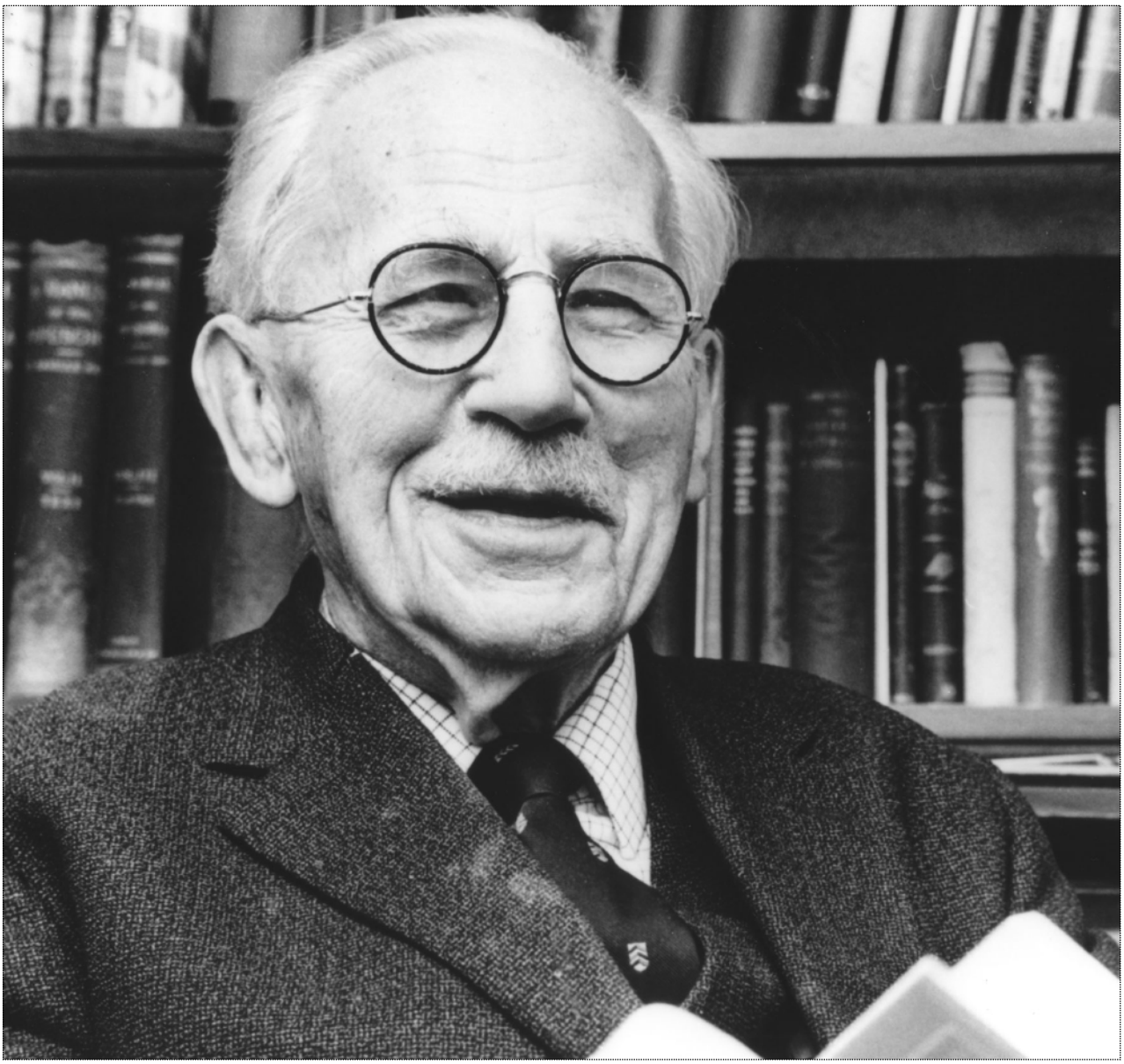
Journal for the Study of Religious Experience

Vol. 7, No. 1 (2021)

"The Future of the Study of Religious and Spiritual Experience"



Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of the
Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre

Guest Editor:
Dr. Jack Hunter

ISSN: 2057-2301

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Editorial:
The Future of Research on Religious and Spiritual Experience

Jack Hunter

Religious Experience Research Centre,
Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture,
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
(jack.hunter@uwtsd.ac.uk)

Welcome to Vol. 7 No. 1 of the *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience.* This issue has its roots in the Religious Experience Research Centre's 50th anniversary conference, which was held on the weekend of 1st-3rd July 2019 in Lampeter. Most of the papers here were initially given as presentations at the conference, and have since been reviewed, edited and written up for publication. The theme of the conference was 'The Future of the Study of Religious and Spiritual Experience,' and with this in mind the papers collected in this issue explore different theoretical and methodological approaches to the study of a variety of religious and spiritual experiences. There is also an emphasis in the papers that follow on experiences that have tended to fall outside of the remit of academic research on extraordinary experience, but which may have a large contribution to make to our field if taken seriously.

My own paper, entitled 'Deep Weird,' for example, points to the stranger reaches of extraordinary experience research, and examines why some of the most unusual reports of extraordinary experiences come to be neglected in the scholarly discourse. Encounters with UFOs, fairies and other strange entities are often ignored in academic research precisely because they are so strange and do not fit into often quite riding academic categories. As I point out in the paper, however, there are many reasons to think that these 'high strangeness' experiences share common phenomenological features and underlying processes with other more established forms of religious and spiritual experience. In the context of the theme of this issue, the paper suggests that a greater academic engagement with 'high strangeness' experiences could provide fruitful new directions for the future of religious experience research.

Alison Robertson's contribution also shines a spotlight on a class of extraordinary experience that has been marginalised in academic conversations. Robertson argues that the experiences fostered by practitioners of BDSM (bondage, dominance, sadism, masochism) share commonalities with other forms of ecstatic and religious experience, and as such also deserve to be taken seriously as the subject of research on

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extraordinary experiences more generally. Indeed, one of the key points raised by Robertson in this paper is that the experiences that arise through these practices are co-created - that the experience itself results from the interaction of the experiencer (bottom/submissive) and their partner (top/dominant), and would not be possible without the participation of both parties. This challenges the common view that religious, spiritual, extraordinary and ecstatic experiences are inherently 'private' and 'subjective' in nature, and suggests instead that they may also arise through participation and interaction with others.

In her paper 'Secularization of/or Mysticism,' Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki evaluates the ideas of the philosopher Richard H. Jones, and in particular those examined in his recent book *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable* (2016). Szugyiczki's paper is a critical appraisal of five key concepts that Jones uses to structure his argument - *secularisation, modernity, classical mysticism, today's mystical phenomena* and *the future of mysticism*. Szugyiczki problematises the concept of secularisation - which is often taken for granted in fields outside of religious studies - and demonstrates how mystical experiences continue to have relevance in the contemporary world. In conclusion to her evaluation, Szugyiczki suggests a range of questions that we can ask of mystical experiences in order to propel the field of religious experience research forward in new directions.

In his paper, Simon Dein presents a case-study of 'Spirit Possession in a Psychiatric Clinic,' which he uses as a vehicle for exploring different anthropological and psychiatric approaches to spirit possession phenomena. The paper argues in favour of greater interdisciplinarity in the study of religious experience, and suggests that both anthropological perspectives (with their emphasis on the socio-cultural context of possession experiences), and psychiatric perspectives (which emphasise the aetiology of extraordinary experiences in the individual), have much to learn from one another. The paper concludes with a comparison of exorcism practices and psychotherapy, and suggests some implications for the future of mental health care, in particular the need for greater cultural awareness, inclusivity and spiritual sensitivity.

To round off the papers in this issue, Leslie Francis' contribution - 'Exploring the consequences of religious experience within the Greer tradition' - evaluates the effectiveness of John Greer's (1932-1996) approach to the study of religious experiences and their effects on Irish students in the 1970s. This is achieved with a replication of Greer's famous study with a new cohort of Irish students in 2010. Francis argues that Greer's original research question - *Have you ever had an experience of God, for example, his presence or his help or anything else?* - still has meaning for contemporary Irish students. The paper concludes with a summary of the key observations and findings from

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the study replication, and suggests further replications in the future for longitudinal comparison, as well as parallel studies employing different sets of research questions.

To conclude I would like to make a few summarising statements concerning the future of religious experience research. In light of the papers included in this issue, the future of religious experience research will have to be *inclusive* - expanding its scope out to explore experiences that have previously been 'damned' or tabooed in scholarly research (such as paranormal experiences, or ecstatic BDSM encounters), traditional concepts in the study of religion and religious experience will have to be evaluated (the subjectivity of experience, for example, and the concepts of secularisation, mysticism, and so on), theoretical models well have to be seen as complimentary, rather than as complete explanations in themselves (e.g. anthropological and psychiatric perspectives on spirit possession), and research methodologies will have to be adapted and developed to bring empirical religious experience research into the twenty-first century, while building on the foundations that are already in place.

Finally, I would like to offer another possible direction for religious experience research going forward - the application of indigenous research methodologies (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Religious experience researchers have adopted a range of quantitative and qualitative research methodologies since the discipline's inception in the 19th century, which has contributed to our diverse and interdisciplinary field of research. Increasingly, however, historians of science are demonstrating that the research methodologies of the human and social sciences continue to perpetuate out-dated colonialist models for understanding the world, as well as ontological assumptions that are not necessarily shared by non-Western (and especially indigenous) societies. The burgeoning field of indigenous research methods (which begin from very different ontological starting points to western scientific research methods), may offer new and exciting avenues for research on religious experience going forward. An engagement with indigenous research, methods, theories and ontologies may also go someway towards decolonising the study of religious experience, and of religion more generally. Perhaps this could be a theme for a future issue. In the meantime, we sincerely hope that you enjoy this one!

References

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Deep Weird:
High Strangeness, Boggle Thresholds and Damned Data in Academic Research on Extraordinary Experience

Jack Hunter

Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture,
Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre
University of Wales Trinity Saint David
(jack.hunter@uwtsd.ac.uk)

Introduction

This paper is about the stranger reaches of extraordinary experience research, and examines why some of the most unusual experiential reports come to be neglected in the scholarly discourse, even within what is already a relatively fringe field of inquiry. Some of the reasons are methodological in nature, while others are rooted in deeper cultural and personal attitudes to anomalous data. The academic aversion to the most unusual forms of extraordinary experience has resulted in a gulf between the kinds of experiences discussed in the scholarly literature - which often fall into distinctive types and categories (OBE, NDE, voice hearing, encounters with light, spirit possession, religious experience, and so on) - and the writings of popular paranormal researchers, who have more frequently been able to discuss a broader range of experiential accounts (from UFO encounters to Bigfoot and fairy sightings, and everything in between). Notwithstanding this divide, however, there are significant themes that run through the established academic literature on religious and extraordinary experience and the canon of popular popular paranormal research, some of which are explored in the following paper. These similarities suggest that even the most unusual experiences, which are often ignored by academics, contain elements that connect them to other forms of extraordinary experience that are more broadly accepted. This paper concludes by suggesting that a sense of 'high strangeness' might well be a core underlying feature of extraordinary experience more generally, and that instead of being neglected the 'deep weird' should be granted greater and renewed scholarly attention.

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High Strangeness

In the annals of research on extraordinary experience there are certain cases that are so strange that they stand out from the crowd. These are stories of experiences that are far weirder than, for example, the slightly above chance evidence for psi revealed in parapsychological experiments, or the average ghost encounter or UFO sighting. These experiences are utterly bizarre, and cannot be neatly classified or understood - they are experiences that fall between the established categories of researchers and academics. UFO experiencer and researcher Mike Clelland, for example, describes how real-life paranormal experiences are often enmeshed in a "tangled knot of implausibility" in which "synchronicity spills over the edges like an unattended sink" (Clelland, 2020, p. 44). In Clelland's case, his own UFO experiences were synchronistically intertwined with numerous uncanny encounters with owls. Seemingly distinct paranormal events and experiences often merge and overlap in the real world. Indeed, so common is this kind of paranormal cross-pollination in the life-worlds of many experiencers, that Clelland considers it "a sign to trust the event as legitimate. The more complicated the interwoven details, the more valid it seems" (Clelland, 2020, p. 44). In the popular UFO and paranormal literature this element of paranormal experience is referred to as the 'High Strangeness' factor. The term was coined by the pioneering UFO researcher and astronomer Dr. J. Allen Hynek (1910-1986) in the context of his 'Strangeness Rating' for UFO encounters. He explains:

> A light seen in the night sky the trajectory of which cannot be ascribed to a balloon, aircraft, etc., would […] have a low Strangeness Rating because there is only one strange thing about the report to explain: its motion. A report of a weird craft that descended within 100 feet of a car on a lonely road, caused the car's engine to die, its radio to stop, and its lights to go out, left marks on the nearby ground, and appeared to be under intelligent control receives a high Strangeness Rating because it contains a number of separate very strange items, each of which outrages common sense […] (Hynek, 1979, p. 42).

In other words, the strangeness rating is a measure of "the number of information bits the report contains, each of which is difficult to explain in common sense terms" (ibid.). Computer scientist and UFOlogist Dr. Jacques Vallee later expanded Hynek's rating, elaborating seven distinct levels of strangeness - ranging from the lowest level of a simple sighting of a light in the night sky all the way up to abduction experiences and the psychic side of the the UFO phenomenon, accounts of which contain the highest number of

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anomalous information bits (Vallee, 1977, pp. 114-119). Through his work, Vallee has demonstrated that the UFO experience is far stranger than the standard 'nuts-and-bolts' and extraterrestrial hypothesis (ETH) perspectives would often like to admit, and suggests that UFO experiences have a great deal in common with other forms of extraordinary experience reported throughout history (cf. Graham, 2017). More recent writings from the popular paranormal field have also begun to highlight the high strangeness that permeates other areas of the paranormal, such as in the case of Bigfoot encounters, and other cryptozoological interactions, which often cannot be adequately distinguished from accounts of poltergeist, fairy and UFO experiences (Cutchin & Renner, 2020). A Bigfoot sighting is not always just a Bigfoot sighting, and is often much more - including telepathic communications, dream visitations and other psychic experiences. In a 1991 survey of the work of the independent psychical researcher D. Scott Rogo (1950-1990), George P. Hansen commended Rogo's willingness to tackle even those elements of the paranormal 'that most consider "subversive"' (Hansen, 1991, p. 33). Hansen goes on to list many of the complex overlaps that characterise high strangeness experiences, the most 'subversive' aspects of the already marginalised paranormal:

> …demonic experiences, bigfoot sightings, poltergeist action, and phenomena suggesting survival of bodily death have all been reported in conjunction with UFOs. Strange animal mutilations have been reported in poltergeist cases as well as with ufo sightings. Striking ESP experiences […] have been reported by ufo contactees. Some of the contactees claim bedroom visitations by angels, extra-terrestrial aliens, and mythical creatures. Similar experiences have been reported for thousands of years. These are unsettling claims not only because of their innate strangeness, but also because they fall between the discrete categories most people assume to be valid, and thus most researchers (even those in parapsychology) prefer to ignore them (Hansen, 1991, p. 33).

Because the more outlandish elements of paranormal experience are often ignored or dismissed, even by parapsychologists, Hansen suggests that the responsibility to investigate them has often fallen to journalists and other popular writers. Charles Fort's (1874-1932) collections of 'Damned Facts' (Fort, 2008), John Keel's (1930-2009) investigations of the Mothman, Men in Black and other mysteries (see Keel, 1971; 2002; 2013), the hugely influential books of Jenny Randles on the alien abduction phenomenon (see, for example, Randles, 1988), and Albert Rosales' recent epic compendia of humanoid encounters (for instance, Rosales, 2016), are good examples of popular researchers who have embraced High Strangeness in their writings. Despite its

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acceptance as an almost defining feature of paranormal experience in the popular and Fortean research communities, however, very little attention has been paid to the High Strangeness factor in the context of academic or scientific research on extraordinary experience more generally - though the recent writings of Jeffrey J. Kripal have paved the way for further exploration (Kripal, 2010; 2011; 2020). Why, then, has High Strangeness received such little scholarly attention?

Boggle Thresholds and Academic Research on Extraordinary Experience

One possible explanation has been offered by the historian of psychical research Renée Haynes (1906–1994), who coined the term 'Boggle Threshold' to refer to the point at which an extraordinary experience or phenomenon is deemed so outlandish and unlikely that it is entirely dismissed by the researcher. She explains that:

> Individual boggle thresholds will vary […] with individual temperament, history, training, and aptitude. They will also be influenced by […] the groups to which each individual is linked: family, friends, school, employment, university. In people brought up in the discipline of the physical sciences the levels of boggledom are likely to differ considerably from the levels found in those brought up in the humanities (Haynes, 1980, p. 94).

Boggle Thresholds also play their part in academic fields that actively engage in research on extraordinary experience (as opposed to simply ignoring it), such as parapsychology and religious experience research. Boggle Thresholds may, for example, place limits on the kinds of experiences that a study will take into consideration - and there might well be pragmatic reasons for excluding certain phenomena from a research project. For example, in their pioneering study, published as the *Census of Hallucinations* in 1889, philosopher Henry Sidgwick (1838-1900) and colleagues in the Society for Psychical Research (SPR) made use of what qualitative research methodologists call a 'filter question' at the beginning of their survey (Krosnick & Presser, 2018, p. 264), specifically to filter out certain kinds of experiences that might 'muddy the waters' in their study of hallucinatory experiences. Their filter question was:

> Have you ever, when believing yourself to be completely awake, had a vivid impression of seeing or being touched by a living being or inanimate object, or of hearing a voice; which impression, so far as you could discover, was not due to any external physical cause? (Sidgwick, 1891, p. 52).

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Sidgwick explains that this 'last sentence is intended to exclude, as far as possible, a class of experiences which are liable to confound with hallucinations' (Sidgwick, 1891, p. 52). The implication is that there are certain experiences, such as those that occur in dreams, or visual illusions when not 'completely awake,' for example, that should be ruled out of a study of auditory and visionary hallucinations. But what about experiences that fall between these categories - those peculiar times when we are between waking and sleeping, in hypnagogic and hypnopompic states, that are rich in hallucinatory experiences, for example (Ohayon et al., 1996)? A whole plethora of extraordinary experiences is potentially ruled out from the start. As sociologist David Yamane suggests, 'by using a closed-ended question as a filter […] qualitative researchers run the risk of filtering out those who do not understand their experiences in the terms given by the researcher' (Yamane, 2000, p. 180). The Religious Experience Research Unit at Oxford University also took a similar approach to the collection of its data on contemporary religious experiences in the 1960s, using a combination of public calls for experiential narratives in newspapers, pamphlets and via questionnaires (Hardy, 2006, pp. 17-25). This research employed the now famous 'Hardy Question' - named after the founder of the research unit, Sir Alister Hardy (1896-1985) - to try to focus the enquiry onto certain types of extraordinary experience:

> Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?

Hardy notes in his own analysis of the data collected by the RERU, however, that in spite of the filter question the general public continued to send in 'accounts of the more ecstatic experiences,' and as such the research team ultimately decided against trying to restrict the kinds of experiences that people could submit to the collection (Hardy, 2006, p. 19). This is perhaps indicative of the 'wild' nature of real-world religious experiences, which do not necessarily fit neatly into simplistic classificatory schemes. Hardy's decision to allow the incorporation of heterodox accounts of religious experiences, therefore, has led to the creation of a very rich resource for researchers. The Religious Experience Research Centre (RERC), as it is now called, is currently based at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David and houses over 6,000 self-submitted reports of 'religious experiences' from the general population, and is ripe for research on the overlaps between paranormal, religious and other extraordinary experiences.

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Damned Experiences

The contents of the RERC archive has provided the source material for several studies of religious experience, and various different attempts at categorising them into distinctive types, but this work has often also continued to perpetuate a distinction between certain kinds of experiences. In his 1977 phenomenological study, for example, Timothy Beardsworth focussed in particular on experiences of a 'sense of presence' drawn from the first 1,000 submitted reports. He explains how he classifies these experiential narratives in the introduction to his analysis:

> The episodes I shall quote involve "sensory" phenomena - visions, voices, and the like. I classify the phenomena under separate [headings] according to the "sense" involved: (1) visual, (2) auditory, (3) tactile, (4) inward sensations. There is also (5) the sense of a "presence", the feeling that someone is there, based on no sensory evidence at all. This feeling, I think, so far as being out on a limb, somehow underlies the other "sensory" categories (Beardsworth, 1977, p. ix).

