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Research on religiosity and spirituality in the context of interdisciplinary integration

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Abstract. The psychology of religion has come a long way from its pre-paradigmatic past to its current stage, where a multi-level interdisciplinary paradigm is actively taking shape. This future paradigm is based on recognising the value of data at different levels of analysis and avoids reductionism in the context of spiritual and religious phenomena. This paradigm shift has been a response to the longstanding calls by scholars for a common framework for research in the psychology of religion. The development of a theoretical framework for further integration is essential. This article explores the evolution of the psychology of religion, tracing its journey from a pre-paradigmatic phase to the current stage, where a multi-level, interdisciplinary paradigm is emerging. The article discusses how this shift has been shaped by long-standing calls from scholars for a unified framework in the psychology of religion.

Keywords: interdisciplinary integration, religious studies, psychology of religion, processes of integration, research on religiosity issues.

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Introduction

In recent decades, the study of the psychology of religion has experienced a rapid development. Whereas the research in this field in the mid-twentieth century remained episodic, the situation has changed dramatically. Modern research on the psychology of religion encompasses a wide range of methodologies, from quantitative to qualitative methods. This methodological approach has led to a significant expansion of the understanding of religious phenomena. Many complex

integrative conceptual models have been introduced that bring together different fields of study, including neuropsychology, social psychology, and cross-cultural research.

Thus, there has been a need to integrate the psychology of religion with other disciplines as a result of several key factors that have shaped the direction of the field.

Firstly, the lack of attention to religion in psychology has been an important impetus for the development of an interdisciplinary approach. As noted, until recently, religiosity remained on the periphery of psychological research, despite its significant impact on human behaviour and social processes. This gap has long limited the development of the psychology of religion, but the need to consider religious phenomena as an important aspect of human psyche and behaviour has become increasingly evident. The integration of religion into the scientific discourse has made it possible to broaden the scope of psychology and take into account its impact on everyday human life.

Secondly, the complexity of religious phenomena required the use of a more extensive methodological approach. Religious experiences, beliefs, and practices are multi-layered and cannot be explained by a single scientific discipline. The psychology of religion is faced with the need to consider both internal psychological processes (e.g., cognitive and emotional aspects) and external factors such as cultural and social context. This has necessitated an interdisciplinary approach that encompasses different levels of analysis, from neurobiological research to sociocultural factors.

In addition, developments in methodology have played an important role in reinforcing the need for integration. Traditional quantitative methods of researching religious phenomena, such as questionnaires, have proved insufficient to explain the complex processes involved in religiosity. There was a need for qualitative and mixed methods that could more accurately describe religious experiences and beliefs, especially in the context of cultural differences. This has stimulated the creation of more sophisticated theoretical models that integrate data from different fields of science.

Finally, the social and cultural significance of religion in the context of globalisation and intercultural interaction has also reinforced the need to integrate the psychology of religion with other humanities disciplines. Religion continues to play an important role in shaping social norms, personal values, and group identity. Therefore, the interaction of the psychology of religion with religious studies, sociology, and anthropology allows for a deeper analysis of how religious systems affect individuals and society, especially in the context of contemporary social change.

Three key types of integration can be identified in the current development of the psychology of religion. First, integration within the psychology of religion itself, which brings together different levels of analysis, from neuropsychological processes to sociocultural factors, creates holistic models of religious behaviour. Second, the integration of the psychology of religion with other fields of psychology, such as cognitive and social psychology, allows religious phenomena to be viewed within the broader context of the human psyche. Finally, the integration of the psychology of religion with religious studies and other socio-humanities broadens research horizons by taking into account the social, cultural, and historical dimensions of religious practices and beliefs.

Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal L. Park (2005) proposed five integrative themes. These themes do not constitute a complete theory in themselves, but they provide a framework for the further development of the discipline. These themes help unify research, formulate new questions, and stimulate the development of theoretical approaches.

