

## **IN WHOM CONFIDE: EXPLORING THE CHRISTIAN-CATHOLIC PERSPECTIVE**

**Valentina Sosero**

ICP Institute of Constructivist Psychology, Italy

*The religious dimension can represent an important aspect in a person's life. How can Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) contribute to the understanding of this construction? The present work is an exploration of religious constructions in a group of Catholic-Christian believers, as well as in a group of people who do not feel represented by a religious credo. We will make some hypotheses and reflections around the construct of spirituality explored in both the research groups. Finally, we will use the PCP professional construct of "dependency dispersion" to understand to whom the people of both groups turn to, when they are in need.*

*The present research finds its roots in a personal journey taken in the religious domain. If up until a certain point religion was, in the author's experience, a matter of ultimate truth, meeting Kelly and Personal Construct Psychology (PCP) transformed it into something that could be looked at in different ways. In other words, PCP offered a key to overcoming the "true-not true" opposition and construing religion into new ways that gave deep meanings to what constitutes a more or less elaborative choice.*

Keywords: *religion, spirituality, dependency, PCP*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Maturana and Varela (1987), in their book *The Tree of Knowledge*, called "temptation of certainty", that temptation men experience "to live in a world of certainty, of undoubted, rock-ribbed perceptions: our convictions prove that things are the way we see them and there is no alternative to what we hold as true". McWilliams (1993, p. 269), citing Kelly (1977), refers to the desire for certainty that transforms into the strong "tendency to certify our constructions as being objective representations of the universe". Sometimes, this temptation can become so pervasive that it constitutes an absolute truth for a person. Personal Construct Psychology, helps us to see this from a different perspective: we are always facing a possible construction within which "we build and rebuild our coordinates and we give directions to our actions" (Giliberto, 2013, p.3). In other words, it is not important what we observe, it rather matters how we observe it. From this perspective, religion can be considered as a possible narration, which al-

lows us to experience the world, a phenomenon or a human experience that, in some way, gives meaning to it (Bertelli, 2015).

The etymology of the word religion is very debated: many say that it derives from the Latin: *religare*, which means "to tie/to bind: "According to Cicero, this term derives from "relegere" as meaning "to go through or over again in reading, speech or thought"...for others, religion seems to be connected with the English *reck*, to heed, to have a care for" (Hoyt, 1912, pp. 126-7). Although there is not a unique definition of religion, Gios and Marchesoni (2011, p. 26) define it as "a system of meanings, beliefs, values, rituals and norms around which people can form a common identity and a moral".

The topic of religion also seems familiar to Kelly and his work: Warren had tried to deepen the religious dimension for Kelly, in the light of Dewey's influence. It is interesting to know that:

*Dewey's more general purpose was to distinguish a religious outlook or attitude from any particular, doctrinal religion...Dewey offers a*

view of 'the religious' that sees it as integral to all human experiencing, and as impacting the person's whole life in the sense of generating basic and lasting changes (Warren, 2003, pp. 388-389).

As we have seen before, this reflection seems to give us a new perspective: an approach to process beyond the content, instead of a given truth and a given attitude. In *Sin and Psychotherapy*, Kelly (1969a) tries to face the religious dimension, without promoting any particular credo, but suggesting a perspective about the possible raising of guilt in the fight between good and evil, and in the psychotherapeutic process. For Kelly, it seems that religion (like science) "is a way of stretching out and making sense of the universe" (Warren, 2003, p. 394).

There are not many studies concerning the religious domain and PCP. This could be explained in light of two main reasons: on the one hand, the temptation of dilating the field and the difficulty in tightening it up and, on the other, the opportunity to touch on core and dependency constructs while investigating religion that may then be linked to significant meanings and values (and often identity) for people who hold religious beliefs (Todd, 1988). If these hypotheses can be relevant to other research area choices, even more so, they are significant for religion, which being a very superordinate construction includes several elements and risks leading to loose constructions and in a not very defined direction.

