND SANDY  
HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SURVIVORS**

JAMIE D. ATEN, Ph.D.

**Founder & Co-Director, Humanitarian Disaster Institute**

**Rech Endowed Chair & Associate Professor, Psychology Department  
Wheaton College**

In response to Super Storm Sandy and the Sandy Hook Elementary School tragedy, the Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) at Wheaton College has recently released several new applied psychology of religion and disaster resources to assist survivors. *Helping Children Cope with Traumatic Events* is a booklet that provides practical guidance for caregivers—including parents, family members, teachers, clergy, and volunteers—on how to help support children after a traumatic event. This booklet provides readers with an overview of common reactions to violent acts, including a breakdown “by age” of common signs and symptoms by age. Concrete steps for caring for children’s emotional and spiritual needs in the wake of a traumatic event are also provided. HDI has also launched the *Disaster Spiritual and Emotional Care Tip Sheet Series*, which includes 15 tip sheets to help address trauma experienced by Super Storm Sandy survivors. Of particular interests to Division 36 members, is a 25 year annotated review of psychology of religion and disaster research. These resources can be downloaded for free from HDI’s website: [www.wheaton.edu/hdi/Resources](http://www.wheaton.edu/hdi/Resources)

The Humanitarian Disaster Institute (HDI) is the country’s first faith-based academic disaster research center. As a college-wide interdisciplinary research center at Wheaton College, HDI is dedicated to helping equip domestic and international congregations and faith-based organizations to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. HDI carries out this mission through applied research, training, and technical support. Further, HDI seeks to conduct translational research that leads to useful tools and resources for a wide range of helpers based on psychology of religion and disaster research.



ANNOUNCEMENT

## International Series in the Psychology of Religion

The **International Series in the Psychology of Religion (ISPR)**, previously published by Rodopi (Amsterdam), has moved to Springer (New York) and offers possibilities for publication in the psychology of religion (broadly defined) to a wide range of authors. The main features of this unique while international series are:

- ISPR will deal with the psychology of religion in all its aspects, allowing authors to write from a variety of perspectives (e.g., related to a specific psychological theory or orientation, a specific religious/spiritual phenomenon, or research approach).
- ISPR will include monographs as well as edited volumes, but will not accept manuscripts of textbooks, publish dissertations or texts with excessive technical or statistical information.
- Striving for the highest psychological scholarship, ISPR aims to publish readable books that will address not only specialists in psychology, but also practitioners of other disciplines bordering on the psychology of religion, as well as a wider audience interested in psychological approaches to religious and spiritual matters.

### ISPR Characteristics

The following characteristics will inform the development of the series:

- **Interdisciplinary outlook.** ISPR does not only have psychologists as authors, but also psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, anthropologists, sociologists, religious studies scholars, historians, and others who are experts in applying a psychological perspective in studying religious/spiritual phenomena
- **International reach.** ISPR aims to make an international impact and to encourage broad collaboration, soliciting authors and editors from every continent possible to explore topics in this area. Members of the editorial board represent a truly global vantage point.
- **ISPR is strictly psychological in nature.** It publishes books based on theoretical, empirical, and cultural investigations of religious phenomena, persons and events from a psychological perspective. The series is not in itself religious in any way; it does not publish theological or pastoral psychology texts. It does not advocate for or reject religion, but examines religion (broadly defined) as an important element of culture (individual and collective) and by consequence of human lives, which calls for psychological attention and analysis.
- **ISPR does not restrict itself to any psychological approach or method.** It allows for any type of psychological method as practiced by the world wide community of psychological scholars, drawing on approaches ranging from well established empirical ones drawn from social, personality, and clinical psychology, theoretical and historical approaches, as well as newer ones, such as cultural psychology and evolutionary psychology, employing hermeneutical methods as well as other emerging scientific approaches like those incorporating methods from neuroscience.

### Academic Level

ISPR intends therefore to attract attention from a broad variety of readers. Whereas most volumes on psychology and religion speak to only one audience, the ISPR aims to reach out to a wide audience of scholars, researchers and practitioners from psychology, psychiatry, social and cultural sciences, religious studies, philosophy, and to those with a scholarly interest in a psychological approach to religion. Volumes from ISPR will be aimed primarily for a graduate and postgraduate audience but may also be used on in undergraduate education.

### Language

Other than the previous series at Rodopi, ISPR publishes volumes in English only. (It allows for translations of books previously originally published in languages other than English.)

### Contact information

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750 First Street, NE  
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## Our Mission...

Division 36 – Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality,

- promotes the application of psychological research methods and interpretive frameworks to diverse forms of religion and spirituality;
- encourages the incorporation of the results of such work into clinical and other applied settings;
- and fosters constructive dialogue and interchange between psychological study and practice, on the one hand, and religious perspectives and institutions on the other.

The division is strictly nonsectarian and welcomes the participation of all persons, without regard to personal faith, who view religion as a significant factor in human functioning.

The division's quarterly Newsletter contains original articles, book reviews, announcements, and news of interest to division members.

### NEWSLETTER

#### SOCIETY FOR THE PSYCHOLOGY OF RELIGION AND SPIRITUALITY

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Division 36, Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality.

The Newsletter invites articles, interviews, book reviews and announcements  
relevant to the interdisciplinary focus of psychology and religion.

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