1. The paradigm problem. Throughout most of its history, the psychology of religion has lacked a common paradigm that could serve as a basis for research and discussion. Today, the need for such a paradigm is felt more and more acutely, as it would make it possible to unite different research directions and promote the development of theories explaining the psychological processes underlying religiosity.

2. Methods and theory. The issue of research methods and theory remains an important one. Scholars debate whether research on religion should adhere to experimental methods, as is common in psychology, or whether other approaches, such as deconstruction of concepts and comparative analyses of different narratives about religious processes, are possible.

3. The question of meaning. Understanding meaning plays a central role in the psychology of religion. Questions of meaning, traditionally considered theological, are also psychological. Exploring how religious experiences give meaning to life is key to building a theory that can explain the psychological processes of religiosity.

4. Pathway for the development of the psychology of religion. For the discipline to develop, a critical mass of ideas and knowledge needs to accumulate to facilitate both in-depth research on particular topics and co-operation between different strands. An important step forward is the development of integrative approaches that can bring together different areas of knowledge.

5. The role of the psychology of religion. An important question remains as to what role the psychology of religion plays in general psychology and what it has to offer for understanding human well-being. The question is whether the psychology of religion makes a unique contribution to psychological science or whether its research can fit into the more general categories of psychology.

The psychology of religion has come a long way from its pre-paradigmatic past to its current state, where a multi-level interdisciplinary paradigm is actively emerging. This future paradigm, as Emmons and Palutizian (2003) and Silberman (2005) emphasise, is based on the recognition of the value of data at different levels of analysis and avoids reductionism concerning spiritual and religious phenomena. The move towards this paradigm has been a longstanding response to calls from scholars for a common framework for research in the psychology of religion, which requires the elaboration of key issues and the development of a theoretical framework for further integration.

The problem of the uniqueness of religion in the context of the psychology of religion is important for its integration into the general science of psychology. As Dittes (1969) has pointed out, the key issue here is the extent to which religion can be explained based on basic psychological processes applicable to any other form of behaviour. One end of the spectrum assumes that religion is just one form of human behaviour and can be investigated using the same methods as other behaviours. The opposing view argues that religious phenomena are unique and require special concepts and processes to explain them. One aspect that makes

religion unique is its ability to provide the individual with a higher meaning to life (Emmons, 1999), centred around what the individual perceives as sacred (Pargament, 1997). This is particularly important in the context that religious truth claims that an individual ascribes to their beliefs can be perceived as absolute reality while defying standard empirical evidence (Paloutzian & Silberman, 2003).

However, Emmons, R.A., & Paloutzian, R.F. (2003) suggest that within a multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm, these opposing viewpoints do not necessarily conflict. The multilevel paradigm allows religious phenomena to be explained simultaneously at different levels of analysis, from the neuropsychological to the sociocultural. Such an explanation does not exclude other levels of analysis and allows for the use of knowledge from related sciences. For example, religious conversion can be explained both at the level of neuropsychology and social psychology, allowing the integration of different methods and approaches within a single paradigm.

The question of the uniqueness of religion is also important in determining its place in general psychology. If religion is truly unique, then its study should become an integral part of general psychology to build a comprehensive theory of human behaviour. If religion is not unique, it can be studied as one of many forms of behaviour, and its study will be useful only in practical terms, because of its significance for individuals and societies. This issue has been the subject of considerable debate (Baumeister, 2002), and its resolution will influence whether the psychology of religion becomes a central theme in general psychology or is treated as a secondary discipline.

Contemporary research in the philosophy of science requires consideration of the correlation between modernist and postmodernist approaches to scientific knowledge, especially in the context of the psychology of religion. The traditional modernist approach has long dictated methods of scientific enquiry based on laboratory-type experimentation as the 'gold standard' of science. Earlier psychologists of religion debated whether to pursue rigorous laboratory experiments (Batson, 1979; Gorsuch, 1982), but in recent years the debate has shifted towards a choice between quantitative and qualitative methods.