Beardsworth goes on to give numerous fascinating accounts from the archive, categorising them according to the criteria listed above. The following extract is a randomly-selected, though more or less representative example from Beardsworth's study that shares similar features with many of the experiences submitted in response to Hardy's question, and is the kind of account commonly featured in analyses of the archive's contents. You could say it is a reasonably standard religious experience:

> Male 60: "There was no sensible vision, but the room was filled by a Presence which in some strange way was both about me and within me. I was overwhelmingly possessed by Someone who was not myself, and yet I felt I was more myself than I had ever been before…" (cited in Beardsworth, 1977, p. 122).

Experiential accounts such as this give very intimate insights into what are often powerfully transformative, and deeply personal, moments in peoples' lives, and are a rich source of data for research. These are extraordinary experiences to be sure - they include encounters with beings of light, hearing disembodied voices, out-of-body experiences, transfiguration of landscapes, and many interactions with entities interpreted as angels, God, Christ and the Holy Spirit - but there are also experiences contained in the RERC archive that do not often appear in such studies - out-lying accounts that do not quite fit into the ordered frameworks put together by academic researchers. The following

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account, for example, which I found during my own perusal of the archive, has the reference number 000235 so was presumably included in the first one thousand accounts surveyed by Beardsworth in the 1970s. The experience is undoubtedly a sensory (visual) one, and includes a very distinct sense of presence, though for some reason the account does not appear in his exploration of sensed presences in the archive:

> On the Friday a man came to clean the carpet and curtains in the drawing room. Later on there was a complete fusing of everything electrical. Clocks, radios, refrigerator, freezer, T.V. all the lights etc. In the evening I lay down on a sofa, closed my eyes and tried to relax. I then saw several little green men with very unpleasant expressions. They were looking at me. They seemed to be at a distance. I suppose "gnomes or goblins" would be an adequate description. I didn't like what I saw, and I was reminded of the time I had a rheumatic illness when I was seven, and had been very alarmed by the "little green men" I had seen then. Hallucinations, presumably.
>
> Date of Experience: 1951, Female.
> RERC Archive Reference: 000235

This is clearly an experience with a high strangeness rating, perhaps to the extent that it exceeded Beardsworth's boggle threshold, leading to its exclusion from his study. Indeed, there are many different elements of this experience that resonate with other features of high strangeness - the man coming to clean the carpets (who has clearly been mentioned for a reason), the fusing of electrical devices, the little green men, the 'unpleasant' feeling, the life-time of similar experiences, and so on - put in these terms it carries many of the hallmarks of a UFO, abduction or Men in Black experience (see discussion below). Perhaps, then, it is not a religious experience, but a paranormal experience, so it belongs in a different category? On the other hand, the direct reference to "gnomes or goblins" in the account also has clear parallels with the body of research related to encounters with fairies and other folkloric entities. Simon Young's recent *Fairy Census* (2018), for instance, contains numerous descriptions of similar contemporary interactions with small green humanoids, so perhaps it is a fairy experience - and yet, the report was explicitly self-submitted as a religious experience, in response to Hardy's question. Regardless of how the experience is ultimately categorised, it is clear that a distinction is being made between those experiences that are suitable for inclusion in academic publications concerned with religious experience, and those accounts that do not fit the mould. Such accounts - and there are other high strangeness experiences in the archive (see Hunter,

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2019 for a couple of other examples) - are unlikely to be found in scholarly research publications because of their high strangeness rating. To use Charles Fort's terms they become 'damned data' - even in an already damned field like parapsychology or religious experience research.

The Numinous, The Weird and the Oz Factor

There are, however, some investigators from the canon of academic research on extraordinary experience who have commented on the deep weirdness that underlies many such experiences. The German theologian Rudolf Otto (1869-1937), for example, is famous for his notion of the 'numinous' experience as the foundational religious impulse. Otto suggested that the sense of the numinous is conjured through our interactions with what he terms "the wholly other" - "something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an absolutely different one" (Otto, 1958, p. 29). For Otto the numinous experience was non-rational - pre-existing any kind of religious doctrine - but could be broadly understood through two overlapping characteristic 'feeling-responses' that he labelled *mysterium fascinans* and *mysterium tremendum,* the beautiful and frightening aspects of the numinous respectively. Otto also highlights the occasional tendency of numinous experiences to slip over into a state of what he calls "daemonic dread" - the *mysterium horrendum,* or the "negative numinous," which can be utterly terrifying for the experiencer. Otto elaborates on the dual-nature of the numinous in the following extract from his *The Idea of the Holy* (1958):

> The feeling of it may at times come sweeping like a gentle tide, pervading the mind with a tranquil mood of deepest worship […] It may burst in sudden eruption up from the depths of the soul with spasms and convulsions, or lead to the strangest excitements, to intoxicated frenzy, to transport, and to ecstasy. It has its wild and demonic forms and can sink to an almost gristly horror and shuddering […] It may become the hushed, trembling, and speechless humility of the creature in the presence of […] that which is a mystery inexpressible […] (Otto, 1958, p. 13).

Otto's emphasis on the 'wholly other,' the 'non-rational' and the numinous, effectively drew academic attention to some of the stranger features of religious experience - as well as to its darker dimensions - and his analysis is a good starting point for a scholarly approach to High Strangeness as a feature of extraordinary experience. The folklorist Peter Rojcewicz (1987) is another example of an academic researcher of extraordinary experience who has faced up to the highly strange and the wholly other, in particular in

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his analysis of the bizarre Men in Black (MIB) as both a folk-tradition - a system of beliefs and narratives - and as a distinct kind of extraordinary experience. Take, for example, his summary of the highly unusual behaviour of the Men in Black, who have been reported mysteriously turning up to question and intimidate UFO experiencers since the 1950s:

> Often dressed in black clothing that may appear soiled and generally unkempt or unrealistically neat and wrinkle-free, MIB have on occasion displayed a very unusual walking motion, moving about as if their hips were swivel joints, producing a gliding or rocking effect, often with the torso and legs seemingly moving off into opposite directions […] (Rojcewicz, 1987, p. 151).

Encounters with the MIB clearly have a very high strangeness rating, they are often surreal interactions and evoke the numinous in the sense of being simultaneously fascinating and frightening for the experiencer. These kinds of encounters are also frequently ignored. As Rojcewicz points out in his paper, such accounts are unlikely to be examined in the academic literature on extraordinary experiences or folklore, precisely because they are so weird. Although the word ‘weird' is often used flippantly, the cultural theorist Mark Fisher (1968-2017) suggests instead that the ‘weird’ is - like Rudolf Otto’s notion of the numinous - a very distinctive feeling-response resulting from an interaction with an anomalous stimulus, such as an encounter with the Men in Black. Fisher explains that:

> […] the weird is a particular kind of perturbation. It involves a sensation of wrongness; a weird entity or object is so strange that it makes us feel that it should not exist, or at least it should not exist here. Yet if the entity or object is here, then the categories which we have up until now used to make sense of the world cannot be valid (Fisher, 2016, p. 15).

This feeling of ‘deep weirdness’ runs through many of the varieties of anomalous experience - from ghost sightings and interactions with Bigfoot, through to angelic visitations and mystical visions. When approached from a comparative perspective, then, bizarre experiences such as encounters with the MIB reveal a number of features that connect them to broader motifs in the phenomenology of extraordinary and religious experience (Evans, 1987). For example, Rojcewicz gives a detailed narrative description of an MIB encounter given to him by an informant that includes an eerie sense of quiet stillness surrounding the interaction, reminiscent of what alien abduction researcher Jenny Randles has called the ‘Oz Factor.’ The Oz Factor is common to many paranormal

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experiences, and often precedes the climactic encounter - whether with a UFO in the sky, Bigfoot in the woods, a gnome-like entity in the garden or an angel in your bedroom. Randles defines it as:

> […] a set of symptoms […] which [create] the impression of temporarily having left our material world and entered another dream-like place with magical rules […] It tells us […] most notably that the percipient has changed their state of consciousness […] The result is a dreamy and weirdly silent state of mind that is recognised as peculiar […] even though they do not appreciate what it implies (Randles, 1988, p. 22).

Rojcewicz's account also highlights the strange and awkward movements of the MIB as a trigger for this dreamlike state, and the growing sense of the *mysterium tremendum* that eventually engulfs the experiencer: "Within, say, ten seconds, great fear overwhelmed me and for the first time I entertained the idea that this man was otherworldly. Really, I was very frightened" (Rojcewicz, 1984, pp. 163). As a further illustration of these overlapping high strangeness traits: the following narrative was sent to me by an informant who was looking for help making sense of an extraordinary encounter he and a friend had while walking in the wilderness, not far from his friend's home. My informant has given permission for the following extracts from his initial message to me to be included in this paper. He explains how he and his friend were walking away from the house, down a path toward the surrounding woodland, when:

> […] both of us immediately saw something out of place […] below about 30-40 feet away from us in between the trees [there was something] tall, white and three dimensional. It appeared to be completely white and soft like light, but it did not illuminate the trees or ground around it […] it was shaped in [an] upside down V or U […] It was so white that you could see the shadow being cast on it while it was swaying like it was a real animal […]

Instantly apparent in the context of this discussion is the anomalous 'sense of presence' noticed by my informant and his friend - both recognised 'something out of place' in their immediate environment. It is also, therefore, a shared experience, suggesting an objective anomalous presence in the woods. That the encounter was with a being of light is also a classical feature of many forms of religious experience. The unusual behaviour of the light itself - such as the fact that it did not illuminate the surrounding trees - is also a widely noted theme across a range of extraordinary experiences, including UFO encounters and

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near-death experiences, during which light often behaves in peculiar ways (cf. Fox, 2003; Puhle, 2013). Perhaps strangest of all is the bizarre shape of the entity - described as 'an upside down V or U' that swayed 'like it was a real animal.' The description is, to use Otto's terminology, of something 'wholly other.' My informant continues his description of the entity he and his friend witnessed:

> […] It was making creepy swaying movements with its (whole body) […] It was moving left to right in a specific motion standing on the forest floor in the same area between the trees making absolutely no sound, and there was absolutely no wind. It was beautiful to look at but terrifying at the same time. We watched it in silence as it was swaying and I started to feel impending doom (the sinking feeling in your chest) "set in" and it felt like I was going to die or something bad was going to happen. I told my friend specifically "I don't like this", he agreed, and we immediately left the forest […]

This extract contains several features that further resonate with other elements of high strangeness experiences. The 'creepy swaying movements' of the entity, for instance, are reminiscent of the bizarre movements of the otherworldly MIB discussed above. The fact that there was "absolutely no sound, and there was absolutely no wind" recalls the 'Oz Factor' described by Jenny Randles in conjunction with UFO sightings and alien abductions; and Otto's sense of the dual-natured numinous is captured vividly in the the way that the swaying entity is described as 'beautiful to look at but terrifying at the same time,' with the experience gradually slipping into the feeling of 'impending doom' and Otto's *mysterium horrendum*. This is an account with a high number of anomalous information bits "each of which outrages common sense" (Hynek, 1979, p. 42). It is precisely this kind of knotting of elements that characterises high strangeness, but that also connects high strangeness experiences to other elements of extraordinary experience more generally. It is also this knotting together in a single account of numerous high strangeness threads that makes my informant's experiential narrative so compelling, as Mike Clelland suggests: "The more complicated the interwoven details, the more valid it seems" (Clelland, 2020, p. 44).

Conclusion

'High Strangeness' was introduced into the discourse of paranormal research as a scientific term - by a scientist - as a framework for making sense of some of the most complex extraordinary experiences. As a scientific term, High Strangeness may have

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broader usefulness in the wider study of extraordinary and religious experience. The high strangeness perspective encourages us to take seriously those elements of extraordinary experience that might seem bizarre or absurd, and to try to understand them in a comparative context. This may go some way towards helping to bridge the gap between popular Fortean perspectives on the paranormal and academic research on religious and extraordinary experience - revealing not only the threads that link the highly strange to established themes of religious experience, but also showing how elements of religious experience often tip over into the highly strange. High Strangeness, then, may not simply be a feature of outlying cases, as I suggested at the start of this paper, but may actually be a fundamental characteristic of extraordinary experiences more generally, and as such deserves wider scholarly attention.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr. Michael Grosso, Prof. Bettina Schmidt, Joshua Cutchin and Tony Eccles for their comments on an earlier draft of this paper.

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  ISSN: 2057-2301

"He can cane me to orgasm, or he can cane me to hysterical tears": The Co-Construction of BDSM Experience

Alison Robertson
The Open University
(alison.robertson@open.ac.uk)

> He asks how it can be possible to actually punish me if I can take and enjoy pain at the level they've just given me […] and no other question could show me so clearly that he just doesn't get it. Look, it's punishment if Master wants it to punish me. And it's pleasure if he wants me to enjoy it. He can cane me to an orgasm, or he can cane me - with the same cane mind you - to hysterical tears - goodBadgirl.

The description above contains an insight that many kinksters - including both people who participated in my research and people with whom I have simply had personal conversations - would share. Namely, that the reactions and intentions of another person can have a profound impact on your own experience of something. I think it likely that this is true far beyond the sphere of kink activity, but the emphasis of most discourse about experience seems to be on it as individualised, essentially separated from that of others, even as wholly un-shareable. The accounts of kink experience shared by my research participants challenge these assumptions, and the nature of the activities which lead to those accounts offer a unique site of deliberately created, complementary and relational encounters through which the co-construction of experience can be examined.

'Kink' is an umbrella term that is linguistically similar to 'religion' in that it is a multivalent term which potentially denotes a diverse range of concepts, phenomena, artefacts, communities and behaviours. It also shares with religion the difficulty of identifying which of these elements might be considered most important by any given individual using the term, along with the regrettably common assumption that everyone using it means exactly what the listener considers it to mean. Jonathan Z. Smith recommends that, in the case of religion, scholars should avoid attempts to seek "'that without which' religion would not be religion" (1982, p. 5) and should consider instead a polythetic taxonomy of different possible configurations of characteristics. This seems a useful approach to many of the complex and fluid concepts with which the various disciplines of the humanities deal, and certainly it works well for the concept of kink. My research and experience give me the beginning of a list of characteristics which might

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contribute to a taxonomy of kink and enables me to offer this brief description of kink practice in the context of my research. Kink is:

> a collection of activities that involve the conscious and consensual use of pain, perceptions about pain, sensation, emotion, restraint, power, perceptions about power or any combination of these, for psychological, emotional and/or sensory pleasure.

The focus on sensation and power exchange in this list reflects the fact that most among my research participants were engaging in practices that might be labelled BDSM (Bondage, Domination, Submission and Masochism). However, the broader term 'kink' was the preference of most of my participants, both as a general category label and name for the subculture they were members of, and as a description of their personal areas of interest within the vast array of possible kink activity - their portfolio of personal kinks. My intention is to focus largely on the creation of physical sensation by one person for another, as the type of experience most amenable to the unpicking of (some of) it's component parts, but this should not be taken as an indicator that all kink involves sado-masochistic activity.

Kink activities which may create pain include beating, electrical shocks, cutting, piercing with needles, restricting movement and putting clamps on various sensitive body parts. The terms 'top' and 'bottom' are not generally considered to incorporate a presumption of power exchange and so are preferable for general description than the more widely known terms Dominant and submissive,[1] although these latter are more likely to be used to indicate personal kink identity. In most types of physical kink a sensation of some kind is deliberately created by the top applying their attention, and tools, to the body of the bottom. Through this process of sensation creation - commonly called play - a situation is created in which there is of necessity a crossing - or touching of - "boundaries of the self that one does not allow to be crossed mundanely" (Bauer, 2014, p. 111). In other words, it is a situation of deep intimacy that requires the palpable presence of another person. Many descriptions of such situations were shared with me during the course of my research. They were shared primarily through verbal conversation, although some participants also offered me access to material they had written. These kinds of linguistic materials are at the heart of most research into experience which leads me to the following observation: experience is not language and language is not experience.

[1] Common convention within the kink community is to indicate the power exchange in relationships described by these terms by capitalizing Dominant and not submissive.

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I make this statement in the full realisation that language plays a significant part in what we understand about our own experiences, how we explain them to ourselves and share our understanding with others. But, that notwithstanding, language remains the interpretation of the experience, not the experience itself. Awareness of this is common, with most people likely to have had occasion to recognise the inadequacy of available words to do justice to what they wish to share. But a tendency to forget about those difficulties, or at least to leave them out of the discourse surrounding experience, is also common. For scholars studying experience, language is the primary tool in the box for finding out about experiences had by another person: in order to find out what can be shared about what that experience was like for that person the starting point is to ask them about it. If, as is often the case, responses to such questioning include references to not being able to do justice to the reality, that may well be taken as a claim to fundamental ineffability. In turn this, for some, is understood as an attempt to place that particular category of experience beyond critique or discussion. But many people who offer such caveats do then go on to do their best to describe their experience as fully as they can; the warning that language does not do justice to the reality is thus part of the description, rather than a way to avoid further discussion.

The process of experiencing is a "quasi-chaos" (James, 2003, p. 33), incorporating many various and constantly changing elements. To identify something that may be labelled 'An Experience' of a particular kind is therefore a process of picking through the complex mesh of these elements to arrive at a perception of the whole which satisfies. A request to share this 'Experience' with a researcher only adds to that complication, particularly if the researcher has already labelled the particular category of experience in which they are interested - a label of 'religious experience,' or even 'religious-type' experience' - in the discussions I sought to have would have prevented many of my research participants considering their own experiences relevant, because of their assumptions about what I must mean by such a term. The final descriptive account shared with the researcher is only the last point in "a train of sensations, emotions, decisions, movements, expectations, etc., ending in the present, and the first term of a series of 'inner' operations, extending into the future" (James, 2003, p. 7). Any coherent linguistic account is constructed later than the events it describes, and will struggle to do justice to the "non-rational and vaguer aspects" (Blum, 2012, p. 209) present in that initial quasi-chaos. This is so because both the world and the self within the world are experienced "in wordless ways before we come to language our experience" (Sheets-Johnstone, 2009, p. 364). The challenge for the researcher is thus to recognise the complex whole of experience, including any non-rational elements, in a way which is both intelligible and which contributes to the research process. The challenge inherent in

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'languaging' experience is in finding adequate words to achieve a "descriptive rendering of the dynamic phenomenon" (p. 363), which creates a sense of having done justice to the phenomenon itself, and also to the experiencers knowledge of it. What is experientially felt and known is challenging to render into words because "language is not experience in the first place" (p. 364).

None of this is intended as a claim for an essential ineffability of experience. Language may be incomplete (or even fundamentally inadequate) to describe some elements of experience, but still experiences are described, and the descriptions are not wholly unintelligible. Listeners draw upon personal experiential knowledge of things which seem comparable, on other accounts of similar experiences and the ways they were described, on different experiences that have created what the listener judges a comparable internal state to that created by the experience being shared with them. The whole person, embedded in a context which includes all of their experiences to date in all their fluidity and complexity, is involved in interpreting what is communicated to them in the partial, linguistic description of another person's experience.

The way in which the tool of language functions in such contexts creates a tendency to focus on the single person speaking and what they have to tell us about their experience; the complexity of the task means this is not surprising but that does not mean it is not noteworthy. The words offered are collected by the researcher who then uses different words to drill into the speakers account of their experience according to a preferred methodology that has been chosen (hopefully reflexively) for the purpose of focussing on and interpreting the linguistic choices made by the speaker in pursuit of adequately expressing their experience. Specific components which contributed to the whole can be identified and explored in this way; researchers may be concerned with looking for common elements across a range of accounts or may focus in depth on one specific factor depending on the specific research concerns. But the interweaving of disparate strands to make the original account will always be unique to the individual giving it because it is created by the entire person, embodied and embedded in their complex, personal contexts. The linguistic interpretations applied by researchers and the readers of their research are equally subject to such contextual idiosyncrasies.

Overall then, talking about experience in a careful analytic way tends to feed the impression that experience is in large part private and interior to the individual and so essentially inaccessible and un-shareable. This may not be the intention, but it is commonly the effect. The imperfections of language as a tool are often explicitly recognised but, once that is done there is an understandable temptation to shift the focus to what it can do without worrying about what might be overlooked as a result of its imperfections and the assumptions which underpin its use. And, since language is not

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experience and experience is not language, it seems likely that eliding such considerations means there will be real and important elements of experience missing.

In what follows I am seeking to apply the approach set out by Blum as a challenge to the "dominant epistemological perspective" (Blum, 2012, p. 202) of experience being wholly defined and bounded by cognitive function and expectation. He argues that understanding experience as created from received sensory input, together with the mental filtering of this input, has led to a form of linguistic empiricism, with the corresponding view that reality can only be encountered via the mediation of language. This creates a "double-reduction" (p. 204), in which experience is characterised as an essentially cognitive process, and concepts are defined and bounded by language – a position which renders an experience that is beyond articulation a logical impossibility and leads to the assumption that to describe something as ineffable can only be an attempt to prevent its discussion. Blum correctly argues that this ascription of a protective function to the term ineffability makes no sense. The term has been used across many and diverse contexts, and in times and places with no need for such apologetic protection. It is therefore more reasonable to accept that the term functions as a signal of experiential aspects that are not linguistic in nature. This possibility is evident in situations where people report an awareness of the gap between the experience they had and their ability to describe it in a way that seems adequate and meaningful; a common observation in accounts of intense kink experience. Recognising this does not make assumptions about the existence of the supernatural; it does not make "ontological claims about the nature of existence or the metaphysical status of the self" (p. 217) and it does not reject or avoid naturalistic explanations for qualitatively ineffable experiences. Instead, it allows that experience consists of both linguistic and non-linguistic dimensions.