Starting from these points of view, understanding what religion means to people and exploring and understanding religious people's perspectives, as well as the perspective of those who do not have any particular credo, seems to be important and useful. On the one hand, because religion appears to be a significant construct for some people and, on the other, because such an exploration, if carried out in a clinical context, could help to deepen the knowledge of the client's personal construct system, enabling the therapist to better play sociality with him/her.

Since religion is a human phenomenon, we can anticipate that it satisfies some human needs, i.e. the need to make sense of life, to find answers to difficult questions, to feel part of something. Religion, can be considered somehow re-

lated to the construct of "confide in", something external that can provide answers. With regard to this, Kelly (1969b) formulates dependency constructs, in terms of a "universal problem". In PCP, dependency does not hold a positive or negative connotation but is rather considered a construct that develops connecting one's personal needs to another person or thing that satisfies those needs (Chiari et al, 1994, Kelly, 1969b; Walker, 1997). According to Kelly, human beings are all dependent, and individual difference lies in how such a dependency is distributed for people. In other words, the difference is due to different allocations of resources (people) for different needs. For this reason, Kelly talks about dispersed and undispersed dependency (Walker, 2003). Therefore, the PCP perspective allows this core dimension to be considered as a personal construction (Kelly, 1955, 1969b), focusing on the person's choice to engage with different resources in different situations (Kelly, 1969; Cipolletta S., Shams, M., Tonello, F., & Pruneddu, A., 2013).

In the following, we will present a pilot study, set up in the PCP theoretical framework, that aims at exploring religious and non-religious people's constructions in order to understand how they conceive spirituality (exploring the possible connection between religion and spirituality), and how they distribute their dependency. To do this, a quantitative and qualitative approach was used: on the one hand, a quantitative evaluation of the dispersion of dependency index within groups and between groups and, on the other, a qualitative analysis of the constructs that emerged from the questionnaire.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The present study does not aim at giving final answers or making inferences. It rather aims at exploring the construct of religion and, in particular, the Christian-Catholic religion; their different constructions and their implications for the distribution of dependency.

The research objectives are:

1. To observe the Dispersion of Dependency Index (DDI) and describe on whom participants in different groups mainly depend.
2. To explore some of the possible constructions of religion and spirituality.

Participants were divided into two groups: a) Christian-Catholic believers; b) Non-believers (who do not feel represented by any particular credo)

The researcher's anticipations or hypotheses were:

1. That differences would emerge in terms of the dispersion of dependency index measured through grids (Kelly, 1955, 1969b, Walker, 1997, Walker, 2003) in relation to the different resources involved.
2. That in the Christian-Catholic group there would be an orientation towards a religious figure (e.g. a priest) and to God, rather than towards "professional resources" (such as a psychologist, psychotherapist or doctor) and the self.
3. That in the group of non-believers, there would be a greater dependency on the self and on other "professional" figures and the non-consideration of "religious resources" (e.g. a priest / God).

Regarding the possible *constructions of religion and spirituality*, the researcher's anticipations were that believers could describe this construct through their personal experience, linking it to the construct of spirituality (which, for this group, could be highly linked to the religious dimension). For the group of non-believers, the researcher's expectation was that religion could be described in terms of an institution (Church), whereas spirituality was seen as a construct not necessarily linked to the religious dimension, but as a significant part of life in general. It was considered important to observe the construing of agency in believers and non-believers, anticipating an agency shared with God for Christian-Catholic subjects, but an agency closely connected to the self without attribution to others for non-believers.

One last point is related to the *mutual construction of the roles* between believers and non-believers. We anticipate finding the use of pre-emptive or constellatory constructs (Kelly, 1955) associated with stereotypical thinking, as opposed to an understanding of others' choice and reasons for believing or not believing in God. The aim was to try and explore the various ways of construing in the two different groups to see if we could find a common thread in the description of the different participants.