Interesting and important for further integration is the historical-cultural approach proposed by Belzen (1997), which emphasises the need to take into account the cultural and historical conditioning of religious phenomena. This approach views religiosity not as a fixed entity, but as a culturally constructed and time-varying structure. Thus, the psychology of religion should not only focus on universal aspects, but also take into account the cultural and historical contexts in which religious experiences are shaped. This opens up prospects for interdisciplinary research, where psychologists can collaborate with anthropologists, historians, and cultural scientists to create more comprehensive models for understanding religiosity.

Insider and Outsider Perspectives in the Psychology of Religion: Discussions, Hybrid Approaches, and Cultural Reflexivity

In the mid-1980s, a debate arose regarding the methods of studying Sikhism and the motivations of researchers writing about the Sikh religion. The central question was: who has the right to interpret and represent Sikh traditions – insiders or outsiders? In 1986, the collection of articles *Perspectives on the Sikh Tradition* severely criticized the works of Western scholars, particularly W. H. McLeod, who, according to critics, undermined Sikh faith through his

historical and textual analysis. This moment became a significant milestone in the development of debates about insiders and outsiders, where religious scholars began to focus not only on methods but also on how their status influences the perception of research findings. It also marked an important shift toward recognizing the participation of religious groups in shaping the discourse of religious studies.

Darshan Singh (1991) emphasized that understanding religion is impossible for outsiders, as the true meaning of religion is revealed only through participation and adherence to its prescriptions. While Western scholars have made significant contributions to Sikh studies, their methods and motivations – whether Christian or secular – have been met with suspicion. In this context, the question arose: can outsiders reliably represent a religion, or should this task be left exclusively to insiders?

The study of religion as an academic discipline in the West developed with an emphasis on objectivity, comparative analysis, and scientific methods, distinguishing itself from theology. Early proponents of religious studies emphasized the importance of an impartial approach and the development of appropriate conceptual tools. In 1873, Max Müller stated that religion should be respected but also subjected to critical examination. Twenty years later, Cornelis Tiele argued that religious scholars could be just as objective as non-believers and that their religious convictions should not interfere with their impartiality in research. This approach, which separates personal religious subjectivity from scholarly objectivity, dominated for nearly a century.

The phenomenological approach also fueled debates because it reinforced the concept that religious experience can only be understood through empathy and deep comprehension. This contradicted earlier objectivist and secular approaches, which insisted on maintaining a distance between the researcher and the subject of study. Unlike objectivists, who emphasized detachment and scientific impartiality, phenomenologists of religion, such as Christensen, van der Leeuw, and Otto, argued that religious phenomena are unique and autonomous. They believed that these phenomena could only be grasped through empathy, by "experiencing" another person's religious world. While the very essence of religion remains inaccessible, its manifestations can still be understood. Phenomenologists sought an empathetic reinterpretation of the insider's perspective, avoiding judgments about the truthfulness of religious beliefs, which contrasted with the rational critique of objectivists.

In recent decades, two distinct approaches to the study of religion have emerged in the West. The first is predominantly secular and scientific, aiming to strengthen the objective position of the outsider. It operates on the assumption that no special human nature exists through which religion and sacred experiences can be universally understood. Instead, religion should be examined as a social phenomenon, studied in the same manner as other ideologies and institutions. The scholar's task is not to immerse themselves in religious experience but to maintain a critical distance to explain religion from the outside.

The second approach focuses on reflexivity. Unlike the first approach, it does not demand greater objectivity but rather insists on the researcher's awareness of their own intellectual and personal context. In this framework, postcolonial critique plays a significant role. Instead of striving for complete objectivity, this approach requires scholars, whether insiders or outsiders, to acknowledge their contextual influences. Postcolonial theorists emphasize that researchers

must consider issues of identity, power, and status in their work, as many Western scholars, belonging to privileged groups (both Western and male), may unconsciously reproduce colonial stereotypes in their studies of religion (Shaw 1995; Flood 1999; King 1999; Donaldson & Pui-Lan 2002).

