

Psychologists have long been fascinated by the phenomenon of religiosity. In numerous studies they attempted to understand what, from the psychological perspective, may predispose people to belief in God/Higher Power. Among various discoveries two seem particularly significant. First, it was proven that religious individuals present higher mentalizing skills, i.e. abilities to perceive and understand thought and emotions of other people. This relationship may result from the fact that we tend to attribute to God (or gods) emotions and intentions analogous to the ones we ascribe to other people. Second, studies demonstrated that religiosity is associated with higher empathy, i.e. ability to feel certain emotions in response to someone else's situation. Similarly as with mentalization, researchers argue that the mechanisms involved in empathizing with other people may also have crucial importance for the development of intuitive belief in supernatural powers. Unfortunately, the previous investigations are not free from certain methodological difficulties. They rely mainly on subjective, self-reported measures of mentalization and empathy. Moreover, both terms are sometimes used interchangeably, what hinders a proper interpretation of obtained results. Considering these limitations, in this project we intend to explore the relationships between mentalization, empathy and religiosity using both subjective and objective measures. The primary goal will be to better understand the role of psychological variables for individual religiosity.

The project will include four studies of different character. Study 1 will apply psychological test and questionnaires to examine the correlation between mentalization, empathy and religiosity in a randomized adult sample. The second study will strive to verify if experimentally induced empathy and mentalization may lead to an increase in declared religiosity. The third investigation will be carried out in two versions and will apply a procedure of 'religious priming'. In the first version of the experiment we will examine whether the activation of cognitive concept of religiosity may result in a higher level of objective empathy (i.e. specific psychophysiological reaction to emotional stimuli). The second version of the third study will let us test if religious priming may also increase the actual level of mentalizing ability.