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

The total sample of the present study (Fig. 1) involved 18 Italian participants aged between 20 and 35 years: 10 Christian-Catholics (7 Females, 3 Males; M Age = 29.2; DS = 4.16) and 8 non-believers (1 Female, 7 Males; M Age = 31.25; DS = 5.6)<sup>1</sup>.

The inclusion criteria were:

- Age between 20 and 35 years.
- Understanding the Italian language.
- Subscription of informed consent.

The data production procedures lasted 2 months (from May to June 2018). Most research participants were recruited via email, some in person. In both cases, an initial phase involved explaining the research project and its objectives. Subsequently, informed consent was submitted, explaining the instructions for the dependency grid and the questionnaire. Each participant had the contact details of the researcher, who was available for any eventuality.

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<sup>1</sup> Originally the study involved 28 Italian participants: 10 Christian-Catholics, 8 Non-believers, 2 non-practicing believers, 6 agnostics, and 2 belonging at "other" category. For the time being, this pilot study focused only on 2 categories (Believers and Non-believers), but it is the researcher's intention continue the exploration, involving all groups.



Figure 1: *Composition of sample*

## Measures

1. *Dependency grids* were employed to explore how participants used their resources to satisfy their needs. This tool contained a standard list of 23 problem situations, to which 2 additional items exploring non-problematic events were added (item 24: the time when he/she reached an important goal; item 25: the time when he/she felt happy). To administer the grid, 16 roles were provided anticipated as significant in the person's everyday life, including God, the psychologist or psychotherapist and the self, in addition to: mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, sister, brother, daughter, son, partner, friend of the same sex, friend of the opposite sex, priest, doctor.
2. An *ad-hoc questionnaire* collected some personal data (age, gender, level of education) and consisted of 9 questions:
  - 4 open-ended questions to explore the constructions of religion and spirituality and the mutual construction of the roles of the believers and non-believers;
  - 1 Fill-in question, to explore the contrast pole of religion;
  - 2 multiple choice questions to explore, from a religious point of view, how participants define themselves (for example, if they are a believer or non-believer) and explore the sense of agency in relation to participants' life choices.

- Finally, 2 questions based on a Likert scale response, from 1 (not significant) to 7 (very significant), to explore the importance of constructions of religion and spirituality for participants.

## ANALYSIS

Each *dependency grid* was analysed using the IDIOGRID statistical package (upgrade of Gridstat, Bell 2002) elaborated by J.W Grice (2002) and using GRIDSTAT (Bell, 2002). Based on the existing literature (Beail, N., & Beail., S. 1985; Walker, 1997; Bell, 2001), the calculated result indicators were:

- The number of resources chosen among the 16 already included in the grid;
- The total dependency index (= total number of crosses inserted in the grid);
- The Dispersion of Dependency Index (DDI) (sample size = 10; Walker, 1997; Bell, 2001), calculated in the different situations and among the different resources.

The results obtained from this first analysis, were subdivided into believers / non-believers. Subsequently, the means and standard deviations (DS) were calculated for the above-mentioned indices (number of chosen resources; total dependency; DDI), as well as for the different resources included in the grid, with particular attention to: the Priest, God, Psychologist/Psychotherapist, Doctor and Self. A com-

parison between means (through the t-student test, for unpaired data, Keppel, 2001) was carried out with the aim of exploring the presence of any significant differences between the two groups of participants. Later, the "FOCUS" technique described by Beail & Beail (1985) was applied to order the previously obtained data, according to the frequency of the choice of the available resources, in different situations (eliminating the resources rarely taken into consideration, e.g. grandparents, children, brothers). From this analysis, a "classification" was obtained of the dispersion of dependency, from the most involved resources to those less mentioned.