MacCutcheon (1999) classified responses to the insider-outsider problem as follows:

- (i) autonomy and the intrinsic value of religious experience, associated with the phenomenological approach;
- (ii) reductionism, characteristic of the scientific, objective outsider perspective;
- (iii) neutrality and methodological agnosticism, which involves using insider data without evaluating it; and
- (iv) reflexivity.

MacCutcheon also employed the terms of linguist Kenneth Pike: *emic* – the study of behavior "from within the system"– and *etic* – the analysis "from the outside," where the researcher systematizes and reinterprets data. These concepts are crucial for understanding the positions of insiders and outsiders.

Kim Knott identifies four roles of a researcher in the study of religious groups, based on the participant-observer model. These roles vary in terms of involvement in religious practice, each presenting specific challenges:

1. Complete Participant:

Description: The researcher is fully integrated into the religious life of the group, experiencing it from within. Their work is seen as a description of religion "from the inside," based on personal experience and knowledge of traditions.

Challenges: The main difficulty of this role is the loss of critical distance. Complete participants may be biased due to their deep involvement in beliefs and practices, making objective analysis and interpretation more difficult. Such research risks being overly subjective, reducing its scientific credibility.

2. Participant-Observer:

Description: The researcher actively participates in the religious life of the group while striving to maintain a certain degree of critical analysis. They balance participation with observation, seeking to reflect on their engagement in religious practice.

Challenges: The primary challenge is maintaining a balance between involvement and objectivity. It can be difficult for the researcher to remain impartial, especially if participation leads to emotional or personal attachments. Additionally, the study may be considered less reliable if its methodology does not clearly define the extent of participation.

3. Observer-Participant:

Description: In this role, the researcher primarily remains an observer but occasionally takes part in religious life to gain a deeper understanding of its internal dynamics. The focus is mainly on objective analysis, with limited participation allowed for additional insight.

Challenges: The main issue is the lack of full integration into religious life, which may result in the researcher missing key aspects of the group's internal experience. Partial participation can also lead to distrust among community members if they feel the researcher is using them for observation rather than engaging as a full participant.

4. Complete Observer:

Description: The researcher does not participate in religious life and maintains full distance, observing the group solely as an external observer. In this case, the emphasis is on objectivity and impartiality, aiming to analyze religious life "from the outside."

Challenges: The primary challenge is the limited access to the group's internal life. A complete observer may fail to grasp crucial aspects of religious experience, as their detachment prevents deep personal understanding of beliefs and rituals. Additionally, the group may distrust the observer, knowing that they do not share their beliefs, which can restrict access to valuable data.

Kim Knott's model offers flexibility in studying religious communities, particularly in contexts where insider and outsider positions may overlap or become blurred. For instance, in studies of Muslim communities, this model is especially useful, as Muslim researchers often face the challenge of balancing personal religious commitment with the demands of academic objectivity. Research indicates that even among Muslim insiders, different interpretations of religious doctrines and practices exist, highlighting the multilayered nature of the insider experience. Furthermore, Knott argues that the boundaries between research roles—whether as a complete participant or a complete observer—are not fixed. Researchers may transition between positions depending on the research context and objectives. In Muslim communities, this is particularly significant, as scholars engaged in religious life may integrate their personal religious identity with critical distance. This flexible approach helps bridge the gap between full involvement and absolute objectivity, offering an intermediary role in which scholars act as both participants and analysts. The modern iteration of the insider-outsider debate has raised new questions. Critics argue that the phenomenology of religion carries an implicit theological bias (Segal 1983; Wiebe 1985) and even constitutes a form of spiritual practice in itself (McCutcheon 1997). One of the main concerns is its assumptions about the fundamental nature of the sacred and its frequent reliance on Christian categories to explain all religions (Fitzgerald 2000). Additionally, the rhetoric of impartiality and critical distance, characteristic of phenomenology, has been questioned (Flood 1999). An increasing number of scholars now conclude that categorizing researchers as insiders or outsiders does not fully capture the complexity of studying religion. The boundaries between these categories are becoming increasingly blurred, and a growing awareness emerges that researchers are part of the narrative rather than mere external observers.