This is an application of James' radical empiricism: "to be radical, an empiricism must neither admit into its constructions any element that is not directly experienced, not exclude from them any element that is directly experienced" (2003, p. 22). Many of the things which are directly experienced may be intangible, but they must be included if the most complete understanding of the experience is to be achieved. These "non-rational and vaguer aspects" (Blum, 2012, p. 209) in general terms include things like emotion, physical sensation and intuition. When describing kink experiences specific references to non-rational or intangible things include: the exchange or sharing of energy; the presence or personhood of other participants in the scene; exchange, transfer or transformation of power; psychological 'edges'; paradoxical emotion and/or contradictory sensations like "beautiful, agonising pain" or feeling both "totally vulnerable and absolutely protected" (goodBadgirl).

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One such dimension, and the one on which I intend to focus here is the presence and involvement of others in the shaping of the experiences themselves. What follows is a consideration of the nature of profound, transformative experience created through shared interactions in the context of kink. The intention is to reject the assumption that a given individual's unique experience is fundamentally isolated from that of everyone else. I argue that it is possible to have an experience that is non-ordinary, overwhelming and beyond the descriptive power of language to adequately capture and for that experience to be simultaneously mutual, reciprocal and complementary. I am concerned with experiences which are not only not solitary, but which cannot be solitary. To present them as contained within a single individual would be to misunderstand a foundational element of the experience. These are experiences in which apparently different, even contradictory, components of the whole - sensation, emotion, motivation - mesh together and feed each other to co-construct an utterly shared experience of other-where, an as-if reality within which particular and (perhaps) paradoxical qualities of experience and relationship can be explored before a safe return to the quotidian world. I want to start examining this with the common experience of pain.

Elaine Scarry, in her influential book The Body in Pain (1985), presents pain as uniquely destructive of language. It is, she says, inexpressible and thus must be wholly contained within the individual. This inexpressibility is so complete that, in Scarry's view, to have pain is to have certainty, while to hear about it is have doubt. She argues that pain actually destroys language, reducing human communication to pre-lingual noises such as screams. If the pain is prolonged sufficiently (itself a relative requirement) then it 'unmakes' our world, stripping away everything we previously knew about the world beyond our own skin and replacing it with itself. This is a profoundly isolating concept. Anyone who has attempted to describe the precise nature of their pain to a doctor seems likely to agree that pain does defy precise description. This is as true of the grinding ache of chronic pain as it is of the sharp immediacy of torture. But that difficulty is not a quality unique to the sensation of pain; pleasure is equally nebulous when one tries to capture it. It is also less likely to carry the same acutely felt need to capture in words, which perhaps results in its ambiguity being overlooked in common discourse. However, an inability to adequately capture in words is in no way synonymous with an inability to share. The pre-lingual screams to which Scarry refers communicate pain quite effectively, and a sadistic top, creating pain consensually for a willing bottom, is aware of a potentially vast difference between one scream and another. Such empathetic knowledge is essential for a mutually pleasurable sado-masochistic encounter. When necessary, the kink community uses its own shorthand, such as 'good/bad pain' to discuss the nature of different forms of pain outside the play space. Such language carries an implicit recognition of much that

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cannot be captured in words and so, within the play-space itself, much communication is done in non-verbal, somatic ways. Ultimately pain related kink relies on one party being able to recognise and respond to the sensations they create in another to be successful; the nature and experience of those sensations must therefore be communicable.

People who seek out desired pain engage in an intense experience that is consensually crafted for them, in relationship with another person seeking to satisfy their distinct but complementary desire to give such pain; the experiences which result are deeply intimate and thus the very opposite of isolated. Not least because, in order to successfully engage in a mutually satisfying scene, a great deal of self-knowledge must be shared in advance, but also because through their practice the participants are exploring both themselves and each other. Put simply, the recipient of any deliberately created pain is also the focal point of a concentrated, specialised attention of which neither party can help but be aware. Building on Newmahr's observation that rape "which many of us would shudder to consider 'intimacy' is so heinous precisely because it is intimate" (Newmahr, 2011, p. 176), I suggest that one of the things that makes non-consensual torture so terrible is precisely that it is not isolating. That when the world is unmade, and language stripped away from the torture victim it is not replaced by a void, but by another person. The intimate and unescapable connection they forge is made without consent and without care for the new shapes being carved into the torture victim's sense of themself in their world. One of those shapes is that of the torturer - forcing a place in the elements from which the subject of their attention constructs their self. Intimacy is not inherently desirable, or constitutive of pleasant experiences: a forced intimacy is still an intimacy, one which turns the pleasures to be found in consensual connection into trauma. At the heart of the horror in such experience is the presence of an unwanted intruder - I imagine a victim of torture wants nothing so much as to be left alone, which would be an odd sentiment if the deliberate creation of pain were indeed inherently isolating for its recipient. Such an experience cannot be wholly isolating, because it is not created in isolation from another human being, but rather it is deliberately co-constructed. In the case of torture that co-construction is forced, but in other situations all parties are actively and consensually involved in the process.

Achieving intimacy is a process of creating access to what would be inaccessible to most people in most circumstances (Newmahr, 2011). It is an opening up of the self to an other and it is therefore impossible to experience without the real, active presence of that other. Whether the intimacy is terrible or wonderful, or both, is the result of the relationship that is being performed by and inscribed on the bodies of those people, in that relationship, in that moment. Each party to that relationship brings to the co-construction of the shared moment their own package of somatic, cognitive, affective and

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contextual elements which contribute both to the moment itself and its interpretation afterwards. These things, and the ways in which they combine are unique to the individual as they arrive in the shared moment and they form an integral part of the single shared experience - that may sound contradictory, but that contradiction is a product of the tendency of language to isolate experience in the individual. It is important to hold both sides of that apparent contradiction to be true in order to understand the kinds of experience I am discussing here. That is one experience which is crafted through the interweaving of separate individual experiences to create a shared whole. To examine in more depth how this kind of experience can occur I would like to stay with deliberately created pain, which may destroy language while also forging connections, but I would like to shift from non-consensual torture to consensual kink.

Past experience suggests that, unless someone already knows something about both kink and contemporary approaches to religious studies, my connecting of kink with religious practice and experience may cause confusion. Even people familiar with forms of asceticism and the connection between such physical practices and particular forms of religious experience are often surprised by the knowledge that kink practice is not only capable of creating profound, transformational and/or transcendent experiences, but that such experiences of altered consciousness are not really that unusual. What is unusual, in comparison to most of what seems to be said about this kind of experience in other contexts, is that people achieving altered consciousness through kink consider their experience shared by the person (or people) with whom they created it. Indeed, they are more than shared - they are mutual, relational and complementary. In sum they are co-constructed. Kink play, whether with one partner or several at a time, cannot be an isolated and wholly interior experience because it relies upon a continual and reciprocal loop of action, response to action and response to the response, which build up and merge together to alter consciousness. Successfully created play-space is commonly described with terms like a bubble, or a magic circle, denoting a space distinct from the everyday - an alternative as-if reality within which different qualities of experience, relationship, self and other can be explored. Within this other-where different levels of alteration and immersion can be achieved but, at least among my research participants, wherever one person involved in shaping the space goes the other goes too. Participant Ben succinctly captured the intimacy and reciprocity of what occurs within play-space by characterising it as “a giving and receiving of joy.”

Giving and receiving is a vital aspect to understanding what happens in kink, as it is the way in which the experience is co-constructed and shared. That players do not have identical physical experiences of the shared scene is probably obvious, but for clarity I would like to propose the imaginary scenario that you, my reader, are about to

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engage in a flogging scene with me and to then consider some of the elements that would contribute to our individual experiences: I don't top so you would be the one swinging the flogger, meaning that you would have the weight of it in your hand, you would feel the shifts in weight as you lift and swing it, and the brief catch of weightlessness as the falls strike my flesh; you would also have whatever feelings are created in you by knowing you are about to make violent contact with another human being, you are going to mark my skin and, possibly, make me cry out in pain and shock. Those feelings may well be made more complex by the knowledge of my consent and that I have an active wish to feel the sensations that you are going to create for me. I, on the other hand, would have the exposure and anticipation of waiting for the first blow to fall, the thud of the main impact and the flicking sting of any falls which strike beyond the main bundle, the shock of breath when the falls connect and a momentary regathering before the next blow falls. I would also have a complex intermingling of physical sensation that I cannot easily categorise as either pain or pleasure. Looked at individually these are very different experiences. But, remembering the effect of language and linguistic description on something that is not in itself linguistic allows the recognition that breaking an experience into its different components is almost inevitably going to isolate your experience from mine, even in a situation created by one of us doing something to the other one. Moving beyond identifying these disparate components to consider their place in the whole, shared experience allows for the recognition that my experience will feed yours and yours will feed mine as the scene unfolds. It reveals the fundamental point that you cannot feel whatever it is throwing multiple strands of leather at my unprotected flesh makes you feel if I am not there to receive it. Practicing your aim on a cushion might be a useful way to develop your skills as a wielder of floggers, but it is not a satisfying experience in the way that play with another person can be; my research participant Piers explained that if he just wants to practice his technique "I'll use an inanimate object," because playing with the focus solely on himself (as he would be if simply practicing) is a waste that "makes the person being struck completely meaningless, and they're not."

In other words, the lack of response to an action performed in order to create a response robs that action of an important, if unmeasurable, quality; this is a useful absence when practicing a skill but it would remove a vital element of play for most kinksters. It is interesting to note that the mere presence of another person, whether as a top or as a bottom, is not sufficient to create a successful, relational scene. Damien described the essential pleasure of play as being in both "the sense that I enjoy giving somebody something else [and] enjoy[ing] what they give in return." This means that if the bottom is "literally laid there like a plank," giving him no reactions to which he can respond, he is not only unsure about whether or not they are getting what they need from

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the scene but his own satisfaction in it is impaired. All participants need to understand this to make the connection that the play-space draws on because this space is made "absolutely together, unequivocally. Regardless of the roles being taken" (Griff). Mistress Marina agrees that "the two of you need to make it together. I think if you've got someone with you that's not reading off the same page you can't go there" - the space is not created, and the scene is ultimately unsuccessful. For pussikin the top and bottom form two parts of a whole "like a hook and eye, I've got one part, and it either fits with a partner or it doesn't." She further suggests that without both parts "you can have kinky sex but you can't have BDSM"; goodBadgirl goes further, implying a lack of the right reciprocal awareness can tip the experience into abuse rather than kink. In describing a session she "endured," in which her Master had given her to another top to play with, goodBadgirl explained that it matters to her Master "what I feel and how I feel it," because he wants to "hear, feel and see my experiences of the pain [he] chooses to give me […] he is in that place of pain with me." By contrast the top to whom he had temporarily given her:

> had no interest in my reactions or my experience of what he was doing, he didn't want anything from me other than a living body to do unpleasant things to, with none of the awareness or interaction that might render those unpleasant things eventually pleasurable and without either skill or awareness of the lack of skill in doing any of those things […] my reactions were a matter of indifference to him […] he didn't care whether he was causing me pleasure, distress or total indifference. I was no part of the equation.

She used terms like "brutal" and "abusive" to describe this scene, even though she also observed that in terms of the level and intensity of pain created by this "psycho-man" top "it was nothing compared to what [my Master] does. Nothing at all."

A play-space is a bubble of alternate, as-if reality, marked out from the usual constant flow of experiencing by alterations in perception of space, time, sensation, self, other and the inter-relations of all of these. It is thus, even at its least immersive level, a space in which consciousness is altered. The potential for kink activity to create the kind of "white hot" (Taylor, 2003, p. 29) experiences of altered consciousness which stand out from ordinary play in much the same way a mystical encounter with divinity might be said to stand out from ordinary prayer is well recognised within the kink Scene. It is often referred to as 'spacing' or achieving sub- or Dom-space and experiences of it are variously described in terms of transcending the constraints of the quotidian world (Beckmann, 2013; Kraemer, 2014), as a loss of self or aspects of self (Kaldera, 2006;

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MacKendrick, 1999), or as a sense of more holistic, fully integrated self (Easton & Hardy, 2004; Pita, 2004). Spacing is usually considered a peak experience, rather than a routine or guaranteed aspect of any session, neither is it usually an intended or sought after outcome of any given scene. Nonetheless it is this kind of kink experience which has formed the core of the limited body of work that exists on kink in relation to religion. For example, Taylor and Ussher's (2001) study, identified "transcendence" as one of the categories through which some practitioners might understand their practice. They defined this category as practice which creates experiences of a "heightened state of consciousness, or as in some way making [practitioners] more astute, more enlightened or more alive" (p. 305). These are effects which seem, according to my own research, to be a significant motivating factor for all kink practice.

Beckmann (2009) used broadly Christian concepts of mysticism to identify common characteristics of "transcendental states" which she then used to construct a questionnaire for kink practitioners, investigating experiences she had predetermined to be unusual. Her list of characteristic features includes difficulty explaining an experience in words, changes in the way the body is perceived or reacts to stimuli, a loss or change of the sense of time, and a different quality of memory. Her results are interesting in that firstly the identified characteristics are elements of any successful play-space, and thus not in themselves evidence of the peak states of transcendence she appeared to want to investigate. It is also worth noting that she concluded "transcendental states" to be available only to the bottom, the recipient of sensation, because of the different nature of the roles taken in play. This understanding isolates the players from one another in her perspective on their play, without recognition of the ways the different but complementary performances of players mesh together to create both play-space and the potential for further spacing within it. If I were to space during the hypothetical flogging scene considered earlier then my sensory perception would shift, my interpretation of what is pain and what is pleasure would alter and my understanding of what and where I am would change. I might lose my ability to speak or to move easily or precisely and cognition of the kind I might translate clearly into language useful for a researcher will not be any part of my experience.

For poppy sub-space is "like the world isn't there anymore, it's like this big cloud, and I'm in the middle of it"; Kaz said that "when I'm in that state […] I don't really feel anything, to be truthful. I've got no thoughts at that point" and Twisted described it as "like being drunk, but just drunk on happiness." Rocks, who as a switch can access both sides of sub-space, concludes that "actually drunk is probably the wrong thing, slightly stoned is closer. It's that feeling that things are happening around you but not really comprehending why or what they are." These things wouldn't happen to you during our

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flogging scene, because they must not if you as a top are taking your responsibility for my state seriously. But there is a comparable, and usually complementary, state to sub-space for tops. For Damien this is "not out of body. It's not me looking down upon it, or me travelling beside myself and seeing it. I'm still in charge but it's just effortless. I'm not having to put any effort into it, it's just happening." Stoney-face called this "that definite top-space extension of myself thing" in which what starts out as a tool he is using, such as a cane, becomes "just part of your arm." He agrees with Damien that in such moments "you don't have to think any more, it just seems to occur." Javelin says that this state is "so totally in the here and now [that] I'm achieving what Buddhist monks spent years trying to achieve. I'm in the here and now, I'm focused, time tends to be gone […] I'm just in the moment."

Clearly each person chooses their own terms to describe the specific qualities of their spacing experiences although there is a shared vocabulary within the kink scene - like the term 'spacing' itself - which relies on some overlap of experience to inform a listener's understanding. There is also a recognition of elements which may be assumed to be present - such as the assumption that 'spacing' includes feeling out of one's body - and these are often explicitly challenged or rejected as part of arriving at an acceptable description. All these elements vary from person to person, and even from scene to scene, but what does appear to be generally agreed upon is that these altered states can only happen because different, complementary shifts have occurred in the consciousness of both parties. Using our hypothetical flogging scene as an illustration we could say that I can only achieve the altered state of sub-space if you have achieved the altered state of top-space. As my senses have altered and my knowledge of my self and the world around me diminished or diffused yours have grown more acute; you have taken hold of whatever I have released so that your consciousness has altered in a different key to mine, but they harmonise perfectly and we both hear that harmony. As Aey put it, we may not be in precisely the same state but "we danced the same dance together." This same complementarity is true of other characteristics on Beckmann's list; changes in the way the body is perceived for a top may take the form of a sense of union with the implement they wield, of being able to create a reaction in the bottom without conscious effort, of the senses being extended into the space and the objects within it. For the bottom the body may be lost entirely, or it might become all that exists. But for both knowledge of the other, their presence in that space and the connection between them, remains constant.

The space in which BDSM play happens is obviously a physical area chosen for play, but it is also a different space, distinct from everyday reality. That space is created by the play itself and the relationships constructed through that play. Play-space does not spring into being from the moment people decide to play together, it is not simply

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summoned into existence by entering a room designated and equipped for play and it incorporates more elements than physical sensations such as pain. Context also contributes: first play is discussed and anticipated. Negotiation of activities of mutual interest and discussion of limits may be required (if players are new to one another) and such conversation helps to signal the start of a shift from one kind of space to another. For established or lifestyle players that might be more directly signalled with a form of words, or an activity like putting a play-collar onto the person who will be bottoming. There are also the contributions of anticipation, expectation, social attitudes to such play and personal feelings about them. All of this is relational, shared and responsive and contributes to the processes through which the space is ultimately "practiced into existence" (Lindquist, 2005, p. 158). The top acts in a way that impacts upon the bottom (the recipient of the top's attentions) - by, for example swinging that flogger we discussed earlier. The bottom reacts to that action, and their response feeds the next actions of the top creating a continual loop. It is not a mechanical process, where the simple act itself creates a new space, but a constant process of communication and adjustment. As Mistress Marina said, "you build it up. It's almost like a vortex. You're building it up as you're going along." Aey says that this "doesn't consciously happen […] because you're so deeply focussed it tends to happen naturally" while Cee suggests that it begins as a conscious process but changes as the feedback loop is formed so that "to start off, yes, I'm very conscious of what I am, what I'm doing. But as it goes on, if you're getting really good feedback with that person and you're connecting you are actually completely oblivious to what you're wearing, what you're doing. Everything just seems to naturally flow... what we started off last night doing, and what we ended up doing were two completely different things, because I feed on that person." This is not a mechanical process; it is not simply the act of flogging or spanking or bondage which creates it, as goodBadgirl's account of an unsuccessful scene demonstrated. Michael described play with people who are not his sub, Molly, as being a "stunt arm" for that person, rather than a Dom because "that loop doesn't exist […] It's far more technical. I'm still aware, I'm still connected, and I'm still paying attention. I'm still doing those things but I am removed. I am not in that moment of that situation in the same way [pause] that I am when we do our thing."

Play both creates and requires a bond between the players, so that as people play together more often they can also play more intensely and enter into their shared world more completely. The contract of trust, in which a bottom trusts a top not to violate their agreed limits and to stop if a stop signal is given, and the top trusts the bottom to communicate their experience as it unfolds, enables both parties to enter safely into a world where one has real, tangible power over the other and to create together the

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experience of exploring what it means to have, to use and to feel such power. The shift from the mechanical "stunt-arm" kind of play to what is available when the power-exchange is felt to be real was explained by goodBadgirl in these terms: "I have always thought [pause] that one of the unique things about kink […] is that you need another person who fits you for it to really work. I mean, you have to click with someone for it to work at all - but that's true even for vanilla sex really - but kink can go beyond that click point. To use a bit of a stereotyped analogy if finding a person you click with is like finding a key that fits a lock then [with kink] there is a possibility to turn the key and to enter and explore whatever space was being kept secure by the lock." The process of passing that "click point" and forming the play-space which allows that exploration of what lies beyond is initiated by the actions of the top performed upon the bottom meaning the bottom is the heart of the space, but it is the connection and interactions of the players that forms and maintains it, and once it is created top and bottom are there together. Ben describes it as being like a good paella: "the prawn, the chicken, the saffron, the cloves... each have to lose a little bit of themselves and absorb a little bit of the others and so it makes a fantastic dish. [It's] not only mixing ingredients together, each ingredient willingly loses a bit of themselves and gains the other."

