

# International Association for the Psychology of Religion

July 2015

## Spreading the news



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## Conferences



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- 2015 IAPR Congress (August 2015 in Istanbul, Turkey)
- Seminary: The Psychology of Religion in Brazil: Research, Theory, Teaching and Practice, November 2015, Curitiba, Brazil
- Annual Nordic Conference on Psychology of Religion, October 2015, Honne, Norway

*The International Association for the Psychology of Religion (IAPR) is an international organization promoting the scientific research and exchange within the field of the psychology of religion. The Association is not partial to any particular trend but aspires to provide a platform for the entire spectrum of the scientific-psychological study of religion for psychologists of religion from all over the world.*

Website: <http://psychology-of-religion.com/>

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## Spreading the news: Early career researchers talk about their latest findings and upcoming studies



Hello! My name is Laura Kiken, and I currently am an NIH T32 postdoctoral research fellow in Complementary and Alternative Medicine at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Prior to my postdoctoral fellowship, I completed a master's in public health and then a Ph.D. in social/experimental psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University. Broadly speaking, my research examines contemplative practices and associated psychological constructs, with an interest in how these affect health and well-being.

During my Ph.D., I became interested in testing a notion one finds in several spiritual texts: that mindfulness – a nonjudgmental awareness of and attention to present-moment experiences, which can be practiced in meditation or in daily life – fundamentally alters how one views the world. Under the guidance of Dr. Natalie Shook, I used social cognition paradigms to examine the relation between mindfulness and cognitive biases toward negativity or positivity. Over several studies, I found evidence that mindfulness may reduce bias toward negativity. For example, in a lab-based, randomized experiment (Kiken & Shook, 2011), I compared a brief mindful breathing meditation to a carefully designed control condition and assessed performance on an attitude formation paradigm. The paradigm involved a virtual world of novel stimuli that either helped or hurt participants' scores in a game. I exposed participants to equal amounts of helpful (i.e., positive) and harmful (i.e., negative) novel stimuli and then assessed participants' learning of each valence. Mindful breathing meditation, as compared to the control exercise, reduced bias toward better learning of negatives than positives, with more equal learning overall. In another study with a similar experimental manipulation, I found that mindfulness meditation reduced negatively weighted thoughts in response to affect-eliciting images (Kiken & Shook, 2014). These findings suggest a potential mechanism through which mindfulness may benefit mental health, because negatively biased cognitive patterns typically promote emotional distress. Likewise, I found preliminary support for a model in which the inverse relation between dispositional mindfulness and emotional distress is indirect, mediated at least partly by less negatively biased cognition (Kiken & Shook, 2012).

This line of research produced less clear findings regarding the relation between mindfulness and positivity, however, cultivating positivity may be desirable for psychological health. In my postdoctoral fellowship, under the guidance of Dr. Barbara Fredrickson, I have begun to distinguish mindfulness from positivity-promoting correlates while examining whether these distinct constructs serve synergistic roles in well-being. This aligns with how mindfulness often is taught in spiritual settings: as a quality that supports other constructive practices, such as savoring. Based on this framework, I analyzed data from a longitudinal field study in which participants completed baseline measures of dispositional mindfulness, perceived ability to savor the moment, and psychological health. Participants then reported their emotions daily for nine weeks, and completed the psychological health measures again at the end of the study period. I found that mindfulness and savoring ability, which were modestly correlated, interacted to predict daily positive emotions, and in turn, residualized changes in psychological health. Mindfulness did not predict positive emotions except at very high levels of savoring ability; savoring ability predicted positive emotions and related improvements in psychological health only among those with moderate to high (not low) levels of dispositional mindfulness.

I also have initiated a new line of research in my postdoctoral fellowship. In this research, I am studying individual beliefs in divine immanence. This work has involved the development of a new self-report measure. Initial studies suggest that meditation practice and mystical experience predict perceived divine immanence. I currently am studying potential implications of this belief for personal agency, social functioning, and well-being. In the near future, I will be transitioning to a postdoctoral research associate position at Kent State University on a randomized controlled trial of Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction in pre-hypertensive patients. This study includes opportunities to examine meditative practices, mindfulness, and spiritual beliefs in an important clinical population, with physiological measures. The position provides several opportunities to continue and expand the lines of research I have described. To contact me about my research, please email me at [laura\\_kiken@med.unc.edu](mailto:laura_kiken@med.unc.edu) (through summer 2015) or [lkiken@gmail.com](mailto:lkiken@gmail.com).