Mandar and Collins propose different approaches to overcoming the insider-outsider problem. Mandar believes that the issue stems from the modern crisis in the humanities, where secular rationalism dominates religious studies. He sees the solution in rejecting the objectivist approach in favor of studying religion as a form of self-knowledge that combines both spiritual and political dimensions. Collins, on the other hand, adopts a postmodernist perspective, advocating for the rejection of the insider/outsider dichotomy. He proposes a dynamic concept in which all participants become co-authors of the narrative about religion, thereby breaking down the boundaries between faith and research. Jensen also rejects the distinction between insiders and outsiders, calling it a pseudo-problem that lacks both theoretical foundation and methodological significance. However, Jensen offers a largely opposing approach, rooted in universalism and a critique of the concept of insider knowledge. He argues that this division

hinders the objective scientific study of religion, as it is based on outdated concepts of subjectivity and the privileging of insider experience.

Jensen dismisses that only insiders with personal religious experience can truly understand religious phenomena. He considers this a myth-or even a form of mysticism-based on the assumption that insiders have unique access to truth, inaccessible to outsiders. Instead, Jensen supports the outsider position, asserting that critical distance and objectivity provide a better understanding of religious phenomena. Moreover, Jensen rejects the importance of empathy as a key tool for studying religion, criticizing it as a mechanism reinforcing cultural essentialism—the notion that only members of a particular culture can correctly interpret its religious practices. In contrast, Jensen advocates for an approach based on the social nature of language and thought, which enables people to understand one another regardless of their religious or cultural affiliations. In his view, the emphasis on the insider perspective often reinforces political and social structures that may distort academic research on religion. Jensen argues that Postcolonial critics who insist on the significance of the insider perspective ultimately support privileged discourses that hinder free and objective inquiry. In light of these arguments, Jensen suggests abandoning the insider-outsider distinction as a methodological category and instead focusing on an objective, universal analysis of religion as a social phenomenon accessible to all. Some scholars criticize the traditional division between insiders and outsiders, arguing that it distracts from more important issues, such as the quality of data and researchers' responsibilities toward the communities they study. Rather than enforcing rigid distinctions, they propose an approach in which all research participants become co-authors in the process of knowledge creation, thereby eliminating the dichotomy between "internal" and "external" researchers. Additionally, they emphasize that the boundaries between insiders and outsiders are not fixed. Researchers may occupy different positions depending on the context, and these positions can shift throughout the research process, making the categories more flexible and dynamic. Ultimately, they conclude that greater attention should be given to the research experience itself rather than rigid adherence to methodological frameworks. Thus, the boundaries between insiders and outsiders become less significant as researchers become more deeply engaged in interactions with religious communities.

Critical realism, proposed by Ferber, offers a flexible approach to overcoming the dichotomy between insiders and outsiders by integrating the poetic and political aspects of religion. The poetics of religion manifest in its symbolism, myths, and rituals, which evoke profound emotional experiences and shape the internal spiritual journey of participants. However, religion also plays a significant political role, influencing social structures, power dynamics, and identity issues. Studying it through only one of these lenses would be limiting. Ferber critiques the illusion of complete objectivity, known as the "God trick," arguing that absolute outsider detachment is unrealistic. Instead, it is more important to acknowledge the reflexivity of the researcher and their role in the creation of knowledge. Thus, critical realism proposes epistemic relativism, in which insider and outsider perspectives can complement one another. This allows the researcher to account for both subjective experience and objective analysis, ultimately bridging the poetics and politics of the religious phenomenon.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the psychology of religion represents a dynamic and multifaceted field that has evolved significantly over the decades. As this discipline gains traction within the broader framework of psychological research, the need for interdisciplinary integration becomes increasingly apparent. This article has explored the historical context, methodological approaches, and emerging trends that shape the contemporary understanding of religious phenomena.