Such a merging does not - I would go so far as to say it cannot - result in isolated individuals floating alone in their separate, impermeable bubbles of personal interior experience. To focus only on the separate elements is to miss one of the things that makes this kind of experience so powerful and potentially transformative. It is vital to remember that, as I began by observing, experience is not language. If a researcher were to ask me about the hypothetical flogging scene we have considered throughout this paper and they did so in terms which focus solely on the individual experiences of my body then they deny me the opportunity to say, or perhaps to be heard saying, that part of whatever it was I experienced was you. The lacuna created by this remains even if the incompleteness of description, the subjectivity and idiosyncrasy of memory and the inadequacy of language to capture the nuance and complexity of the pleasure-pain I felt, fought and enjoyed in the other-where of sub-space is explicitly acknowledged. My research participants referred again and again, in different ways, to the deep connection and intimacy forged and explored through their play. They did so without my asking them specifically about it and it was important enough for them to include it as they attempted to describe such things as a personal understanding of pleasure and pain. It seems to me then quite likely that many other pre-analysis accounts of kink experience make such references, but they have not been heard or understood because of the ways in which experience has been conceived as an academic concept. Further, I do not believe that kink experiences are unique in this vital component of the real, active presence of

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other(s); recognising this and exploring the different possible forms and processes of co-construction could add a great deal to understanding profound, transformative experiences. The challenge is to find ways to engage with it and it is my hope that, because co-construction is so overt and conscious in the context of kink, my work and the reflections of my research participants on their experiences can offer a starting point for other explorations of experience as mutual, shared and co-constructed.

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  ISSN: 2057-2301

Secularization of/or Mysticism: Notes on Richard H. Jones' Philosophy of Mysticism

Zsuzsanna Szugyiczki
University of Szeged
(szugyiczki.zsuzsanna@gmail.com)

Since about the 1960s 'secularization'[1] has undoubtedly been one of the most influential and debated theories of religion in society. Though it might not be the most current term for characterizing contemporary religious phenomena and changes in society, 'secularization,' and the concomitant idea that religion is in decline in modern societies, is still a persistent trope in some areas of academia. Some fields of science - those that are not primarily concerned with religion - have not yet adapted to the general understanding that the theory of secularization is wanting.[2] Outside of academia, the idea of secularization is wide-spread and often used to describe the decline of religiosity in today's society.

One of the most recent monographs on mysticism entitled *Philosophy of Mysticism: Raids on the Ineffable* was written by Richard H. Jones, and published in 2016. In this work, Jones aims at providing a comprehensive account of several important questions related to mysticism raised by scientific research and from the perspective of postmodernity. In the epilogue (entitled "The Demise of Mysticism Today"), Jones summarizes the key findings of the book and glances out to the present and future states of mysticism. His purpose is to explain the change in religious experiences, in particular with regard to those that appear in connection with mysticism in modernity, linking the latter with the idea of secularization. The idea of secularization of mystical experiences is also briefly introduced. In my perception the secularization of mystical experiences is drawn up more as an impression rather than a well-thought-through argument supported by relevant research and data. Nevertheless, I consider it an interesting and highly debatable concept, which is worthy of further discussion. Firstly, I will briefly introduce the relevance and the structure of Jones' book, as well as the concept and categories of mysticism the author writes about, as there few available reviews of it. Secondly, for a more precise understanding I will be analyzing the content of the epilogue, along with five aspects of it: secularization, modernity, the concept of classical mysticism, today's mystical phenomena and the future of mysticism. Thirdly, I will be using these aspects to clarify the idea of the secularization of mystical experiences. Lastly, I will put this concept

[1] Wilson (1966); Berger (1967); and (critically) Luckmann (1967).

[2] It is widely accepted in academia that the original thesis is not working either theoretically or practically. Despite this fact, it might still be important for works focusing on religious phenomena in modern societies to touch upon this theory, primary because of the above-mentioned influence it had in and outside of academia (Máté-Tóth, 2014, p. 37).

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under a more thorough critical scrutiny, in order to provide a more nuanced understanding of mysticism as a contemporary phenomenon.

Richard H. Jones[3] considers his book to be an important addendum to Walter Stace's *Mysticism and Philosophy* (1960). His purpose is to address the scientific developments and questions that have emerged with postmodernism since Stace's book was published.[4] He deals with a wide range of topics in a "sensible and balanced" way.[5] Reviewers point out that the book gives much space to examples taken from Theravada Buddhism, Advaita Vedanta and Hinduism,[6] but lacks a similarly thorough understanding and examples of Sufism, Christian, and especially Jewish mysticism.[7] Miller (2017) points out certain examples where Jones cites different authorities with identical views without detailed explanation, creating the impression of "parallelomania."[8] Beside these downfalls, *Philosophy of Mysticism* does provide a comprehensive guide to understanding questions and problems related to mysticism, such as the categorization and the scientific study of mystical experiences; whether or not mystics' claims about their experiences are cognitive and how the purported insight they provide into ultimate reality should be dealt with. He also observes different aspects of mysticism from the perspective of philosophy, such as metaphysics, language, rationality, morality and the compatibility of science and mysticism.

Jones' concept of mysticism aims to highlight neglected aspects of the phenomenon, notably, the path of preparation and the transformation of lifestyle following the mystical experience.[9] Jones argues, along with William James, that the philosophical discussion and definitions of mysticism had been reduced to the mystical experience itself and neglected the above mentioned aspects.[10] Therefore, in *Philosophy of Mysticism* Jones describes mysticism as follows:

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[3] The author has a Ph.D. from Columbia University and a J.D. from University of California at Berkeley. He has written books on the scientific study of religious experiences (in particular about mystical experiences), on Theravada Buddhism and Advaita Vedanta.

[4] Ralph W. Hood, Jr. considers Jones' book not only a good review on the literature of the scientific study of mysticism but a critical extension of Stace's work with a "sophisticated discussion of the extent, range, and metaphysical implications of mysticism" (Hood's review quoted on Jones' webpage: URL: http://www.richardjonesbooks.com/index.html).

[5] Jerome Gellman described Jones' approach this way and denotes that Jones avoids the usual problem of philosophical texts about mysticism, i.e. arguing pro or contra mysticism in a clearly biased way. URL: http://readingreligion.org/books/philosophy-mysticism .

[6] Miller (2017) URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662

[7] Gellman (2016) URL: http://readingreligion.org/books/philosophy-mysticism and Miller (2017) URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662.

[8] Miller (2017). URL: http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=49662.

[9] In *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* Gellman Jerome defines mysticism in a similar way: focusing on the transformational aspect of it rather than the *unio mystica*. "'Mysticism' is best thought of as a constellation of distinctive practices, discourses, texts, institutions, traditions, and experiences aimed at human transformation, variously defined. In contrast with most of the definitions human transformation is defined here as the goal of mysticism instead of unity with ultimate reality/transcendent. A large emphasis is put on the apparatus supporting the mystic and setting up the mystical tradition." URL: https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/mysticism/

[10] „The modern reduction of mysticism to merely a matter of personal experiences was solidified by William James in 1902 (1958). Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one's whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition's beliefs)" (Jones, 2016, p. 2).

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> […] in this book "mystical" will refer only to phenomena centered around an inward quest focused on two specific classes of experiences. […] It is a "way" (yana, dao) in the sense of both a path and a resulting way of life. […] Nevertheless, mysticism is traditionally more encompassing than simply isolated mystical experiences: it is about living one's whole life aligned with reality as it truly is (as defined by a tradition's beliefs) (Jones, 2016, p. 2).

Jones acknowledges that what distinguishes mysticism from metaphysics and other forms of religiosity is a special form of experience. His typology of mystical experiences has a significant role in his argument about why mysticism should be taken seriously by scientists and philosophers, and it also relates to the cognitive claims of mystics. He uses and further develops the distinction between "extrovertive" and "introvertive" mystical experiences distinguished by Otto (1932), later adopted, named and developed by Stace (1960). Jones introduces further subcategories[11] and focuses on the so called "empty-depth mystical experiences."[12] Contrary to Stace (1960), Jones does not make a difference in value between introvertive and extrovertive mystical experiences, that is to say, he does not devalue extrovertive ones.

The epilogue of *Philosophy of Mysticism* (2016) is entitled "The Demise of Mysticism Today." In this chapter, Jones first summarizes eleven key points defended in the book and proceeds to discuss the relevance of studying mysticism today. According to Jones, mystics purportedly experience aspects of reality that non-mystics do not; studying mystical experiences, especially empty-depth mystical experiences, can affect our views of the nature of consciousness and the study of mind. Hence, for philosophers and theologians, the experiential aspect of mystical experiences is important to consider. Besides, Jones underlines the importance of what he calls "mystical selflessness", as it exposes the underlying values and beliefs of different cultures.

The next part of the epilogue is titled: *The Antimystical Climate Today*. Here, Jones discusses certain factors in culture which work against taking mysticism seriously. He starts with academia, firstly with naturalists who deny the cognitive claims of mysticism along with the possibility and the explanation of transcendent realities – since these cannot be proved scientifically. Furthermore, he mentions postmodernists who argue

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[11] Both of the categories have an inner dimension to them and involve an insight into the ultimate reality - however differently it is perceived by different traditions and mystics. The main differences between the categories are that extrovertive ones are "this-worldly," involve differentiated content, are dualistic and include sensory inputs with a passive receptivity to those; on the other hand, during introvertive experiences sensory content is retained from the mind; and the consciousness is void of all sense-experiences. Among extrovertive experiences Jones arguably tackles three subcategories: nature mysticism, cosmic consciousness and mindfulness state of consciousness. Introvertive mystical experiences are divided into two subcategories: those with differentiated content might be theistic or non-theistic; introvertive experiences with non-differentiated content are called empty-depth mystical experiences (Jones 2016, pp. 1-36.)

[12] There is a striking resemblance here to what Robert Forman describes as pure consciousness event (Forman, 1990, pp. 8., 22-24.): a wakeful, contentless, nonintentional form of introvertive mysticism, not shaped, constructed or formed by epistemological processes, which are responsible for ordinary sense experiences. Jones quotes Forman stating that it might simply be a pure state of consciousness (described by Forman) and highlights that as it is not a full emptiness, nor a state of unconsciousness, empty-depth mystical experiences are opened for mystics' interpretation after the experience. (Jones, 2016, p.22)

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against genuine mystical experiences. According to Jones (2016), in the field of Philosophy the topic of mysticism is faded into the background. With regards to Religious Studies, mystical experiences are not considered significant anymore due to the popularity of constructivism and the attribution theory. Similarly, to naturalists' point of view, those who accept mystical experiences deny that they are cognitive. At the end, the scientific study of mystical experiences is pushed to neuroscience.

Aspects in Christian theology are also mentioned, explaining that the direct experience of God is impossible for postmodern theologians on logical grounds and an "experientialist" approach, which would take mystical experiences as genuine ones, is considered outdated according to Jones. Following that, he talks about what happens outside of academia, mentioning the West where there is a general decline in serious mysticism. He lists certain aspects of religion, psychology and culture in general which create an 'antimystical' climate and, according to Jones, this results in a trend he calls the *secularization of mystical experiences.*[13] This trend purportedly started with the separation of the mystical experience from mysticism[14].[15] Jones perceives this as a twofold process: absorbing mystical experiences into modern culture and abandoning a fully transformed lifestyle based on the mystical experience. This proceeding eventually resulted in naturalistic spirituality replacing "classical mysticism" (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

In *Accepting Mysticism Today,* Jones proposes the question of whether religions will be able to survive without generating experiences of transcendent realities. He starts contemplating about this problem by outlining the changes mysticism faces in today's society, i.e. the natural realm cannot be ignored by mystics anymore, as we no longer live in a sacred universe in modernity. This poses some questions regarding the possibility of mystical experiences as well as a quest for mystics to change the way they interpret

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[13] The phrase and to some extent, the idea behind it seems to be Jones' innovation. Though, in the beginning of the 20th century Theodore Schroeder (1921) published an article titled 'Secularized mystics,' in which Schroeder differentiated religious mystics and their counterparts: secular mystics. It was an attempt to highlight the purported psychological reasons behind wars and the emergence of omnipotent leaders. He uses the words secular and anti-mystical as synonyms, with a positive overtone – as mysticism and mystical experiences are related to an early, immature stage of human intellectual and psychological development.

Walter Stace talks about a secular or non-theological mysticism of Plotinus (Stace, 1960, pp. 105-112). "And first we take Plotinus as representing the classical pagan world. Plotinus was not an adherent of any organized religious system but a believer in the metaphysics of Plato, which he sought to develop and advance" (Stace, 1960, p. 105). In this sense whether mysticism is secular is decided upon the religious affiliation or non-affiliation of the mystic. The idea behind it relies on constructivism: the interpretation of the experience and purportedly the experience itself is essentially influenced by the religious, personal, historical context of the mystic. Later, in this paper, I am dealing with more complex scientific reflections on the topic: the link between mysticism and secularization, related to the texts of Ernst Troeltsch and William James.

[14] As mentioned above, Jones argues that mysticism is more than mystical experiences. Mystical experiences are key parts of mysticism, but we should not forget about mystical traditions along with their teachings, techniques, metaphysics etc. and the transformation of lifestyle (Jones, 2016, p. 2). Based on this concept, later in this paper I am arguing that the term secularization of mysticism would be a more suitable expression for Jones' concept.

[15] "The history of psychology and religion since the 1890s has been one where religious 'experience' has become an individual event and where the boundaries of the self have been reinforced. Building on Protestant notions of the self in relation to God – and thus continuing longer historical processes of individualization from the Reformation – the early psychologists of religion located the significance of religion within individual experience. […] mysticism could be reconfigured as the pursuit of 'altered states of consciousness' and religious practices became represented as manifestations of inner psychical processes rather than as social forms of expression" (Carrette and King, 2005, p. 68).

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introvertive experiences and act in the world.[16] Lastly, Jones talks about a possible *Mystical Revolution* which would change the situation of religion and could also have an effect on science. He ends the epilogue with a part titled *A Thirst for Transcendence* writing about why mysticism could be beneficial for today's society: it would lead people to a more meaningful and morally thoughtful and compassionate life.

Overall, in my viewpoint the epilogue significantly stands out from the book because it has a more personal tone and less scientific purpose. It resembles a set of impressions and feelings; and introduces a very powerful vision of mysticism without a clear concept – which, retrospectively, seems to be the underlying drive of the main text. Almost all the chosen researchers and authors quoted in the epilogue have the purpose of driving the text forward to the point without really challenging the concept. As opposed to the "sensible and balanced"[17] main chapters, the epilogue seems mostly vague and one-sided.

In my opinion, nevertheless this text raises important questions explicitly and implicitly, related to modernity, secularization and mysticism. In the next part of my paper I will be dealing with the questions he explicitly raises: the decline of mysticism, the future of mysticism, and experiences which challenge the borders of already existing categories and definitions of mysticism. Therefore, I aim to understand and clarify the thoughts that Jones articulated. In order to do that I will analyze five of the text's central concepts: *secularization, modernity, "classical" mystical experiences, today's mystical experiences, and the future of mysticism.*

Secularization

It will be worth concentrating first on secularization, both as a phrase and a theory, as Jones is not concise about the use of the word, does not define his understanding of it in the epilogue, and does not deal with the theory in the main text. I categorized his concepts and phrases related to secularization implicitly or explicitly based on the levels of analysis suggested by Karel Dobbelaere (1999) and José Casanova (2006). Each of them aims to get a good grasp of the paradigm - Dobbelaere by highlighting the process of it by categorizing the theories, and Casanova by clarifying the different uses of the word. Dobbelaere distinguishes the macro (societal), meso (subsystem/organizational) and micro (individual) levels to help our understanding, but emphasizes that these levels are interconnected and influence one another. Observing the different levels, Dobbelaere found that societal secularization is related to modernity and the political process of promoting laicization: institutional differentiation or segmentation, autonomization, rationalization, societalization, disenchantment of the world, privatization and

[16] "That is, the problem for anything resembling a classical mystical way of life today is how to reinject the world into a nonnaturalistic framework with transcendent realities without denying the world's full reality—one that incorporates both an eternal ontic vertical dimension and a historical horizontal dimension as both real and important. But if successful, mysticism can replace the image of a totally transcendent deity with one that is also immanent in space and time, since the god of theistic mysticism is experienceable and the ground of the natural world" (Jones, 2016, p. 340).

[17] See footnote no. 6.

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generalization. On the subsystem level it occurs as: pluralization, relativization and this-worldliness. On the individual level it appears as a decline of the commitment to the institutional level of religiosity, individualization, unbelief and bricolage. (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 2.) Casanova (2006) aims to refocus the fruitless debate around secularization and to provide the base for a comparative historical analysis across societies along three patterns: the decline of religious beliefs and practices, the privatization of religion, and the differentiation of the secular sphere. Moreover, he suggests that sociologists of religion should focus on analyzing newly emerging forms of religious phenomena in world religions on the societal, group and individual level, instead of obsessing over the decline of religion. (Casanova, 2006, p. 17).

Related to the *societal level*, firstly, Jones talks about a *loss of faith in transcendence* and the lack of all-encompassing myth (Jones, 2016, pp. 335-336). He says that people lost sight of the ontic source of the world and mysticism takes this further. Mysticism, which could provide claims and direct experiences, has lost its focus on the transcendent and has been replaced by a naturalistic spirituality solely focusing on the phenomenal realm. Though, it still is able to align mystics with reality as it truly is, in the sense that it helps them with a greater sense of well-being and better functioning in society (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

Secondly, he describes today's *culture and society as an antimystical climate*. (Jones, 2016, pp. 333-337). On the one hand, it is secularized to the extent that we are probably unable to experience the world the way that pre-modern people did.[18] On the other hand, society hinders mystical experiences: self-will dominates our culture and psychology works for this as well by strengthening the ego; self-assertiveness is in focus in people's life and it makes mystical selflessness seem counterproductive and introvertive mystical experiences as life goals seem irrational. Moreover, and to some extent refuting what he had described earlier, Jones highlights an important aspect from today's society which results in an increasing interest in mysticism: people feel lost and are searching for certainty, reassurance and connection with other people.

Thirdly, Jones talks about a trend of *cultivating mystical experiences absorbed into parts of modern culture*. People use these mystical experiences and traditional techniques to benefit from them psychologically and physiologically. Some aspects or a "watered-down" version of traditional teachings might be adopted temporarily, and they do not engage in a full mystical way of life, following the experience. He mentions mindfulness meditation as an example.[19]

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[18] By the word *secularized* he means that modern scientific findings about the natural realm have a huge impact not only on the way we perceive the transcendent but the way we think about mysticism as well. Here he makes a difference between a "premodern" and a modern, secular worldview, which I am discussing later, at his concept of modernity.

[19] Mindfulness meditation seems to have a distinguished place for Jones as it is highlighted not only here, but in the main chapters as well: it is one of the three subcategories of extrovertive mystical experiences. Nature mysticism and cosmic consciousness seem to cover the range of focus for extrovertive experiences. What seems to be an added level in mindfulness meditation is that it if free of conceptualizations. "But one state of consciousness may be free of all conceptualizations: a "pure" mindfulness involving sensory differentiations but not any conceptualizations" (Jones, 2016, p. 13).

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Jones' idea of secularization related to the *group level* can be discussed in two parts. *Firstly,* he talks about a trend of *mysticism decreasing in* some of the *major religions*. Major religions seem to hinder mysticism.[20] People are not involved in traditional practices anymore, at least not for an extended period of time. Tradition seems to be neglected in several forms: teachers of metaphysical doctrines are not needed, people do not want to adhere to "difficult monastic ethical codes", transcendence is not in the focus of mysticism anymore and scientific researchers support this by focusing on the effect of mysticism solely on the body. He mentions New Age theorizing which is also disconnected from mystical experiences. *Secondly*, he contemplates the *future of religion*. Jones links the vitality and success of religion – and in his perception the lack of it in today's society - to religious experiences and especially to mysticism.[21] He argues that the survival – a re-awakening - of religion could depend on mysticism, which provides empirical facts of what religion talks about. That said, mysticism needs to adapt to the changes that have taken place in society, as well as science's advancement over the past century (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-346.) I will discuss the concept of reawakening through mysticism in more detail when exploring the secularization of mysticism.

Regarding secularization on the *individual level,*[22] two directions can be pointed out in Jones' text: primarily, the seemingly contrary trend of *simultaneous decrease and increase in mysticism* and, secondly, the change of mysticism. As for the first direction, Jones points out that engaging in traditional practices and and adopting a full mystical way of life for the long term, is in decline.[23] For the above mentioned societal reasons he thinks that it is difficult to see introvertive mystical experiences as the ultimate goals of life and solely focus on them; and few people want to give up their sense of individual existence – which is a fundamental element of mysticism. Somewhat contrary to the aforementioned aspects, he points out that "Today there may be a spike in interest in mysticism as people search for a sense of certainty and reassurance of the rightness of things in a time of uncertainty and search for a way to feel experientially grounded in the world and connected to other people…" (Jones, 2016, p. 336.) He considers this to be superficial, however, as these people are not likely to engage in long established spiritual traditions, with their developed depth. Moreover, many young people describe

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[20] Jones talks about the decline of Sufism, the limitedness of mystical traditions in Judaism because of the fear of antinomianism. The authoritarian nature of monastic training poorly influences the way Buddhist monks commit to meditation/spirituality. In Christianity he considers the split between spirituality and theology in the early modern period the reason for the decrease of interest in mysticism. For him, rigid conformity to rules seems to be the reason why there is less emphasis on meditation in Eastern and Western monasteries Liberal churches discourage mystical experiences and mysticism as unnecessary. In conservative churches my mystical knowledge of God is seen as blasphemous and other religious experiences related to personal salvation are emphasized (Jones, 2016, pp. 334-335).

