

# IAPR

**International Association for the Psychology of Religion**

## Newsletter of the IAPR

June 2012

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## Under the spotlights

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### **Dr. J. Dezutter winner of the first Early Career Award**

This summer, at the IAPR conference, Dr. J. Dezutter received the first Early Career Award. We asked her to give us an overview of her previous and future work. We thank her for sharing with all the IAPR members her interesting research questions.

My current research investigates the role of meaning systems (both transcendent and secular) in coping with severe stressors. The guiding theoretical framework is the meaning making model of Crystal Park (e.g., Park, 2010 for an overview) complemented with ideas from positive psychology on meaning in life (e.g., Steger, in press) and concepts from cognitive-emotional process theory (Gross, 2003). The meaning-making model assumes that individuals need to engage in intra-psychic processes in order to transform the meaning of the stressful experience. Therefore, the meaning-making model expands the more traditional coping models (e.g., the transactional model) by focusing more explicitly on aspects of meaning in the coping process. The meaning-making model proposes that confrontation with stressful situations potentially shatters meaning systems and that the discrepancy between the appraised situation and the meaning system creates distress. For example, the diagnosis with a life-threatening disease can violate one's beliefs that bad things only happen to bad people. Discrepancies between the appraised situation and the beliefs of the meaning system can create feelings of loss of control and loss of predictability, leading to the experience of intense stress (Park, 2008). The perception of these discrepancies is thought to initiate attempts aimed at reducing distress, resulting in a process of meaning making. In this process, in which the restoration of meaning is strived for, both cognitive strategies (i.e., re-appraisal) as well as emotional strategies (i.e., emotional processing) can be activated. Some scholars, therefore, refer to cognitive-emotional processing (Rachman, 2001). A positive resolution of this process would result in a reduction of distress and in a better adjustment to the stressful event (Park, 2010).

In collaboration with the Flemish Pain League, a first set of cross-sectional studies were conducted. These studies explored different aspects of the personal meaning system of chronic pain patients in order to investigate associations between these aspects, meaning making processes and adaptation to chronic pain. In these studies, we explicitly focused on cognitive processes within the meaning making process and our main topic of interest was cognitive re-appraisal (= the ability to positively re-evaluate the negative stressful experience). Together with colleagues from the Netherlands (Dr. Schaap-Jonker) and Germany (Dr. Büssing), we explored the role of God images for chronic pain patients. Results showed that God images were related with happiness in chronic pain patients and this association was mediated by positive disease interpretation (an operationalization of cognitive re-appraisal) (Dezutter et al., 2010). In line with the previous study and in collaboration with Dr. Wachholtz (UMass), a second study was set up to investigate whether prayer can function as a re-appraisal technique. Results

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seemed to indicate that prayer indeed has re-appraising capacities, especially for religious pain patients (Dezutter, Wachholtz, & Corveleyn, 2011). In a third collaborative study, a more formal aspect of the meaning system was explored. In line with Huber (2003), we assume that especially a central meaning system will play a role in adaptation to stressful events. Therefore, we tested whether a central meaning system is a predictor for the life satisfaction of chronic pain patients above and beyond other psychological resources (for example, sense of coherence). Results indicated that centrality was an important factor in the promotion of life satisfaction for chronic pain patients, above and beyond any influence of sense of coherence. Furthermore, the centrality of the religious meaning system emerged as a buffer for the detrimental influence of pain severity on life satisfaction (Dezutter, Robertson, Luyckx, & Hutsebaut, 2010).

Currently, a new longitudinal study on this topic is launched in collaboration with the Flemish Pain League. In this three-wave study, a broader range of aspects of the meaning system will be explored. In addition to the cognitive focus in the previous studies, emotional processes will be investigated, combined with a broader range of outcome variables tailored for this medical population (pain treatment, pain medication use, satisfaction with patient care). In addition to previous described studies focusing on chronic pain as severe stressor, a pilot study focusing on the old age has been setting up. This study aims to explore the role of religious meaning systems in the old age, focusing on stressful events associated with this specific life period. I'm looking forward to share the findings!

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J. Dezutter

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## Conferences\*

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\* Whoever wants to bring conference information under attention of the IAPR members, please email the information to the editor of the Newsletter.

### **Registration and call for papers for the Positive Psychology of Flourishing Through Meaning and Purpose**

**Date:** July 26-29, 2012

**Location:** Toronto, Canada

**Information :** The conference is being hosted by the International Network on Personal Meaning. Who should attend? Students, scholars, mental health professionals and anyone who values Viktor Frankl, positive psychology, resilience and eudaimonia is invited to submit a brief summary of their work for possible presentation at the conference. Or, delegates may attend as an interested member of the listening audience. A selected sample of keynote speakers include Richard Ryan, Chris Peterson, Jordan Peterson, Laura King, Todd Kashdan, Alan Waterman, and many other leading scholars such as humanistic psychologist Stanley Krippner as well as logotherapy practitioners such as Emmy Van Deurzen from the UK. and Paul Wong from Toronto. Viktor Frankl's grandson, a filmmaker, will fly in from Vienna to talk and show his feature documentary film entitled, "Viktor and I".

**Conference website and registration:** [www.meaning.ca/conference](http://www.meaning.ca/conference)

**Call for papers :** The deadline for the call for papers is June 15 for non students and June 1st for students.

### **Registration for EASR-conference**

**Date:** August 23-26, 2012

**Location:** Stockholm, Sweden

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**Information :** At the last IAPR conference several people showed interest in David Wulff's Faith Q-sort. Therefore, we would like to draw your attention to the forthcoming EASR-conference where a session "Exploring subjective worldviews with the Faith Q-Sort" will be arranged. David Wulff's Faith Q-Sort was designed to solve the problem of how to assess individual worldviews; religious, spiritual, secular, and anything in between these. It employs a methodology that uniquely combines both qualitative and quantitative features: while respecting individuals' subjective outlook, statistical analysis also makes it possible to discern shared patterns, known as prototypes. We invite contributions from scholars and students on the use of this method.

**Conference website:**

[http://webappl.web.sh.se/EASR2012#!/p3/ext/content.nsf/aget?openagent&key=easr2012\\_1304345036643](http://webappl.web.sh.se/EASR2012#!/p3/ext/content.nsf/aget?openagent&key=easr2012_1304345036643)

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### Contact

Please feel free to contact me or to email all information of interest to me (such as job advertisement, conference, call for papers, summer school, new books, or various announcements that you would like to bring under attention of the IAPR members):

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