## 2015 IAPR Congress is coming very soon!

**Location:** Marmara University in Istanbul, Turkey

**Dates:** August 17-20, 2015

**More information and Registration:** <http://iapr2015.ikc.edu.tr>

The congress is co-organized by Marmara University Faculty of Theology and Katip Celebi University Department of Psychology. Increasingly, the IAPR Congresses have become an essential place for meeting and dialogue between researchers and scholars from a vast array of countries. We cordially invite you to attend this congress and present your empirical and/or theoretical research on any topic connecting psychology and religious behavior such as religion and mental health, religion and psychological development, religion/spirituality, religious development, cultural perspective, neurosciences. With 4 keynote presentations, 5 invited symposia, and 1 pre-conference workshop, we expect to cover a wide variety of topics. The language of this Congress will be English.

The biannual IAPR congress is among the most important events to promote and exchange the most exciting research in psychology of religion. We hope that Istanbul, the transcontinental city, ideally situated between the **Sea of Marmara** and the **Black Sea**, will offer a pleasant and relaxed atmosphere for networking with leading experts, emerging scholars, and enthusiastic young students in the psychology of religion.

## Seminary: The Psychology of Religion in Brazil: Research, Theory, Teaching and Practice.

**Location:** Pontifical Catholic University of Curitiba, Brazil

**Dates:** November 9-11, 2015

**For more information please contact:** Dr. Marta Helena de Freitas <[mhelenadefreitas@gmail.com](mailto:mhelenadefreitas@gmail.com)> or Dr. Mary Rute Esperandio <[mresperandio@gmail.com](mailto:mresperandio@gmail.com)>

The Working Group "Psychology and Religion", belonging to the Brazilian National Association for Graduation and Research in Psychology, will held its Xth biennial Seminary in November 09-11th, at the Pontifical Catholic University of Curitiba, the capital of the State of Paraná, in Brazil. The theme of the Xth Seminary will be **The Psychology of Religion in Brazil: Research, Theory, Teaching and Practice**. Besides the contribution of Brazilian scholars, the Seminary will have the participation of Ray Paloutzian and Kevin Ladd.



## The Annual Nordic Conference on Psychology of Religion

**Location:** Honne, Norway

**Dates:** October 19-20, 2015

**More information:** [www.religionspsykologi.no](http://www.religionspsykologi.no)

**Final date for registration and submission of paper** (150 words): September 20<sup>th</sup>.

**Registration form in Norwegian and English:** <http://si.checkboxonline.com/Religionspsykologisk-fagdag-2015.aspx>

**Organizing committee:** Lars J. Danbolt, Sigrid Helene Kjørven Haug, Ingvild Vattø, Elin Opheim, and Tor-Arne Isene.

**Reference group:** Hilde Hanevik, Torgeir Sørensen, Hans Stifoss-Hanssen, Gry Stålsett, Kari Halstensen, Caroline Austdal, Peter LaCour, Heidi Frølund Pedersen, Valerie DeMarinis, and Lars Lien.

We have the pleasure to welcome you to the Ninth Annual Nordic Conference in Psychology of Religion. This year the main topic will be **Death – as existential experience and clinical challenge**.

Plenary speakers are **James W. Jones, Kathleen Bishop, Owe Wikström, Tatjana Schnell, Valerie DeMarinis, and Oddgeir Synnes**. Others will present in workshops, parallel sessions, and clinical seminars.

Death is a core theme in most religions, as well as in psychology and other human sciences. At the conference the focus will not be on mourning processes, rather more on the meaning making regarding the inevitable fact that death is a part of life, a human basic concern. How do we as humans make meaning of death during life? What are the relationships between death anxiety and religion? How can different ways of thinking about an afterlife (Christian, Atheist, Esthetical) contribute to making sense (or not) of life before death? What characterize seriously ill persons' identity constructions regarding living and dying? Can Buddhist traditions shed light on Western ways of existentially dealing with death?

And furthermore, how can insights from existential meaning making and psychology of religion be helpful for clinical work? These and other questions will be addressed.

In addition there will be workshops, parallel sessions, musical intermissions – and as always – plenty of room for meeting and talking with old and new colleagues.

Further information will be posted on the website of Center for Psychology of Religion.  
[www.religionspsykologi.no](http://www.religionspsykologi.no).