[21] I am discussing this topic, later when analyzing Jones' concept of the future of mysticism.

[22] Ernst Troeltsch (1921) considers mysticism a religious dimension -related to the level of the individual, besides church (level of society) and sect (level of group) and highlights aspects relevant to the topic of this paper. Mysticism is described as: radical individualism; neutrality or adversity towards religious institutions and history; it considers the dogmatic dimension of religion relative on an experiential basis. Morally it is not affiliated with a specific religious tradition; actions and decisions are based on emotional and spiritual impressions and kindlings.

[23] In Jones' argumentation this trend of decreasing in mysticism is closely connected to hindrance of it by religion and society which I was discussing above at the group and societal level.

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themselves as seekers[24] and mystical experiences remain common in contemporary society.[25]

Concerning the *second aspect*: the way people practice mysticism has changed. People might adopt certain aspects of a mystical way of life without knowing or committing to traditional mystical ethical codes, difficult monastic ethical codes and mystical teachings. Instead of a total inner transformation (which Jones considers to be a vital aspect of mysticism), the focus is more on the psychological and physiological well-being of the individual, which these experiences might contribute to. Most of the people who practice these techniques aim to calm the mind or to focus on the present, increase their happiness, overcome problems in their lives and function better in society (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

Jones' thoughts can be related to Casanova's first category: *decline of religious beliefs and practices*, and can be summarized in a twofold way. On the one hand: "[…] serious mysticism is in a general decline in the West" (Jones, 2016, p. 334). The interest in mysticism - as we know it from previous centuries, with its commitment, depth, fully transformed mystical way of life, focus on the transcendent, selflessness, following of traditional techniques etc. seems to be in decline.

On the other hand, there is an increased interest in New Age spirituality – particularly as people search for new ways to improve their emotional and mental well-being (Jones, 2016, p. 336). Jones mentions religious seekers and "nones" [26] in relation to this topic. Some of Jones' ideas confirm and others refute the concept of the *privatization of religion.*[27] Confirming the concept is a phenomenon that Jones disparagingly calls watered-down spirituality.[28] It is about people who pick and choose when it comes to practicing religion: they might attain mystical experiences and practice traditional techniques for a certain purpose without immersing themselves in the teachings of the tradition. On the other hand, one of the key points of the secularization of mystical experiences seem to refute the concept, specifically the trend of practicing some forms of mystical experiences absorbed into parts of modern culture.[29]

In Jones' text *the differentiation of the secular sphere* appears not as a political process, but as the *absence from or loss of the transcendent dimension* in modern culture. Firstly, Jones links the loss of a transcendent dimension, and the particular focus

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[24] He describes seekers as people who do not necessarily identify with the institutional level of a specific religion, do not adhere to a specific religious authority, tend to be experimental when it comes to personal religious experiences (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

[25] Jones, 2016, p. 336.

[26] *Nones* refers to a religiously unaffiliated group of society (also referred to as non-believers) in the United States (Jones, 2016, p. 345).

[27] Luckmann argued against the original thesis of secularization with the concept of the privatization of religion, stating that besides the fact that people are losing connection with the institutional dimension of religion – religion is still an important factor in society (Luckmann, 1967).

[28] "The superficial spirituality of the New Age is more about validating how one currently leads one's life than about any serious change in a mystical direction—a watered-down spirituality of a "Buddhism Lite," as it were" (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

[29] "Cultivating mystical experiences—in particular, mindfulness meditation—has been absorbed into parts of modern culture while engaging in full mystical ways of life has atrophied" (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

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on the immanent, closely to modernity. He says that only the phenomenal world is deemed real and scientific research on mysticism strengthens this approach by focusing only on the bodily aspects of mystical experience. Moreover, the loss of the pre-modern mindset, as well as the embeddedness of scientific discoveries in our education and culture, has resulted in a "secularized mindset" that might prevent us from experiencing the transcendent – and at least from taking it seriously.[30] Mysticism today is absorbed into modern culture and cultivated by many, and it appears as though the experiences are separated from the religious goals and the traditional mystical way of life. Secondly, Jones suggests a *change in mysticism*: it must be this-worldly – thus it needs to provide a meaningful interpretation of this world and its problems as these, unlike in the past, cannot be neglected anymore. Moreover, mystics must incorporate two worlds – bringing back the transcendent and connecting it with the phenomenal realm – with a meaningful explanation and activity in the world. The author even takes this suggestion a step further, implying that civilization depends on mystics and a religious reawakening induced by today's people (the spiritual heirs of religion), and argues that this could help in regaining the lost, transcendental dimension (Jones, 2016, p. 345). He also considers whether humanity can be called *homo religious* and if a mystical society is possible in the near future (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-346).

To summarize this wide range of ideas about secularization, Jones mentions these trends, research findings and visions in order to support his argument about the secularization of mystical experiences. He identifies two simultaneously occurring processes: the decline of mysticism, on the one hand, where mysticism is understood as an immersive, time-consuming and deep engagement related to traditional teachings, techniques, based on an experience which provides insight to the ultimate reality and resulting in a fully transformed lifestyle. The other process is the increase of interest in mysticism, where mysticism is understood as one of the tools for aiding people's quest in a happier, more fulfilled and productive life in society; providing certainty and connection with people. This type of mysticism is temporary and focuses on the experience, rather than the two other aspects mentioned above. Stepping back and looking at it from a sociological perspective, these trends do not seem to obviously support what Jones means by secularization, i.e. the decline of religious (particularly mystical) beliefs and practices in modernity. Mysticism and individual religiosity are said to expand on the expense of the group level. The privatization of religion: "[…] has removed the social dimension of religion and created a spirituality of the self – of the consuming self." (Carrette and King, 2005, p. 68.) Some argue against this notion, stating that instead of a loss of religiosity on the group level, we can talk about the construction of voluntary associations and new types of religious communities. (Casanova, 2006, 18.) In the following part, I am summarizing Jones' understanding of modernity to be able to reflect on the strong connection he draws between secularization and modernity.

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[30] "On the contrary, the United States has always been the paradigmatic form of a modern secular, differentiated society. Yet the triumph of "the secular" came aided by religion rather than at its expense, and the boundaries themselves became so diffused that, at least by European ecclesiastical standards, it is not clear where the secular ends and religion begins" (Casanova, 2006, p. 12).

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Modernity

Jones makes a distinction between premodernity and modernity and suggests a straightforward process of losing the transcendental aspect of the world during the latter, with time progressing. He links the idea of a sacred universe, belief in a comprehensive myth and the embeddedness of the transcendental realm in the immanent to premodernity. Opposed to that the modern society either completely forgot about the transcendent or even if people have experiences of it, it is hard to take the content of mystical experiences seriously (Jones, 2016, pp. 338-339). "For many today the only ontic claim that mystical experiences can support is that only the natural mind and body is involved, not a transcendent mind or other reality" (Jones, 2016, p. 337).

Moreover, Jones suggests that – we are in a civilizational crisis: visible in spiritual decline and malaise - detachment from religious tradition is emphasized (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-345). Based on Paul Tillich's thoughts, Jones thinks that a religious reawakening and the regaining of the lost sacred dimension is needed, but seems impossible in the near future (Jones, 2016, pp. 345-346). It is interesting to note that loss of interest in mysticism is more because of this aspect of our culture than of science – according to Jones: mysticism is seen as counterproductive to our society and self-assertion. He describes our current period as a time of uncertainty, an age of distraction, and characterises culture as materialistic, affluent and too comfortable, promoting self-assertion.

Before I turn to presenting Jones' understanding of mysticism, I would like to highlight some aspects to consider in relation to modernity and secularization: in particular the relationship between the premodern and the modern, the dichotomy of traditional and modern, the close link between modernity and secularization and the exclusivity of the immanent.

The first of these is the relationship between premodern (traditional) and modern, both as an adjective and as an era. Almost all of the aspects of modernity, that Jones deems as negative and hindering from the perspective of religion, are essential in the definition of modernity. Jones talks about modernity in opposition to the pre-modern era. Similarly, Troeltsch (1912) thinks that every era can be understood in relation to the previous one and, especially when it is over, from the perspective of the era which follows

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it. He makes a distinction between modernity and the so-called church civilization[31] – the preceding era. The success of modernity as a new era comes from autonomously forming cultural notions which have an immanent and direct effect. If there is any authority at all – it is based on rationality and autonomy. The emphasis is on personal beliefs. Modernity is described using the following terms: individualism, immanent focus of life, constant reflection on life – as opposed to an intuitive form of it; belief in progress; religion loses its strong basis. Both authors make use of the opposition, but in different ways. For Troeltsch there is no value difference, or superiority, between the eras - their difference is essential not only for defining them, but also for the existence of modernity itself. For Jones, however, the loss of (contact with) tradition and focus on the transcendent, along with the other characteristics of today's society, results in a civilizational crisis, and a sense of spiritual malaise for many.

I think this is a highly problematic point of view based on a rigid dichotomy between the traditional and the modern; and linking secularization and modernization closely together. Casanova (2006) adapts a more fluid view of this problem, stating that the global expansion of modernity challenges world religions to radically change. This process is not exclusive to modernity - the European colonial expansion had a similar effect, but "*Under conditions of globalization, world religions do not only draw upon their own traditions but also increasingly upon one another. Inter-civilizational encounters, cultural imitations and borrowings, diasporic diffusions, hybridity, creolization, and transcultural hyphenations are all part and parcel of the global present"* (Casanova, 2006, p. 17).

In its original formulation, secularization was closely linked to modernity. Religion loses its plausibility and its status as the provider of an all-encompassing explanation of the world. Along with that, the world also loses religious legitimation (Máté-Tóth, 2014, p. 38). However, Casanova points out that "It is the postulated intrinsic correlation between modernization and secularization that is highly problematic" (Casanova, 2006, p. 13). Casanova suggests that there are modern and secular societies, which are deeply religious, and premodern societies that are secular and irreligious from a Euro-centric religious perspective (Casanova, 2006, p. 13). Moreover, the scope of the theory has been questioned by many. It may, for example, be a suitable theory to explain the decrease in religious institutional affiliation in Western Europe over the course of the 20th century, but its global use would require extensive research. Furthermore, it cannot be applied unconditionally to the West (North America and Europe), as Jones suggests it can. [32]

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[31] Church civilization is described as an all-encompassing point of understanding, a totality which is covered and intertwined with every aspect of life. It is described as a belief in an absolute and direct divine revelation; and in the institute of church – the organizational form of revelation. It is an authority-based culture and has an ascetic view of life – concentrating on the after-world. Eisenstadt shares a similar view, highlighting the essentiality of wide-spread cultural acceptance of traditions and the threefold limitations of traditional society which results in the impracticality of structural limitations: "The essence of traditionality is in the cultural acceptance of these cultural definitions of tradition as a basic criterion of social activity, as the basic referent of collective identity, and as defining the societal and cultural orders and the degrees of variability among them. […] The distinctiveness of the center in traditional societies is manifest in a threefold symbolic and institutional limitation: the content of these centers is limited by reference to some past event; access to positions as legitimate interpreters of the scope of the traditions is limited; and the right of broader groups to participate in the centers is limited" (Eisenstadt, 2003, pp. 138-139).

[32] "Outside of academia, serious mysticism is in general decline in the West" (Jones, 2016, p. 334).

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When it comes to the United States, for example, sociologists tend to discard the theory as the indicators do not show a long-term decline of religiosity (Casanova, 2006, p. 8). Máté-Tóth aims to define the distinguishing character of the Central-Eastern European region and tackles the question of whether the theory of secularization is applicable to this context (Máté-Tóth, 2014). Overall, Casanova considers the strong linking of secularization to modernity to be the root of the impasse in the debate. Instead of this, he suggests focusing on the fusion and dissolution of religious political and societal communities - churches, states and nations (Casanova, 2006, p. 15).

Jones primarily understands modernity as an era during which people lost sight of the ontic realm. The transcendental dimension is no longer in the focus of scientific research on mysticism, not to mention the mystics who have also lost interest in anything transcendental, searching only for the immanent aspects and material changes, such as health benefits, that the experiences may provide. Dealing with similar questions, Charles Taylor provides the concept of "the immanent frame" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 539-593). The immanent frame is a set of self-sufficient, impersonal and immanent orders in modernity, covering cosmic, social and moral grounds. It emerges in opposition to a transcendent one, but it does not necessarily "slough off" the transcendent. "Some of us want to live it as open to something beyond; some live it as closed. It is something which permits closure, without demanding it" (Taylor, 2007, pp. 543-544).

Classical mysticism

In the epilogue, Jones describes a form of mysticism in opposition to today's mystical phenomena. It is a pure, undamaged, whole version of mysticism – without removing mystical experiences from the equation. It essentially involves a mystical way of life, a focus on the transcendent,[33] and takes the cognitive claims of mysticism seriously. What makes it different from today's mystical phenomena is the long-term commitment, engagement with traditional teachings, adherence to difficult monastic ethical codes, and so on. The phrases used to label this phenomenon include: classical mysticism, classical mystical way of life, serious mysticism, serious change in a mystical direction, commitment to a rigorous traditional spirituality with its developed depth, full mystical way of life (as opposed to mystical experiences only), and traditional mysticism. The people involved in this type of mysticism are referred to as classical mystics. As Jones uses the term classical mysticism most frequently, I am going to refer to this phenomenon according to that label.

Classical mysticism seems alien in today's society with its emphasis on passivity, ascetic renunciation, forgetting about the body, neglecting the natural world, selflessness which goes against the culture of self-assertion. Because of this, classical mystics appear

[33] Once again, I am referring to Jones' understanding of premodern mindset as a precondition for mystical experiences. See: Footnote 15. and Modernity.

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as irrational, passive and immoral. Even though today's mysticism seems to be flourishing, this other form of serious mysticism is dying.[34]

Jones uses *insight into the vertical dimension of life and the mystics commitment* to a full transformation to provide the basis for a defense of the transcendent ground to this world. According to Jones, these cognitive claims of the transcendent might make others feel uncomfortable in a society where people have more broadly lost sight of the transcendent.

As I mentioned above, Jones describes the purportedly decreasing version of mysticism ("classical" mysticism) with several phrases/adjectives, now I would like to take a moment to look at what these words imply.[35] The word *classical* suggests that this type of mysticism is traditional in form, based on methods developed over a long period of time; and it is considered to have a long lasting value. *Tradition* and *traditional* also suggests an extended period of time, of development and usage of beliefs, principles and actions. The developed depth that Jones associates with classical mysticism primarily refers to organization on the group level, which provides the individual with a set of traditional teachings, techniques, and rules to follow. This depth and complexity require commitment for an extended period in order to understand it and use it correctly. Classical mysticism also means a change in a mystical direction following the mystical experience. Mysticism does not end with the experience, but, as Jones suggests, the main part is the commencement of a full mystical way of life afterwards. Moreover, traditional spirituality[36] is said to be rigorous (careful, thought-through and controlling), and serious (which implies long-term dedication, commitment and a meaningful practice). As today's mysticism is presented in contrast to classical mysticism, this effort might highlight further levels of depth regarding both phenomena.

Mysticism today

Today's mysticism is defined in opposition to classical mysticism: as an incomplete, temporary, superficial, experience-based and self-centered phenomenon, which focuses on the natural realm and, even if there are any claims of the transcendent experience, those claims are ignored. This new kind of mysticism seems to be flourishing and replacing classical mysticism. The phrases Jones uses to label these phenomena are mostly derogatory, namely superficial spirituality, Buddhism Lite, watered-down spirituality, naturalistic spirituality. Today's mysticism entails both change and loss of

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[34] See footnote no. 33.

[35] The Cambridge English dictionary's definitions are used regarding the words: tradition(al), classical, rigorous are used from. URL: https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/ For the interpretation of rest of the words I am using the textual context as I consider this a much more expressive and specific source, than their definitions.

[36] One of the synonyms for the phenomenon of classical mysticism

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tradition. Change of tradition is understood in the sense that it appropriates traditional techniques and teachings. Mindfulness meditation is mentioned as an example - as it is common, popular and far from traditional teachings in the ways it is used.[37] Tradition is moving out of the focus by people ignoring traditional religious metaphysics, traditional religious goals, mystical and monastic ethical codes, and eventually discontinues.[38]

The concept of spirituality is essential for understanding today's religious phenomena, and as a phrase it is used with different meanings in the Jones' epilogue which highlight different stages of the process of spirituality replacing mysticism. Between the 1950s and 1980s, spirituality increasingly began to signify a tradition in world religions, focusing on the personal and experiential levels. "Rigorous traditional spirituality" is used in this sense. On the other hand, *New Age spirituality, watered-down spirituality, superficial spirituality,* and *naturalistic spirituality replacing classical mysticism* highlight further meanings of the word and stages of the "takeover." Carrette and King argue that interest in the notion of spirituality started to increase in the 1950s and was closely knit to the the mystical, but slowly the term replaced the notion of mysticism. Spirituality fit into "secular" markets with its de-traditionalized and this-worldly character, while mysticism remained associated with ancient traditions and otherworldliness. This resulted in a preference for spirituality and mysticism losing its popular appeal (Carrette & King, 2005, pp. 42-44). Carrette and King argue that this process of turning religion into a psychological event is an ideological process, which results in the favoring of the internal economy of the self over the external economy of social relations, and therefore is essentially connected to the history of western capitalism (Carrette & King, 2005, pp. 68-69).

Spirituality is now a private, psychological event that refers to a whole range of experiences that float about on the boundaries of religious traditions. "The lack of specificity allows it to be effective in the marketplace and reduces its concern for social ethics and cultural location. […] In transpersonal psychology spirituality emerges as a product of religious fragmentation and eclecticism, hidden in the psychological structures of individualism. It is a box without content, because the content has been thrown out and what is left is a set of psychological descriptions with no referent" (Carrette & King, 2005, p. 73).

Future of mysticism

Without some injection of personal spiritual experience — for theists, some kind of encounter with a living god — religion becomes no more than a social club with a bloodless metaphysics, and probably suffocatingly dogmatic, if doctrines are taken

[37] Buddhist teachings of selflessness transformed in psychotherapy to enhance the sense of self (Jones, 2016, p. 336).

[38] „Traditional religious metaphysics and transcendent goals are ignored; traditional mystical ethical codes are at best watered down. For example, one can adopt aspects of a Buddhist way of life while being agnostic about its factual claims about rebirth and karma (Batchelor 1997). A total inner transformation is not always the goal. Teachers of complicated metaphysical doctrines are no longer needed, nor is adherence to difficult monastic ethical codes. Traditional meditative techniques may be adopted to calm the mind or to focus attention fully on the present […]" (Jones, 2016, pp. 336-337).

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seriously (Jones, 2016, p. 338). At this point it is clear that Jones perceives classical mysticism as decreasing and does not find today's mysticism suitable for the religious reawakening that he envisions (Jones, 2016, pp. 343-346). Therefore, he describes a future form of mysticism that would live up to both modern challenges and traditional standards. He comes up with several possible names to define this new form of mysticism, which include the following: bifurcated mystically informed life, new mystical systems in association with science and modern cultural interests, truncated mysticism, revamped mysticism , reinvigorated mysticism. From now on I will use the name mystical systems as a reference.