The analysis of the *questionnaire* was carried out in accordance with the Indications for Phenomenological Interpretation Analysis (IPA: Denicolo, Trevor and Bradley-Cole, 2016) and Thematical Analysis (TA: Braun and Clarke (2006), with the purpose of understanding the point of view of each single participant, trying to obtain any perceptions or meanings shared in the two different groups. This analysis allowed the collection, identification and clustering of the different themes and constructs that emerged from the questionnaire, in the light of a clear theoretical framework, such as PCP. The qualitative data collected were considered in regard to 7 different dimensions: description of religion, contrast pole of religion, description of spirituality, description of the Non-Believer (NB), description of the Believer (B), relevance of religion and spirituality in everyday life and sense of agency.

## RESULTS

### Dependency Grid:

#### **Believers (B):**

Within the sample considered (Table 1), the number of resources chosen was between a minimum of 4 and a maximum of 10, out of a total of 16 included elements, with a total mean of 7.9 (DS = 1.97, 48% of the resources present). Regarding the *total dependencies*, the observed range was between 33 and 143, with a possibility of combinations equal to 400, and a group mean

of 74.2 (DS = 35.82). With regard to the *statistical index* (DDI), both the data by situation (rows) and by resource (column) were considered. Therefore, the Dispersion of Dependency Index (DDI) had a row range of between 8.13 and 9.25, group mean 8.55 (DS = 0.35). The column range was between 3.63 and 6.72, group mean 5.30 (DS = 0.99).

Subsequently, indices that emerged in relation to *specific resources*, such as God, Priest, Psychologist/Psychotherapist, Doctor and Self were considered. Among the selected elements the participants mainly referred to two roles: the figure of God (min. value: 0; max. value: 18), chosen on average in 9.90 situations (out of 25) (DS = 5.34) and the Self (min. value: 1; max. value: 20), always selected on average in 9.90 situations (DS = 4.77). The roles related to the Priest, the Psychologist/Psychotherapist and the Doctor, instead, were chosen in a lower number of circumstances, on the average respectively: 1.90 (DS = 4.01); 1.40 (SD = 3.50) and 0.80 (DS = 1.23).

From the *FOCUS analysis* a sort of classification of resources was obtained based on average values, from the most considered resource to the least selected one. Among the elements inserted in the grid, the figure of the partner stood out (M = 13.1), followed by the friend of the same sex (M = 12.7); in third position the mother (M = 10), then the Self (M = 9.90), God (M = 9.90), and the father (M = 5.1). In the last 4 positions: the friend of the opposite sex (M = 4.9), the priest (M = 1.9), the psychologist/psychotherapist (M = 1.4) and the Doctor (M = 0.8).

#### **Non-Believers (NB):**

Within the sample considered (Table 2), the number of resources chosen was between a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 9, out of 16 included elements, with a total mean of 7.38 (DS = 1.06, 46% of the resources present). Regarding the total dependencies, the observed range was between 41 and 150, with a possibility of combinations equal to 400, and a group mean of 84.88 (DS = 35.18).

Table 1: *Dependency Grid – Believers*

B	RESOURCES		TOTAL DEPENDENCIES		DDI (Dispersion Dependency Index)		GOD	PRIEST	PSY	DOC	SELF
	N° (OUT OF 16)	%	N° (OUT OF 400)	%	SIT	RES					
1	9	56%	65	16%	8.13	6.02	9	0	0	1	10
2	9	56%	56	14%	8.16	6.09	9	2	0	0	6
3	9	56%	110	28%	8.47	5.92	9	13	0	1	11
4	5	16%	35	9%	8.98	4.21	4	0	0	0	10
5	10	63%	143	36%	8.33	6.72	10	2	11	4	12
6	7	44%	107	27%	8.51	5.22	18	0	0	0	20
7	9	56%	76	19%	8.4	5.51	12	0	0	1	9
8	4	25%	33	8%	9.25	3.63	0	0	0	0	9
9	9	56%	46	12%	8.74	5.51	11	2	3	1	11
10	8	50%	71	18%	8.55	4.18	17	0	0	0	1
MEAN	7.9	48%	74.2	19%	8.55	5.30	9.90	1.90	1.40	0.80	9.90
DS	1.97	0.15	35.82	0.09	0.35	0.99	5.34	4.01	3.50	1.23	4.77