The integration of qualitative and quantitative methods enhances our comprehension of the complex interplay between religious beliefs, practices, and psychological processes. Recognizing that religious experiences are influenced by cultural and social contexts fosters a holistic view of religiosity, which is essential in our increasingly globalized world. Furthermore, addressing the mental health implications of religiosity illuminates how spiritual beliefs and practices can serve as vital resources for coping and well-being.

Moving forward, researchers must embrace cross-disciplinary collaborations, incorporating insights from sociology, anthropology, and religious studies. Such collaborations can enrich our understanding of how religious systems shape individual identities and societal norms, especially amid contemporary social changes. Additionally, as technology transforms the landscape of religious expression, investigating the impact of digital environments on spirituality will open new avenues for research and understanding.

Ultimately, the psychology of religion not only contributes to academic discourse but also has profound implications for individuals and communities. As we continue to explore the complex layers of religious experience, we can better appreciate the diversity of human belief and its significance in our psychological and social lives. By uniting diverse methodologies and perspectives, we can develop a more robust theoretical framework that captures the essence of religiosity and its critical role in shaping human experience.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no relevant conflicts of interests.

AUTHORS CONTRIBUTION

Arystanbaeva A. The main author and generator of the idea for the publication, substantiated the concept and theoretical also methodological foundations of the article, prepared the article model, contributed to the collection and processing of source and historiographic material, identified significant source material, and contributed to the critical rethinking of the article as well.

Kasimova Z. Equally took part in the preparation of the article, revision, and solving the issues related to the reliability of the information obtained, critical revision of the content of the article, and getting it ready for publication

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Діндарлық пен руханилықты пәнаралық интеграция контекстінде зерттеу

Андатпа. Дін психологиясы өзінің парадигмаға дейінгі кезеңінен бастап, қазіргі көпдеңгейлі, пәнаралық парадигманың қалыптасу кезеңіне дейін ұзақ жолдан өтті. Бұл болашақ парадигма талдау деңгейлерінің әртүрлі мәліметтерін мойындауға негізделеді және рухани әрі діни құбылыстарға редукционистік көзқарастан аулақ болады. Осы парадигмаға көшу дін психологиясы саласындағы зерттеулер үшін ортақ негіз құру қажеттілігі туралы ғалымдардың көптен бергі үндеуіне жауап болды, бұл өз кезегінде негізгі мәселелерді қарастыруды және теориялық негізді дамытуды талап етеді. Бұл мақала дін психологиясының эволюциясын зерттейді, оның парадигмаға дейінгі кезеңнен көп деңгейлі, пәнаралық парадигма пайда болып жатқан қазіргі кезеңге дейінгі жолын қадағалайды. Мақалада бұл өзгеріс ғалымдардың дін психологиясында біртұтас шеңбер құруға көптен бері келе жатқан үндеулері арқылы қалай қалыптасқаны талқыланады.

Түйін сөздер: пәнаралық интеграция; дінтану; дін психологиясы; интеграциялық үдерістер; діни мәселелерге арналған зерттеулер

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Исследование религиозности и духовности в контексте междисциплинарной интеграции

Аннотация. Психология религии прошла долгий путь от своего допарадигматического прошлого до текущего этапа, на котором активно формируется многоуровневая межди-

сциплинарная парадигма. Эта будущая парадигма, основывается на признании ценности данных на различных уровнях анализа и избегает редукционизма в отношении духовных и религиозных феноменов. Продвижение к этой парадигме стало ответом на долгие призывы учёных создать общую основу для исследований в области психологии религии, что требует проработки ключевых вопросов и разработки теоретической базы для дальнейшей интеграции. В этой статье рассматривается эволюция психологии религии, прослеживается ее путь от допарадигматической фазы до современной стадии, где формируется многоуровневая междисциплинарная парадигма. В статье обсуждается, как этот сдвиг был сформирован давними призывами ученых к единой структуре в психологии религии.

Ключевые слова: междисциплинарная интеграция; религиоведение; психология религии; процессы интеграции; исследования, посвященные вопросам религиозности

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