Cognitive claims of mystical experiences are unverifiable so they face the challenge of demonstrating a different form of value to scientific knowledge. Jones thinks that new mystical systems should supplement science with this different type of knowledge in a way that both science and mysticism are accepted as knowledge-giving processes. Jones believes that the cognitive claims of introvertive mystical experiences about the transcendent can still be accepted while fully affirming science.[39]

New mystical systems should therefore incorporate transcendent and immanent dimensions. On the one hand, it means the defense of the transcendent – just like classical mystics did. On the other hand, it means giving full reality to the natural realm by taking it seriously when it comes to interpreting introvertive experiences and not forgetting action and this-worldliness on a daily basis. Therefore, complete selflessness, ascetic renunciation, sole focus on the present, neglecting the body and not reflecting on sufferings in the world is no longer an option. The phrase 'bifurcated mysticism' highlights the question of whether a two-focused life is attainable for mystics. Jones calls this a truncated form of mysticism, where mysticism somewhat loses its autonomy and gives equal weight to a non-mystical point of view. This would mean that successful mysticism would replace the totally transcendent image of the deity with one that is also immanent in space and time. Nonetheless, mysticism would gain scientific (and therefore public) acceptance.[40]

It is interesting to note that Jones considers the focus on mystical experiences exaggerated (solidified by William James) when it comes to scientific research on mystical experiences. However, from the perspective of the vitality of religious traditions he seems to agree with James (2002, p. 29), for whom this vitality appears as an essential aspect of bringing mysticism into focus (Croce, 2013). When Jones contemplates the role of mysticism in the future of religion, he refers to Karl Rahner, Robert Ellwood and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan – who share the same view on the vitality of religious - and particularly mystical - experiences. He shares his views/visions of a religious re-awakening, in which mysticism plays an important role. He sees today's people as the "spiritual heirs of all the

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[39] "Thus, it is possible to forge a conciliation of mysticism and science that accepts both endeavors as knowledge-giving (see also Jones 2010: 261–76). This means that it is not necessary to naturalize introvertive mystical experiences for a reconciliation: one can accept the classical mystical position that these experiences involve transcendent realities while still fully affirming science" (Jones, 2016, pp. 342-343).

[40] "But such a conciliation removes one objection to the cognitive validity of introvertive mystical experiences by showing that their claims to be an awareness of a transcendent reality are consistent with science's cognitive claims" (Jones, 2016, p. 343).

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major religious traditions"[41] who shall use and develop contemplative traditions, not only for the suggested vitality of religions and society, but also because humanity could benefit from it.[42] *"They may help us overcome a sense of alienation from the natural world and give us a sense of being connected to the world and to each other that will affect how we see ourselves and treat others and how we act in the world"* (Jones, 2016, p. 345). Although he outlined this vision, Jones does not think mystics will brig about any significant changes in the near future (Jones, 2016, p. 346).

Today's mystical phenomena are almost completely set aside by Jones, as they does not fulfil all the criteria of classical mysticism. From Jones' perspective, this version of mysticism is not considered "serious" and it is not taken seriously: it is scientifically ignored. Instead of today's mysticism he focuses on the characteristics of possible new mystical systems, which seem to represent an adaptive, revised version of classical mysticism. Following Jones' logic, how can we reflect on today's mysticism? Are these phenomena dead-ends - something that occurs in the period of transitioning from and to a focus of transcendental dimensions of life? Is this mysticism possibly a bit more significant in the sense that it is the next stage of mystical development? What if traditional mysticism is not able to rise to the challenges of modernity and make a come-back in the form of new mystical systems?

Jones suggests that classical mysticism today is untenable for various reasons (Jones, 2016, pp. 338-340). It seems as though almost all the conditions of mysticism (at least of classical mysticism), are absent in modernity. Following Jones' logic - does this mean that mysticism is not possible anymore? Or does it mean that there is a mysticism which is possible with different, or fewer, conditions, and therefore the change of mysticism is inevitable? Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities highlights the problem of trying to establish a rigid dichotomy between sacred tradition and secular modernity (Eisenstadt, 2003, pp. 135-166). He suggests that traditions do not end with modernity but continue to live on, transform due to the challenges of modernity, and so also help to shape modernity. As Casanova summarizes it: "Modern traits […] are not developed necessarily in contradistinction to or even at the expense of tradition, but rather through the transformation and the pragmatic adjustment of tradition" (Casanova, 2006, p. 13).

Secularization of mysticism

Jones' main idea, articulated in the epilogue, is the Secularization of mystical experiences. As I have pointed out above, this idea relies heavily on Jones' understanding of mysticism, resulting in the inclusion of traditional forms of mysticism and the exclusion of today's mysticism. Secularization of mysticism entails a twofold trend related to modernity and particularly to contemporary society. On the one hand, Jones notes an

[41] Jones, 2016, p. 345

[42] Mysticism would provide an experience-based contact with more of reality (more than the natural realm), would help people being more fully human, to a more meaningful life, optimistic outlook on life, moral development and more compassion for others (Jones, 2016, pp. 341-342, 345).

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increase in today's mysticism (i.e., mystical experiences absorbed into parts of modern culture), and a decrease in classical mysticism, on the other. Besides the definition of mysticism, an understanding of modernity and secularization might help to unravel the notion of secularization of mysticism. In general, modernity is primarily defined by Jones in terms of its opposition to premodernity, and as entailing a loss of the transcendent dimension. Consequently, contemporary culture is described by Jones in an utterly negative way, in so far as it is unfavorable to classical mysticism. It is an era of uncertainty, an age of distraction, the culture of material values, affluence and comfort, promoting self-assertion. Jones describes this as a civilizational crisis visible in a spiritual malaise and calls for a religious reawakening.

Modern mystical phenomena have a central role in the idea of the secularization of mysticism. At the social level, Jones points out a loss of faith in transcendence, an antimystical climate, and the tendency that the cultivation of mystical experience comes to be incorporated into parts of modern culture. At the group level, he underlines that mysticism is decreasing in major religions, however, from the perspective of the future of religions, mysticism has a vital importance. Finally, in terms of the individual, Jones observes a simultaneous decrease and increase of mysticism, and a change in the practice of mysticism. The decrease is understood related to classical mysticism, while the increase is related to today's mysticism. The change in the practice of mysticism is described with the idea of watered-down spirituality – picking and choosing mystical practices. Overall, the idea of the differentiation of the secular sphere can be found in the loss of the transcendental dimension of life and the influence of the immanent dimension on thinking and experiencing. Future mysticism as imagined by Jones is a phenomenon which brings back the transcendental dimension and connects it with the immanent.

I consider the phrase, *secularization of mystical experiences* somewhat inaccurate for the concept that Jones describes. As he points out in certain parts of the epilogue, mystical experiences are common and widespread (Jones, 2016, pp. 336, 338). They might have changed due to consequences related to modernity, but they certainly are not in decline (which is the overall meaning of secularization as he uses it). What is in decline, which Jones generally seems to lament, is the long-term engagement with traditions. This means engagement prior to the experience (teachings, techniques, etc.), and following the experience (full transformation of life based on the mystical experience). The secularization of mystical experiences could be an appropriate phrase for the differentiation of mystical experiences from mysticism as a whole. Otherwise, the phrase *secularization of mysticism* would be more suitable to describe this concept. All in all, I consider the use of the phrase secularization in the epilogue, not as a scientific theory but as a general concept which articulates religious decline in a widely understandable way.

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This word aids Jones in expressing what seems like an impression of today's mystical landscape, rather than representing a scientific endeavor. Nevertheless, the impressions he touches upon are/were scientifically relevant and may contribute to furthering the scientific understanding of today's mystical phenomena.

Jones describes his vision of future mysticism as a twofold change in mysticism. On the one hand, the return to tradition - a process which to some extent would go against the current trend of the secularization of mysticism. On the other hand, a change towards meeting the challenges of modernity – a similar process to the idea of tradition's place in modernity suggested by Eisenstadt. Overall, Jones seems to promote a "secularized" and practical version of traditional mysticism – a version of mysticism which takes the phenomenal world seriously in explanation and action while not forgetting about the transcendent experience. It is a kind of mysticism that takes what was experienced and applies it to the natural realm. He thinks that the loss of focus towards the transcendent is what is missing from mysticism today; and the complete focus, which existed in premodernity, cannot be regained, because we live in a secularized world. He admits that the concept of this bifurcated/truncated/revamped mysticism is problematic. Does mysticism lose essential characteristics by making a compromise and adapting to the secularized world? How can that which is ineffable be translated into action and word without altering it to a great extent? It is interesting to note that he uses similar arguments to what he criticized in today's mysticism - for presenting the idea and the usefulness of the new mystical systems. He imagines mysticism as present and having beneficial effects on individuals and on society[43] – just slightly different effects than the ones he deems as self-centered.

As mentioned above, Jones quotes Karl Rahner, Robert Ellwood and Sarvepalli Radhakrishnan who share an emphasis on the vital aspect of mystical experiences. Mysticism would be reintroducing the ontic realm in our life on an experiential and individual basis. The latter two aspects of it: experientiality and individuality might be the major reasons why mystical experiences are popular today. As Jones rightly points out, it answers many of the questions and problems of modern people: it is temporary, it offers the possibility of connection with other people, it is flexible in the sense that mystical experiences can happen outside of the institutional context, it can be a temporary adventure leading to something traditional – as deep as the person wants to dive, it offers a great variety one can pick and choose from – it enables experimenting and fits the buffered self (Taylor, 2007), and bricolage (Dobbelaere, 1999, p. 2). Based on the ideas of Carrette and King, this phenomenon can be called a free-market spirituality, celebrating the individual (2005, pp. 66-69). This is the current state of a process rooted in Protestant

[43] See footnote 41.

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ideas, starting with the psychologization of religion at the end of the 19th century and the privatization of it: a focus on mystical experiences expressed by James and adopted by many and applied far beyond the original limits of the theory. These authors consider the process of psychologisation essentially linked to capitalism.

Questions and conclusions

Does, or could, mysticism in fact have a distinctive role in secularization and the future of religion in modernity as Jones suggests?[44] Casanova considers the predictions of Troeltsch and James about the central role of mysticism as an individual form of religiosity to be accurate; and the so-called invisible religion[45] to be gaining global prominence. Moreover, Casanova argues that this is a novelty only from a Western perspective, as mysticism has always been an important option for the religious virtuosi and elites of Hinduism, Taoism and Buddhism (Casanova, 2006, p. 18). In the "West," William James is credited - or blamed - for establishing the focus on direct experiences of the ultimate and therefore favoring a spiritual elite, who get religion at first hand, and the average practitioners, who get it second hand – seem to be neglected. Croce (2013) argues that James's approach is a democratization of religion instead of elitism. He mentions that James emphasizes the presence of a spiritual potential in all humanity – and instead of focusing on the transcendent for deepest meaning, he refocuses attention toward the "inscendent" – the significance of depth psychology in each person. Furthermore, he points out that James does not neglect the communal and institutional aspects of religion, rather highlights the importance of the personal, experiential and direct aspect of it. Adding to this focus, the general and wide-spread availability of religious options as presented to modern people – "from the most "primitive" to the most "modern" [are] often detached from their temporal and spatial contexts, ready for flexible or fundamentalist individual appropriation" (Casanova, 2006, p. 18)

There is a wide variety of religious and mystical phenomena on all three levels today, not only from the perspective of the "consumers", but from the point of view of scholars as well. Instead of generally ignoring these, or deeming them as a decline because it is not what it was, we might instead ask some questions. The empirical evidence suggests that secularization can no longer be maintained in a general sense. In response, Peter L. Berger introduced a new paradigm based on the implications of the phenomenon of pluralism to tackle the co-existence of different religions and the

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[44] "Without some injection of personal spiritual experience—for theists, some encounter with a living god—religion becomes no more than a social club with a bloodless metaphysics (and probably suffocatingly dogmatic, if doctrines are taken seriously)" (Jones, 2016, p. 338).

[45] A form of individual religiosity – described by Thomas Luckmann. (Luckmann, 1967)

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coexistence of religious and secular discourses (Berger, 2014). Pluralism is able to reflect on the fluid construction and existence of new religious phenomena, instead of focusing on a rigid dichotomy of sacred/religious and secular. Pluralism compels the individual to make choices between different religious and non-religious possibilities. The focus on the individual, compelled to choose between the variety of religious and non-religious possibilities, however, could be brought into question by the perspectives presented by Carrette and King (2005) and shared by Jones.

Mysticism with its traditionality and otherworldly focus seems to be lost next to the appealing spirituality of today's people. Jones takes the standpoint of the defender and uses arguments that completely diminish today's spiritual and mystical phenomena. I suspect the solution lies somewhere in between, reflecting on the scientific understanding of mysticism and re-introducing and proposing new questions such as: How do we define mysticism today? How do we categorize the never before seen variety and quantity of experiences? What are the criteria for considering an experience mystical? How do we deal scientifically with present-day mystical experiences and those who call themselves mystics? Are we forgetting about those simply because they do not fit the definitions, which are mainly based on experiences from the previous era? The fact that modern mysticism is not considered serious when the criteria of classical mysticism are applied to it does not mean that it should not be taken seriously by scientific research.

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  ISSN: 2057-2301

Spirit Possession in a Psychiatric Clinic

Simon Dein
Goldsmiths, University of London
(s.dein@gold.ac.uk)

This paper considers the relationship between one specific religious experience - spirit possession - and psychiatry. I begin with the case study of Ann, a forty year old female secretary with two children, who was referred to her local psychiatric services with a presumptive diagnosis of psychosis. She was interviewed initially alone then with her partner. For about one year she was concerned that a spirit had possessed her, she was low in mood, agitated and maintained that the spirit was controlling her thoughts and actions. She had consulted with a number of Catholic priests from local churches and had asked for an exorcism on several occasions. As is often the case in these instances individuals are first requested to seek out a psychiatric opinion to exclude mental illness before exorcism is considered.[1]

She recounted the following narrative. Born in Lodz, Poland, she had a traditional Catholic upbringing, regularly attending mass for many years. She described a stormy childhood, and while she did not disclose this directly, she intimated that she had been sexually abused by a close relative. This had occurred on several occasions. She had never discussed this with anyone else but felt it left her dirty and guilt ridden. At the age of eighteen years she decided to visit the UK, initially as a tourist but after a couple of months decided to live there permanently. She quickly found a job waitressing in a restaurant and after several months had formed some close friendships. She recounted how one of her male friends had introduced her to the occult, was using Tarot cards and Ouija boards and she vividly described a session whereby a spirit had entered the room and could move a glass on the board. Coming from a Catholic background she became increasing wary of the practices and finished the relationship. For the next decade she continued attending her local church on a regular basis but frequently wondered if there was any truth in these occult practices. While she held a strong belief in the existence of the Devil she was unsure whether other spirits were 'real.'

She spoke about her partner in a negative way, alleging that he was controlling and that she felt stifled in the relationship. This caused her much distress and she had

[1] The details of the patient have been extensively changed to maintain anonymity.

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considered leaving him on several occasions but did not feel able to do this because of her two children. Her relationship elicited feelings of guilt and anger in her.

At the age of thirty eight she was walking close to the road and was suddenly hit by a car. Suffering a relatively mild head injury and bruising she was admitted to hospital overnight. A CT scan revealed no brain trauma. It was shortly afterwards that she became concerned that a spirit had overtaken her, had entered her body and was controlling her thoughts and actions. While the spirit was with her constantly, at times she reported that she had memory lapses and the spirit caused her to jerk uncontrollably. She could not identify this spirit and did not know if it was male or female. She could, however, always sense its presence through a rather pungent odour which she emphasised only she - and no one else - could smell. During these jerking episodes she stated that the spirit spoke through her, often in a male voice and she had absolutely no control over this. She became increasingly agitated with poor sleep, low mood and had lost her appetite. Much of the time she was irritable and this caused mounting tension with her partner since she continuously begged him to obtain an exorcism. Their relationship had become strained over this. Her life had become totally preoccupied with the spirit inside her to the expense of any other aspects of her life.

During her interview with the psychiatrist and a psychiatric nurse she presented in the following way. She was well kempt. Her speech was normal in rate and rhythm. In terms of her mood she was agitated and she repeatedly stated that she could not cope any longer and she needed to 'get the spirit out.' While not expressing any suicidal thoughts she admitted that she felt hopeless. She emphatically stated that the spirit was real and was ruining her life. She was extremely angry that she was seeing a psychiatrist and what she really required was exorcism.[2] She repeated several times 'I'm not mad, I'm possessed.' From her viewpoint our meeting had been a total waste of time. She declined any further assessment.

Her partner who had accompanied her stated that he could not stand this any longer. He confirmed her episodes where she appeared to be in a trance like state, shaking and salivating, during which she would speak in a deep, gruff, male voice. He did not understand what this voice was saying, but noted that it sounded angry. He could not identify any trigger for these 'attacks,' but himself wondered if her stress had brought them on. During these episodes she seemed to be unaware of her surroundings and of those around her. He did not know what to do next.

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[2] Specifically in Catholicism, official doctrine agrees that demonic possession can occur and must be distinguished from mental illness. It however emphasizes that cases of mental illness should not be misdiagnosed as demonic influence. Catholic exorcisms can only be conducted under the authority of a bishop, and then, only in accordance with strict rules. Priests are instructed to ensure that affliction is not actually a psychological or physical illness before proceeding to an exorcism by an ordained priest in the name of Jesus Christ ("Sacramentals", Catechism of the Catholic Church).

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How should mental health professionals understand possession experiences? I begin with a discussion of spirit possession in the anthropological literature. This is followed by an overview of psychiatric explanations with an emphasis on dissociation. Psychological and ethnographic theories are often seen as mutually exclusive. I argue that Western psychological notions of dissociation fail to take account of the social context of spirit possession and, building on the work of Seligman and Kirmayer (2008), that incorporating ethnographic theories can result in a more in depth understanding of this phenomenon with implications for its treatment.

Spirit possession

Psychiatrist and anthropologist Roland Littlewood (2004) views possession as the belief that an individual has been entered by an alien spirit or other parahuman force. This then takes over control of the person influencing both their agency and identity. Vagrecha (2016) summarizes the symptoms of possession as: Loss of control over one's actions; behaviour change or acting differently; loss of personal identity/altered state of consciousness; change in tone of voice as if a different person is speaking; loss of memory of trance session and rhythmical abnormal movements.

In many parts of the world possession states are commonplace and culturally accepted, often playing a central role in healing rituals. They are frequently induced voluntarily. Possession states vary across cultures in terms of the possessing spirits - be it Satan, an ancestor, God or an animal spirit. Evidence is emerging that religious training on managing possession states is associated with better control and integration of these experiences into the individual's life (Almeida, 2004; Negro, Palladino Negro and Louza 2002). Possession states are also common worldwide. Bourguignon (1973) found that altered states of consciousness associated with possession existed in 89% of 488 societies worldwide. As Rashed (2018) comments, ethnographic reports suggest that the prevalence of possession states does not appear to be waning worldwide (e.g. Boddy 1994; Cohen 2007; Rashed 2012).

In Western cultures possession states are commonplace in Evangelical Pentecostal and Charismatic Catholic churches, Afro-American religions, Spiritism, and Spiritualism (Harding, 2005). They appear to be rare in Western cultures outside of religious contexts, possibly because of the Western emphasis on individualism, self–control and the importance of the healthy unified self. Specifically, in Britain possession states are seen in church related contexts, Spiritualist home development circles (Hunter, 2020), and are also prevalent among South Asians (Littlewood & Dein 2013). Cultural factors play a significant role in determining how spirit possession is understood in different societies.

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Anthropologists have taken a keen interest in these states often arguing that they are forms of communication, or expressions of protest in societies among marginalised or subordinate groups (e.g. Lewis, 1989; Boddy, 1989; Bourguignon, 1973). In many parts of the world it is women who more frequently become possessed than men. Anthropological theories highlight the social meaning and rhetorical and discursive functions of spirit possession, allowing for the creation of new relationships or identities not ordinarily available to individuals in their everyday lives (Lambek, 1981; Boddy, 1993). These approaches take note of local cosmology, the construction of self and personhood and the moral order. However, they often do not specifically consider the lived experiences of individual subjects and its emotional and psychological dimensions (Seligman & Kirmayer 2008).

I briefly summarise some of the better known anthropological views. Bourguignon (1973) sees possession as an instrument of social change. In *Ecstatic Religion: A Study of Shamanism and Spirit Possession*, anthropologist I. M. Lewis, from a functionalist perspective, discusses two types of possession: central and peripheral. The former supports prevailing political, moral and religious beliefs. Such states are common in religious ceremonies worldwide and are not considered pathological. In contrast, peripheral possession indicates an invasion of evil spirits and is viewed as undesirable, immoral and dangerous. While peripheral cult possession is typically open to all participants, in central religions such possession is reserved for the religious elite. Lewis' theory assumes that women experience feelings of social deprivation as a result of their marginalised or subordinate status but he does not provide any direct evidence that they actually feel this (see also Sered, 1994 for a critique of this perspective). It is not clear in the male dominated society that Lewis studied in Somalia that women actually feel downtrodden or neglected. For Boddy, the Sudanese Zar Cult allows women to reflect upon their worlds. Spirit possession is seen as a commentary upon their experience of the feminine and allows them to expand their culturally overdetermined sense of self, rather than as a form of protest.

Focusing on the cognitive mechanisms underlying possession states, Anthropologist Emma Cohen (2008) differentiates between pathogenic and Executive spirit possession. The former involves attributing abnormal behaviour to possession by the spirit. The individual maintains their own identity but accounts for specific misfortune though spirit intrusion. In executive possession the afflicted individual acts as though their identity has been displaced by that of the possessing spirit. The body becomes a vehicle through which the spirit speaks and acts.

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Having briefly considered spirit possession in anthropology I now move on to psychiatry.[3]

Spirit possession, psychiatry and dissociation

The relationship between possession states and mental health remains ambiguous and more work is required to clarify the associations (Delmonte, Luchetti, Almeida Moreira & Farias, 2016). As Bhugra (1996) notes, similar mental and behavioural states may variously be defined as mental illness in one society and as a religious experience in another. Cardena and Spiegel (1996) and Lewis Fernandes (1998) both correctly point out that dissociative trance and possession disorder are a problematic category for psychiatry. Possessed individuals sometimes manifest symptoms which are phenomenologically similar to those found in mental illnesses like psychosis, hysteria, mania, Tourette syndrome, epilepsy, schizophrenia or dissociative identity disorder; this includes involuntary or uncensored behaviour.

Possession by spirits is one of the oldest ways of accounting for both physical and mental disorders and is today a prominent explanatory model in many parts of the non-Western world. While no longer common in Europe, demonic possession was a prevalent explanation of madness up until a couple of hundred years ago or so. Only in the late 19th and early 20th century did modern theories of psychopathology arise, replacing ideas of possession with materialistic psychodynamic, behavioural and biological theories all of which deny the reality of supernatural entities. However, among African and South Asian populations in the UK, supernatural explanations for schizophrenia are still commonplace (Romme & Escher 1993; McCabe & Priebe 2004). As Duijl et al (2010) note, spirit possession has received scant attention from mental health care systems.

Psychology and psychiatry generally invoke the notion of dissociation when discussing possession and other trance like states. Dissociation involves both behaviour and experience and includes a sense of disconnection from the self and the surrounding world. It is associated with loss of the normal integrative functions of the mind, affecting memory, consciousness, and identity. In itself dissociation is not abnormal or pathological and is a normal way of coping with stress. Dissociation is on a spectrum from everyday experiences of absorption, to more profound forms like amnesia and derealisation, to extreme forms such as Dissociative Identity Disorder (formerly multiple personality

[3] For a comprehensive critical discussion of theories of spirit possession in anthropology see Schmidt (2016).

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disorder). Psychiatrists have predominantly focused upon clinically significant extreme dissociative states like identity disturbances, fugue states and amnesia.

There are several issues relating to the concept of dissociation. The psychiatric paradigm views dissociation in terms of psychological function and neurobiological mechanism. It is far from clear that dissociation is a universal psychological mechanism based upon a common underlying neurophysiological system (Seligman & Kirmayer, 2008). At present we have little understanding as to how dissociation is subject to cultural influence in terms of its triggers, manifestations and interpretations. But as Bourguignon (2004, p. 558) argues, dissociation is always 'culturally modulated', and it is always necessary to consider the social setting in which it is found (Schmidt, 2016).

Psychological theories involving dissociation are linked to specific Western ideas about the individualistic self, person and agency. As many authors have noted, conceptualizations of mind demonstrate marked cultural variability (Le Vine, 2010). The notion of a bounded unitary, coherent and autonomous self may be unique to the West. Agency - the experience of initiating and being in control of one's actions - similarly is subject to cultural influences (Murphy & Throop, 2010). Western psychology sees dissociation as an individual phenomenon with little attention given to the role of social and cultural context. Dissociation's social meaning and function is given little consideration in the psychiatric paradigm. Possession states in many parts of the world are seen as social rather than individual phenomena and some have indeed argued that possession/dissociative possession states must be understood in their own sociocultural contexts (e.g. Boddy, 1994).

The relationship between experiences diagnosed as dissociative trance/ possession and those states studied by anthropologists as 'spirit possession' remains unclear. While spirit possessions and dissociative/possession disorders are similar phenomenologically, they may be distinguished in terms of deliberateness, distress, impairment, help seeking behaviour and idiom (Bhasavar , Ventriglio & Bhugra, 2016).

Aiming to differentiate normative spirit possession from mental illness, Morton Klass (2003) integrates perspectives from anthropology and psychology. He distinguishes between three sets of Human Dissociative Phenomena: Dissociation Consciousness Phenomenon; Dissociative Identity Phenomenon and Imposed Dissociative Phenomena. For Klass spirit possession is included in the second category of Dissociative Identity Disorder. He makes a distinction between Dissociative Identity Disorder and Patterned Dissociative Identity (PDI). The latter is not an illness or disorder but derives from the society's belief system. Thus this 'patterned' behaviour is not a mental illness.

The American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – a publication for the classification of mental disorders - sees spirit possession as a form of

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dissociative disorder. The latest edition – DSM V – lists possession under the section on DID (Dissociative Identity Disorder), referring to a discontinuity in one's sense of self accompanied by alterations in affect, behavior, consciousness, memory, perception, cognition, and/or sensorimotor functioning. The manual differentiates normal religious possession from pathological possession. The latter is:

> '[…] involuntary, distressing, uncontrollable, and often recurrent or persistent; involves conflict between the individual and his or her surrounding family, social or work milieu; and is manifested at times and in places that violate the norms of the culture or religion' (2013 p. 295).

Thus possession from this perspective should NOT be called a disorder if it is a normal aspect of a broadly accepted cultural or religious practice. Psychological research consistently demonstrates links between extreme psychological stress (e.g. sexual and physical abuse, rape, war experiences, natural disasters, assault and motor vehicle accidents) and dissociative symptomatology (Lewis Fernandes, 2007; van der Kolk & Van der Hart, 1989; Kirby et al., 1993; Spiegel, 1991). While the anthropological literature documenting the social function of spirit possession in different cultures is large, the relationship between spirit possession and potentially traumatizing events has received relatively little academic attention. However a handful of studies have examined this association (Duijl, 2010; Castillo, 1994; De Jong, 1987).

Clinical Implications

Following her psychiatric assessment and discussion with our psychologists we felt that this lady was not psychotic but was most likely in a dissociated state, especially when she had episodes of memory loss and involuntary movements. She refused any further assessment by psychiatric services but communicated solely by phone contact about her wellbeing. Given the opportunity it would have been appropriate to refer her for a psychotherapeutic assessment. She finally found a priest who conducted a ritual of exorcism. She did not provide any details about him for us. Ann stated that this had helped her considerably, she felt less agitated and more in control of her life. Although the spirit was affecting her less it had not completely departed.

It is not adequate for psychiatrists and psychologists to account for possession in terms of dissociation, it is also necessary to understand how this dissociation functions in a sociocultural context, provides meaning and is an indirect form of social protest. As Seligman and Kirmayer (2008) state by 'considering the social context and discursive

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functions of their patients' dissociative experiences, practitioners can decipher more nuanced meanings and implications of these experiences beyond their clinical significance as indicators of a psychiatric condition.' From a psychoanalytic perspective possession states can be seen as symbolic symptoms of the unconscious repression of traumatic or distasteful experiences (Budden, 2003).

At times Ann's identity was overtaken by that of the possessing spirit. This could have been caused by her earlier experiences of sexual abuse and her 'priming' with previous experiences with the occult. Furthermore, we saw her 'possession' as an idiom of her distress phrased in religious terms and as a way of asserting her autonomy in a controlling and at times stifling relationship. Through this she had regained a sense of agency. We also believed that her presenting symptoms accorded with a typical model of possession in Catholicism.

Unlike Western psychiatry, Catholicism does accept the possibility of spirit oppression or possession.[4] Many examples are found in the Synoptic Gospels of Jesus exorcising evil spirits (Porterfield, 2005; Betty, 2005). Christians have adopted these accounts for contemporary healing. Francis MacNutt, a former Catholic priest who has written extensively on evil spirits describes the typical presentations of possession by an evil spirit: 'bodily contortions, changes in the voice, and changes in facial expression' (MacNutt, 1995, p.77). For him, many people diagnosed with mental illness are actually oppressed by spirits ranging from satanic presences to the recently dead who are confused rather than evil.

Exorcism may be seen as a form of psychotherapy providing meaning-centered, spiritually sensitive care. Both attempt to cast out 'demons.' For psychotherapists these are metaphorical and relate to mental traumas and memories. For exorcists the demons are real entities. Psychotherapy and exorcism both speak about a 'higher power,' be it the psychological or medical belief system or Jesus Christ. Both are dependent upon a ritualized relationship between the therapist and client, or between the priest and the possessed individual. Finally, suggestion plays a significant role in both types of treatment. Jerome Frank (1991) argues that all forms of healing including psychotherapy and exorcism share three characteristics: a socially sanctioned practitioner; a sufferer who is convinced about the healing ability of this practitioner and a series of structured interactions between this healer and the sufferer with the aim of influencing the sufferer's attitudes, emotions and behaviour.

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[4] Specifically in Catholicism, official doctrine agrees that demonic possession can occur and must be distinguished from mental illness. It however emphasizes that cases of mental illness should not be misdiagnosed as demonic influence. Catholic exorcisms can only be conducted under the authority of a bishop, and then, only in accordance with strict rules. Priests are instructed to ensure that affliction is not actually a psychological or physical illness before proceeding to an exorcism by an ordained priest in the name of *Jesus Christ ("Sacramentals"*, *Catechism of the Catholic Church*).

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What do we learn from this case study? Mental health practitioners need to be aware of the role of culture and religion in the presentation of mental illness to avoid misdiagnosis. There is a need for dialogue between mental health professionals and religious professionals. Although uncommon among the general UK population spirit possession does occur in religious groups, but generally in the context of worship services. Possession outside these contexts is often abnormal and its effective management involves close collaboration between mental health and religious professionals.

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  ISSN: 2057-2301

Exploring the consequences of religious experience within the Greer tradition: Effects on personal affect and on religious affect

Leslie J. Francis
University of Warwick
(leslie.francis@warwick.ac.uk)

Introduction

Alister Hardy played a pioneering and highly influential role in the developing science of religious experience when he first set out to collect accounts of the religious experiences of a wide range of 'ordinary' people (Hay, 1982, 2011; Franklin, 2014). In this context 'ordinary' is employed in the non-perjorative sense refined by Astley (2002) to designate individuals who had neither specific expertise, training nor status within religious or academic communities. Hardy (1979) began his (now well-established) archive of religious experiences by placing a request in national papers to invite people to respond to a question that evolved into what has now become known in the scientific community as 'The Hardy Question':

> Have you ever been aware of or influenced by a presence or power, whether you call it God or not, which is different from your everyday self?

Attention to the precise formulation of the question is not insignificant, since the question asked helps to shape the range of answers given. Hardy was not alone in shaping a question to elicit empirical data concerning religious experience. A range of other (similar but distinctive) questions have been formulated within both qualitative and quantitative research traditions. For example, Glock and Stark (1965) asked:

> Have you ever as an adult had the feeling that you were somehow in the presence of God?

Back and Bourque (1970) asked:

> Would you say that you have ever had a 'religious or mystical experience' – that is, a moment of sudden religious awakening or insight?

Greeley (1974) asked:

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> Have you ever felt as though you were close to a powerful spiritual force that seemed to lift you out of yourself?

It is within this broader context that John Greer formulated what has now become known in the scientific community as 'The Greer Question':

> Have you ever had an experience of God, for example, his presence or his help or anything else?

The Greer tradition

Born in Northern Ireland in 1932, John Edmond Greer began his academic career shaped within agricultural sciences, focusing his doctoral research on potato blight. After ordination within the Anglican Church of Ireland, Greer focused his scientific curiosity and methodological skills on investigating the religion of Protestant adolescents within his homeland. Greer's first study was influenced by Cox's (1967) investigation of sixth-form religion in England. In 1968 Greer replicated and slightly modified Cox's survey among 1,631 sixth-form students attending controlled or Protestant Voluntary schools, publishing the findings in *A Questioning Generation* (Greer, 1972). Greer established this 1968 study as offering a baseline against which future replication studies could monitor change and chart trends. By the time that Greer was planning his first replication to take place a decade later in 1978 he had been influenced by the pioneering initiative established by Alister Hardy in Oxford in 1969, and had formulated his own religious experience question to include in his ongoing programme of research.

Greer employed his religious experience question for the first time in 1978 among 1,872 upper sixth-form students at controlled or Protestant voluntary schools. In his report of this study Greer (1981) found that 38% of the males and 51% of the females gave a positive response to his religious experience question. Greer employed the question for the second time in 1981 among 940 Catholic and 1,193 Protestant students between the ages of 12 and 17 attending 19 secondary and grammar schools. According to Greer (1982) this time the answer 'yes' was given to the religious experience question by 31% of the Protestant males, 39% of the Protestant females, 35% of the Catholic males and 64% of the Catholic females. In this study Greer found no significant age differences in the proportions of students who reported religious experiences.

Greer employed the question for the third time in 1984 among 1,177 fourth-, fifth- and sixth-form students from ten Protestant and ten Catholic schools. According to Francis and Greer (1993) this time the answer 'yes' was given by 26% of the Protestant

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males, 38% of the Protestant females, 34% of the Catholic males and 56% of the Catholic females. Greer employed the question for the fourth time during the school year 1991-1992 among 2,129 third-, fourth-, fifth- and sixth-form students attending 12 Protestant and 12 Catholic grammar schools. According to Francis and Greer (1999) this time the answer 'yes' was given by 37% of the Protestant males, 56% of the Protestant females, 49% of the Catholic males and 61% of the Catholic females.

Greer's question was employed for the fifth time in Northern Ireland in 1998 among 2,359 sixth-form students (1,093 attending seven Protestant schools and 1,266 attending nine Catholic schools). In her analysis of these data, ap Siôn (2006) found that religious experience was reported by 29% of Protestant males, 29% of Catholic males, 39% of Protestant females and 38% of Catholic females. Compared with earlier data these figures reveal a particularly marked decline in reported religious experience among Catholic females (64% in 1981, 56% in 1984, 61% in 1992 and 38% in 1998). The content of the reported religious experience is analysed and illustrated within nine descriptive categories characterised as: help and guidance, exams, God's presence, answered prayer, death, sickness, conversion, difficulty in describing, and miscellaneous.
In addition to providing information about the level of reported religious experience among Protestant and Catholic students, many of Greer's surveys also invited those students who gave the answer 'yes' to his religious experience question to 'describe this experience if you can.' For example, in the 1978 study 28% of the students accepted the invitation to describe their religious experience, and in the 1981 study 31% did so. The two analyses reported by Greer (1981, 1982) attempted to categorise these descriptions of religious experience within discrete groups. Greer (1981) proposed nine categories which he characterised as: guidance and help, examinations, depression and sickness, death, answered prayer, God's presence, conversion experiences, good experiences, and miscellaneous. Greer (1982) reduced the number of categories to eight by eliminating the category 'good experience.' Greer fully recognised the arbitrary and problematic process of attempting to assign each account to one category.

Greer's question was employed for the sixth time in Northern Ireland in 2010 among sixth-form students attending Protestant schools and sixth-form students attending Catholic schools. This time the study was also extended to the Republic of Ireland. The rich qualitative data generated from the 2010 study has been analysed separately for Northern Ireland by ap Siôn (2017), and for the Republic of Ireland by Astley (2017, 2019). The present study now proposes to interrogate these data from a quantitative perspective and to do so by building on the earlier work, reported by Greer and Francis (1992), Francis and Greer (1993, 1999), and Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins,

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and Barnes (2006), in a series of studies concerned with exploring consequences of religious experience.

Exploring consequences of religious experience

In his book, *The spiritual nature of man: A study of contemporary religious experience*, Hardy (1979) set out to offer 'a provisional classification of the various elements found in the accounts of religious experience so far examined' within his developing archive of such accounts (p. 25). At the same time he began to identify features that he described as 'triggers and consequences' of religious experience (pp. 81-103). His section on consequences is preliminary, and tantalizingly, brief (pp. 98-103). Hardy recognises that 'it is not always easy to distinguish between an actual experience and the consequences' (p. 98). He argues as follows:

> Where it has been of a sudden or dramatic kind it may be easy to note certain obvious differences it has made, to see definite changes in the attitude of behaviour of the person concerned. In other cases developments may be felt to be part of the experience itself, consisting as it does in gradual awareness of new potentiality for growth and understanding (Hardy, 1979, pp. 89-90).

Working with this caution in mind, Hardy distilled from the evidence within his archive three main differentiated consequences of religious experience that he conceptualised as 'a sense of purpose or new meaning to life' (p. 99), 'changes in religious belief' (p. 99), and 'change in attitude to others' (p. 101). In terms of a sense of purpose or new meaning to life, Hardy cites one individual who said of his religious experience 'that it altered my whole outlook on life' and another individual who said 'my dormant soul suddenly came to life again, and I began rapidly to enjoy life.' In terms of change in religious belief, Hardy cites one individual who said of her religious experience that it 'made Christianity comprehensible to me […] The ritual of religion now had a meaning which is why I decided to go regularly go church,' and another individual who said, 'I could do no other than identify myself with the Christian community.' In terms of change in attitude to others, Hardy cites one individual who said of her religious experience that it 'has resulted in the most wonderful feeling of freedom and a flow of love and compassion for others – a much more complete understanding of their needs and feelings,' and another individual who said that 'in the light of such vision, one's care and concern for others become more vital and loving.'

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Within the wider context of his research on religious experience among secondary school students in Northern Ireland, and drawing on Hardy's interest in the consequences of religious experience, Greer took a special interest in exploring the effect or consequences of having, and of acknowledging, religious experience among the participants in his survey. Greer hypothesised that a primary consequence of religious experience within the context of Northern Ireland would be reflected in supporting and maintaining a positive attitude toward religion. Greer's hypothesis is consistent with the second of Hardy's (1979) three categories of the consequences of religious experience, namely changes in religious belief. Greer operationalised this hypothesis by including in his survey the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (see Francis, 1989, 2009). The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity has its origins in the work of Francis (1978a, 1978b). Drawing on the conceptual tradition of Fishbein (1967), Francis conceptualised attitude as a unidimensional construct concerned with the affective dimension of religion, as distinct from the cognitive dimension of religion (concerned with belief) and the behavioural dimension of religion (concerned with practice). Drawing on the scaling tradition of Likert (1932), Francis operationalised the affective dimension of attitude toward Christianity through 24 items concerned with an affective response to five components of the Christian faith accessible to and recognised by children, young people and adults, namely God, Jesus, Bible, prayer, and church. Comprising both positive and negative items this instrument was found to work with satisfactory properties of reliability and validity from the age of eight years upwards. The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity has been shown to function with good internal consistency reliability and construct validity in Northern Ireland among students attending both Protestant (Francis & Greer, 1990) and Catholic (Greer & Francis, 1991) secondary schools.

Greer hypothesised that, if the acknowledgement of personal religious experience was core to shaping a positive attitude toward Christianity, religious experience should contribute additional predictive power to attitude scores after taking into account other factors known to predict individual differences in attitude scores. Greer first tested this theory on data generated by 1,177 fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-year students attending both Protestant and Catholic schools. In this study reported by Francis and Greer (1993), Greer employed multiple regression to build a model which could explore the cumulative relationship between a number of different factors and a positive attitude toward Christianity. First, he entered into the model the influence of sex, church attendance, personal prayer, and belief in God. Then, after taking these factors into account, he entered reported religious experience. The statistics demonstrated that reported religious experience was a significant additional predictor of a positive attitude toward Christianity,

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even after controlling for the influences of church attendance, personal prayer and belief in God.

The theory was tested for the second time by Greer and Francis (1992), drawing on data generated by 2,133 12-17 year old students attending both Protestant and Catholic schools, for the third time by Francis and Greer (1999), drawing on data generated by 2,129 third-, fourth-, fifth-, and sixth-form students attending both Protestant and Catholic schools, and for a fourth time by Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins, and Barnes (2006), drawing on data generated by 2,359 sixth-form students attending both Protestant and Catholic schools. The data from all four studies supported by hypothesis that the acknowledgement of personal religious experience is associated with the formation of more positive attitudes toward Christianity among young people in Northern Ireland.

Research question

The aim of the present study is to build on the work reported by Greer and Francis (1992), Francis and Greer (1993, 1999), and Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins, and Barnes (2006) in three ways. First, the study replicates the earlier work within Northern Ireland on data collected in 2010 to examine whether the effect of religious experience on religious affect (attitude toward Christianity) established during the 1990s remained consistent in 2010. Second, the study extends the research from Northern Ireland to include the Republic of Ireland as well. Third, the study complements exploring the effect of religious experience on religious affect by adding to the research an established measure of personal affect, employing the Oxford Happiness Inventory. The hypothesis that religious experience may result in greater personal happiness and wellbeing is consistent with the first of Hardy's (1979) three categories of the consequences of religious experience, namely, a sense of purpose or new meaning in life.

The Oxford Happiness Inventory was developed by Argyle, Martin, and Crossland (1989) on the basis of a thorough theoretical discussion of the nature of happiness. Drawing on earlier analysis, Argyle and Crossland (1987) suggest that happiness can be measured by taking into account three empirical indicators: the frequency and degree of positive affect or joy; the average level of satisfaction over a period; and the absence of negative feelings, such as depression and anxiety. Working from this definition, they developed the Oxford Happiness Inventory by reversing the 21 items of the Beck Depression Inventory (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Hock, and Erbaugh, 1961) and adding eleven further items to cover aspects of subjective wellbeing not so far included. Three items were subsequently dropped, leading to a 29-item scale. The constructors report an

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internal reliability of .90 and a seven- week test-retest reliability of .78. Validity was established against happiness ratings by friends and by correlations with measures of positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. A series of early studies employing the Oxford Happiness Inventory in a range of different ways confirmed the basic reliability and validity of the instrument and began to map the correlates of this operational definition of happiness. For example, Hills and Argyle (1998a) found that happiness was positively correlated with intensity of musical experience. Hills and Argyle (1998b) found that happiness was positively correlated with participation in sports. Chan and Joseph (2000) found that happiness was correlated positively with self-actualisation, self-esteem, likelihood of affiliation, community feeling and self-acceptance.

Control variables

Empirical studies exploring the connections between religion and personal affect need to take two main control variables into account. The first main control variable is sex. In his pioneering review of empirical studies within the psychology of religion, Argyle (1958) concluded that the most secure finding was that women were more religious than men. More recent reviews have confirmed that, within Christian and post-Christian cultures, this finding has remained secure in relation to a number of indices of religious practice, religious beliefs, and religious attitudes (Francis, 1997; Francis & Penny, 2014).

The second main control variable is personality. A model of personality that has proved to be particularly fertile within the empirical psychology of religion is the three dimensional model proposed by Hans Eysenck and his associates (see Beit-Hallahmi & Argyle, 1997, p. 164). This model has been operationalised in a series of self-completion instruments for application both among adults, including the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (Eysenck, Eysenck, & Barrett, 1985), and among young people, including the Junior Eysenck Personality Questionnaire (Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975) and the Junior Eysenck Questionnaire Revised (Corulla, 1990). Using these instruments a series of studies has demonstrated that higher levels of happiness are associated with extraversion and emotional stability (see Francis, Brown, Lester, & Philipchalk, 1998; Francis, 1999).

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Method

Procedure

As part of a larger study concerned with sixth-form religion in Ireland, building on and extending work pioneered by John Greer in 1968 and documented by Greer (1972), schools catering for sixth-form students in Northern Ireland, and for fifth- and sixth-year students, the equivalent age-group, in the Republic of Ireland, were invited to participate in the project. The aim was to gather data from over 3,000 students in each nation. Within Northern Ireland both Catholic and Protestant schools were involved. All students attending the sixth-form classes within the participating schools were asked to complete a copy of the survey instrument. Within the Republic of Ireland responses were sought from young people in the variety of school types and patronage models provided for in the Republic, most of which have high percentages of students who self-identify as Catholic. Students were assured of complete confidentiality and anonymity and given the option not to submit their copy of the questionnaire for analysis.

Participants

All successfully completed questionnaires were submitted by 3,848 students in the Republic of Ireland and by 3,523 students in Northern Ireland. The 3,848 participants from the Republic of Ireland comprised 1,895 male students and 1,953 female students; 9% were aged 16 years, 36% 17 years, 40% 18 years, and 16% 19 years; 22% attended church weekly, with a further 8% attending at least monthly, while 56% attend church less than once a month, and 14% never attended church. The 3,523 participants from Northern Ireland comprised 1,652 male students and 1,953 female students; 1,591 students attending Protestant schools, 1,618 attending Catholic schools, and 314 attending integrated schools; 21% were aged 16 years, 51% were aged 17 years, and 28% were aged 18 years; 37% attended church weekly, with a further 8% attending at least monthly, while 37% attended church less than once a month, and 18% never attended church.

Measures

The participants completed three measures: happiness was assessed by the Oxford Happiness Inventory; religiosity was assessed by the Francis Scale of Attitude toward

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Christianity; personality was assessed by the Short-form Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised.

The Oxford Happiness Inventory (Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989) is a 29-item multiple choice instrument. Each item contains four options, constructed to reflect incremental steps defined as: unhappy or mildly depressed, a low level of happiness, a high level of happiness, and mania. The respondents are asked to 'pick out the one statement in each group which best describes the way you have been feeling over the past week, including today.' An example item reads: 'I don't feel life is particularly rewarding' (unhappy or mildly depressed), 'I feel life is rewarding' (a low level of happiness), 'I feel that life is very rewarding' (a high level of happiness), and 'I feel that life is overflowing with rewards' (mania).

The Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (Francis, Lewis, Philipchalk, Brown, & Lester, 1995) is a 24-item instrument designed to measure affective responses to five aspects of the Christian tradition: God, Jesus, Bible, prayer, and church. Each item is assessed on a five-point scale: 'agree strongly,' 'agree,' 'not certain,' 'disagree,' and 'disagree strongly.' Example items include: 'Prayer helps me a lot'; 'God is very real to me'; 'I think the Bible is out of date'; 'I know that Jesus helps me'; and 'I think church services are boring'.

The abbreviated form of the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire Revised (Francis, Brown, & Philipchalk, 1992; Francis, Robbins, Louden, & Haley, 2001) is a 24-item instrument composed of four six-item measures of extraversion, neuroticism, psychoticism and a lie scale. Each item is assessed on a two point scale: 'yes' and 'no'. The present analyses drew on the extraversion scale and the neuroticism scale. Example items from the extraversion scale include: 'Are you a talkative person?' and 'Can you easily get some life into a rather dull party?' Example items from the neuroticism scale include: 'Does your mood often go up and down?' and 'Are you a worrier?'

Religious experience was assessed by the Greer Question: 'Have you ever had an experience of God, for example, his presence or his help or anything else?'. Responses were rated: yes (2), no (1). Sex was coded in the conventional manner: males (1) and females (2). Location was coded as follows: Republic of Ireland (1) and Northern Ireland (2).

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Results in the Republic of Ireland

The Greer Question

Among this group of 3,848 students within the Republic of Ireland, slightly more than one in four (26.3%) responded 'yes' to the Greer Question: 'Have you ever had an experience of God, for example, his presence or his help or anything else?' The response was significantly higher ($\chi 2 = 5.6$, $p < .05$) among females (28.0%) than among males (24.6%). There was no significant difference ($\chi 2 = .01$, ns) between the endorsement of 16- to 17-year-old students (26.5%) and 18- to 19-year-old students (26.2%). There were significant differences in levels of endorsement in line with frequency of church attendance ($\chi 2 = 166.6$, $p < .001$): 40.5% among weekly churchgoers, 34.0% among monthly churchgoers, 23.2% among occasional churchgoers, and 11.7% among those who never attend church.

Psychological measures

Table 1

Scale properties (Republic of Ireland)

	N items	Alpha	Mean	*SD*
Oxford Happiness Inventory	29	.91	43.0	13.2
Attitude toward Christianity	24	.96	74.6	20.3
Eysenck Extraversion Scale	6	.66	3.3	1.7
Eysenck Neuroticism Scale	6	.73	4.6	1.6

Table 1 presents the psychometric properties of the four scales deployed in the present study: the Oxford Happiness Inventory, the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, the Eysenck Extraversion Scale, and the Eysenck Neuroticism Scale. The alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) demonstrate a very high level of internal consistency reliability for the Oxford Happiness Inventory and for the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity. The alpha coefficients for the two Eysenckian measures are acceptable and appropriate for such short instruments.

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Personal affect

Table 2

Regression models on personal affect (Republic of Ireland)

	r	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Personal factors					
Sex	-.05***	-.06***	-.02	-.02	-.02
Age	-.07***	-.07***	-.07***	-.07***	-.07***
Psychological factors					
Extraversion	.30***		.24***	.24***	.24***
Emotionality	-.36***		-.31***	-.31***	-.32***
Religious factors					
Attendance	.07***			.09***	.08***
Religious experience					
Yes	.08***				.07***
R^2		.008	.190	.198	.202
Δ		.008***	.182***	.008***	.004***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 2 presents the bivariate correlation coefficients and the four regression models designed to explore the effect of religious experience on personal affect. The correlation coefficients in the first column demonstrate that: personal affect is significantly lower among female students than among male students, and is significantly lower among 18- to 19-year-old students than among 16- to 17-year-old students; personal affect is significantly associated with extraversion and with emotional stability; and there are

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significant positive associations between personal affect and both religious attendance and religious experience. These multiple associations with personal affect indicate that it is prudent to take into account the effects of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion and neuroticism) and frequency of church attendance before testing the association between religious experience and personal affect. The four steps in the regression model make explicit the way in which personal factors are introduced to model 1, psychological factors are added into model 2, church attendance is added into model 3, and finally religious experience is added into model 4. The increase in R2 demonstrates that additional variance in personal affect is explained by each step. In other words, having and acknowledging a religious experience has a significant effect on personal affect after the effects of personal factors, psychological factors, and church attendance have been taken into account.

Religious affect

Table 3 presents the bivariate correlation coefficients and the four regression models designed to explore the effect of religious experience on religious affect. The correlation coefficients in the first column demonstrate that: religious affect is significantly higher among female students than among male students; there is no significant association between religious affect and either age or extraversion; religious affect is significantly associated with emotional lability; and there are significant positive associations between religious affect and both religious attendance and religious experience. These multiple associations with religious affect indicate that it is prudent to take into account the effects of personal factors (especially sex), psychological factors (especially neuroticism), and frequency of church attendance before testing the association between religious experience and religious affect. The increase in R2 demonstrates that additional variance in religious affect is explained by each of the four steps in the regression model. In other words, having and acknowledging a religious experience has a significant effect on religious affect after the effects of personal factors, psychological factors, and church attendance have been taken into account.

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Table 3

Correlations and regression models on religious affect (Republic of Ireland)

	r	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Personal factors					
Sex	.11***	.10***	.08***	.08***	.07***
Age	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.02	-.02
Psychological factors					
Extraversion	.02		.03	.04**	.02
Emotionality	.09***		.08***	.07***	.05***
Religious factors					
Attendance	.52***			.52***	.45***
Religious experience					
Yes	.41***				.32***
R^2		.011	.017	.285	.379
Δ		.011***	.005***	.268***	.094***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Results in Northern Ireland

The Greer question

Among this group of 3,523 students within Northern Ireland more than one in four (28.6%) responded 'yes' to the Greer question. The response was significantly higher ($\chi 2 = 67.4$, $p < .001$) among females (36.5%) than among males (23.3%). The response was significantly higher ($\chi 2 = 15.7$, $p < .001$) among 18- to 19-year-old students (35.6%) than

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among 16- to 17-year-old students (28.4%). There were significant differences in levels of endorsement in line with frequency of church attendance ($\chi 2 = 479.6$, $p < .001$): 51.0% among weekly churchgoers, 38.2% among monthly churchgoers, 19.7% among occasional churchgoers, and 6.8% among those who never attend church.

Psychological measures

Table 4

Scale properties (Northern Ireland)

	N items	Alpha	Mean	*SD*
Oxford Happiness Inventory	29	.91	42.4	12.9
Attitude toward Christianity	24	.96	79.1	24.4
Eysenck Extraversion Scale	6	.69	3.6	1.7
Eysenck Neuroticism Scale	6	.79	4.4	1.8

Table 4 presents the psychometric properties of the four scales deployed in the present study: the Oxford Happiness Inventory, the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity, the Eysenck Extraversion Scale, and the Eysenck Neuroticism Scale. The alpha coefficients (Cronbach, 1951) demonstrate a very high level of internal consistency reliability for the Oxford Happiness Inventory and for the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity. The alpha coefficients for the two Eysenckian measures are acceptable and appropriate for such short instruments.

Personal affect

Table 5 presents the bivariate correlation coefficients and the four regression models designed to explore the effect of religious experience on personal affect. The correlation coefficients in the first column demonstrate that: personal affect is significantly lower among female students than among male students, and there is no significant difference between the scores among 18- to 19-year-old students and 16- to 17-year-old students; personal affect is significantly associated with extraversion and with emotional stability; and there are significant positive associations between personal affect and both religious

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Table 5

Regression models on personal affect (Northern Ireland)

	r	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Personal factors					
Sex	-.06**	-.06***	-.00	-.02	-.02
Age	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01	-.01
Psychological factors					
Extraversion	.34***		.29***	.29***	.28***
Emotionality	-.38***		-.33***	-.33***	-.33***
Religious factors					
Attendance	.09***			.10***	.07***
Religious experience					
Yes	.09***				.07***
R^2		.003	.225	.235	.239
Δ		.003**	.222***	.010***	.004***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

attendance and religious experience. The multiple association with personal affect indicates that it is prudent to take into account the effects of personal factors (sex and age), psychological factors (extraversion and neuroticism) and frequency of church attendance before testing the association between religious experience and personal affect. The four steps in the regression model make explicit the way in which personal factors are introduced to model 1, psychological factors are added into model 2, church attendance is added into model 3, and finally religious experience is added into model 4. The increase in R2 demonstrates that additional variance in personal affect is explained by each step. In other words, having and acknowledging a religious experience has a

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significant effect on personal affect after the effects of personal factors, psychological factors, and church attendance have been taken into account.

Religious affect

Table 6

Correlations and regression models on religious affect (Northern Ireland)

	r	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Personal factors					
Sex	.22***	.22***	.21***	.13***	.10***
Age	-.03	-.02	-.02	-.04**	-.02
Psychological factors					
Extraversion	.04*		.03	.03*	.02
Emotionality	.10***		.07***	.06***	.04***
Religious factors					
Attendance	.64***			.62***	.48***
Religious experience					
Yes	.58***				.38***
R^2		.050	.055	.432	.550
Δ		.050***	.004***	.377***	.118***

Note: * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Table 6 presents the bivariate correlation coefficients and the four regression models designed to explore the effect of religious experience on religious affect. The correlation coefficients in the first column demonstrate that: religious affect is significantly higher

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among female students than among male students; there is no significant association between religious affect and age; religious affect is significantly associated with extraversion and emotional lability; and there are significant positive associations between religious affect and both religious attendance and religious experience. These multiple associations with religious affect indicate that it is prudent to take into account the effects of personal factors (especially sex), psychological factors (especially neuroticism), and frequency of church attendance before testing the association between religious experience and religious affect. The increase in R2 demonstrates that additional variance in religious affect is explained by each of the four steps in the regression model. In other words, having and acknowledging a religious experience has a significant effect on religious affect after the effects of personal factors, psychological factors, and church attendance have been taken into account.

Conclusion

Building on an analytic model proposed and tested by four earlier studies conducted among young people within Northern Ireland (see Greer & Francis, 1992; Francis & Greer, 1993, 1999; Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins, & Barnes, 2006), the present study set out to explore the consequences of religious experience among 7,371 students between the ages of 16 and 19 years attending schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in 2010. The earlier research conducted during the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s had demonstrated the positive effect of religious experience on shaping religious affect. Building on this earlier research the present study has made four original contributions to knowledge.

First, the study has demonstrated that the Greer Question, originally formulated in the 1970s still had traction among young people in 2010. In 2010 a positive response was given to the Greer Question (Have you ever had an experience of God, for example, his presence or his hep or anything else?) by 28.6% of the students in Northern Ireland and by 26.3% of the students in the Republic of Ireland. The strength of the Greer Question resides in specific theistic reference. This allows the interpretation of a positive response to reflect not only acknowledgement of an experience, but also a theistic interpretation of that experience. For at least one in four of the participating 16- to 19-year-old students in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland an experience of God (his presence, his help or anything else) was still strong in 2010. Further research would be helpful in 2020 using the same question to map the trajectory of theistic faith within the two nations on the island of Ireland.

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Second, the study has confirmed the findings reported by Greer and Francis (1992), Francis and Greer (1993, 1999), and Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins, and Barnes (2006) that, within the cultural context of Northern Ireland, having and acknowledging religious experience exerted a positive effect on religious affect. In other words, religious experience theistically interpreted was associated with a more positive attitude toward Christianity.

Third, the study has extended the findings reported by Greer and Francis (1992), Francis and Greer (1993, 1999), and Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins, and Barnes (2006) by demonstrating that, within the cultural context of Northern Ireland, having and acknowledging religious experience exerted a positive effect not only on religious affect, but also on personal affect. In other words, religious experience theistically interpreted was associated with a higher level of happiness and personal wellbeing.

Fourth, the study has extended the potential generalisability of earlier findings reported by Greer and Francis (1992), Francis and Greer (1993, 1999), and Francis, ap Siôn, Lewis, Robbins, and Barnes (2006) within Northern Ireland by demonstrating similar findings within a second nation (Republic of Ireland) that is culturally, politically, and religiously different from Northern Ireland.

Having now tested the Greer Question in both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland in 2010 and established its significant effect on the Francis Scale of Attitude toward Christianity (see Francis, 1989, 2009) and on the Oxford Happiness Inventory (see Argyle & Crossland, 1987; Argyle, Martin, & Crossland, 1989) there would be clear value in including all three measures, alongside the Eysenkian dimensional model of personality (see Eysenck & Eysenck, 1975, 1991), in a replication study in 2020. There would also be value in exploring other potential dependent variables in order to widen the exploration of potential consequences of religious experience. One potentially interesting construct would be the notion of empathy, exploring the potential consequence of religious experience in terms of attitude towards others. Already there is an established research tradition connecting other aspects of religiosity with empathy as assessed by the 23-item empathy scale of the Junior Eysenck Impulsiveness Questionnaire (Eysenck, Easting, & Pearson, 1984), an instrument derived from the adult measure of emotional empathy proposed by Mehrabian and Epstein (1972), as illustrated by Francis and Pearson (1987), Francis (2007), Francis, Croft, and Pike (2012), and Francis, Lewis, and McKenna (2017). The hypothesis that religious experience may result in enhanced empathy is consistent with the third of Hardy's (1979) three categories of the consequences of religious experience, namely change in attitude to others.

Having now explored the consequence of religious experience among young people in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland using the Greer Question, there

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would be value, alongside a direct replication study using the Greer Question, in conducting a parallel study employing a different religious experience question formulated in non-theistic terms.

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Biographies

Simon Dein is a consultant psychiatrist in Essex UK specializing in rehabilitation and liaison psychiatry. He holds a PhD in social anthropology from University College London where he currently teaches as a Senior Lecturer. He is an honorary clinical professor at Durham University where he runs an MSc in Spirituality, Theology and Health. He has written widely on religion and health among Hasidic Jews, Evangelical Christians and Sunni Muslims in the UK. He is founding editor of the journal *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*. He is Chair of the spirituality section of the World Association of Cultural Psychiatry. He is a member of the Royal College of Psychiatrists Spirituality and Psychiatry SIG Executive Committee

Leslie J Francis, chair of the Board of Trustees of the Alister Hardy Trust, is Professor of Religions and Education within the Warwick Religions and Education Research Unit, and Canon Theologian at the Cathedral of St John the Baptist, Newfoundland, and Honorary Distinguished Canon at Manchester Cathedral, England. Since October 2012, he has been Director of WRERU, following the retirement of Professor Robert Jackson from full-time work at Warwick. He obtained his PhD from the University of Cambridge in 1976. His published works have been recognised by three higher doctorates: ScD from Cambridge in 1997, DD from Oxford in 2001 and DLitt from University of Wales, Bangor in 2007. His research in religious education has been shaped by creative links with practical and empirical theology and with the individual differences approach to psychology.

Jack Hunter, PhD., is an anthropologist exploring the borderlands of consciousness, religion, ecology and the paranormal. He is an Honorary Research Fellow with the Alister Hardy Religious Experience Research Centre, and a tutor with the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, University of Wales Trinity Saint David, where he teaches on the MA in Ecology and Spirituality and the MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology. He is a Research Fellow with the Parapsychology Foundation. In 2010 he founded *Paranthropology: Journal of Anthropological Approaches to the Paranormal*. He is the author of *Spirits, Gods and Magic* (2020) and *Manifesting Spirits* (2020), and is the editor of *Greening the Paranormal* (2019), *Damned Facts* (2016) and *Talking with the Spirits* (2014).

Alison Robertson is an Honorary Research associate at the Open University with research interests that include personal forms of religion, subcultures and constructions/performances of identity, self-inflicted injury and experiences of pain. Prior to beginning her PhD she was a Religious Studies teacher and a Principle Examiner for GCSE and A-Level Religious Studies.

Zsusanna Szugyiczki is a PhD student at the Doctoral School of Philosophy at University of Szeged, Hungary. The topic of the doctoral research is the Philosophy of Mysticism and particularly the comparison of ’traditional’ and ’modern’ mysticism.

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