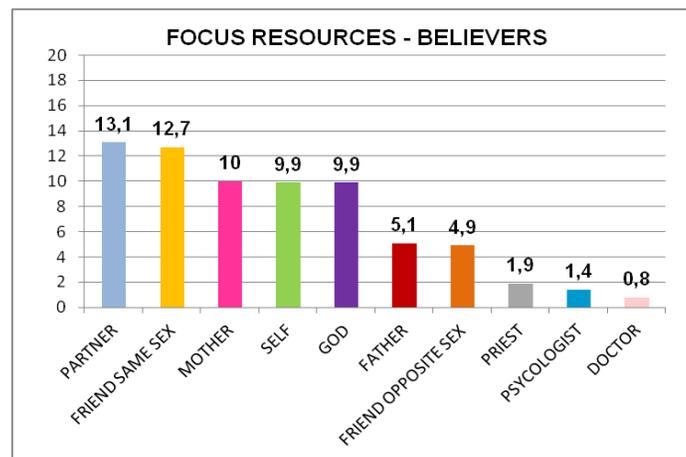


Figure 2: *Focus analysis of resources (Believers)*

Table 2: Dependency Grid - Non Believers

NB	RESOURCES		TOTAL DEPENDENCIES		DDI						
	N° (OUT OF 16)	%	N° (OUT OF 400)	%	SIT	RES	GOD	PRIEST	PSY	DOC	SELF
1	6	38%	41	10%	8.91	4.21	0	0	0	0	13
2	7	44%	78	20%	8.32	5.08	0	0	0	0	20
3	9	56%	62	16%	8.33	5.79	0	0	0	1	16
4	7	44%	60	15%	8.73	4.67	0	0	1	1	9
5	9	56%	114	29%	8.34	5.67	0	0	0	0	25
6	7	44%	72	18%	8.6	4.73	0	0	0	1	16
7	7	44%	102	26%	8.58	5.27	0	0	10	0	25
8	7	44%	150	38%	8.54	5.53	0	0	0	0	24
<b>MEAN</b>	<b>7.38</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>84.88</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>8.54</b>	<b>5.12</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>1.38</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>18.50</b>
DS	1.06	0.06	35.18	0.09	0.21	0.55	0.00	0.00	3.50	0.52	5.98

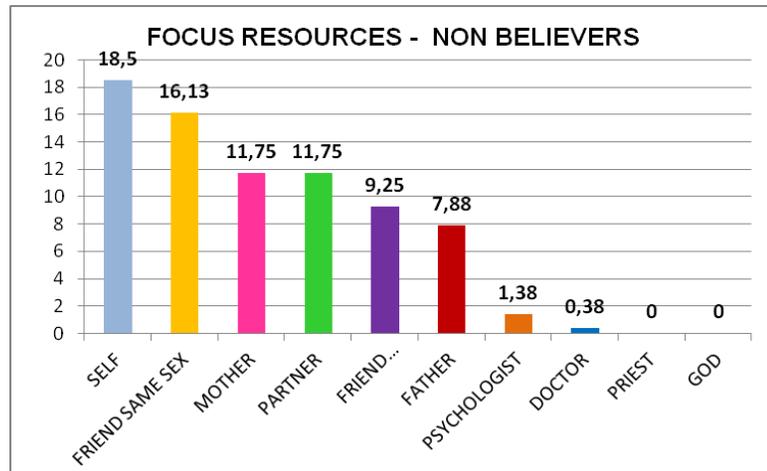


Figure 3: Focus analysis of resources (Non-believers)

With regard to the *statistical index* (DDI), both data by situation (rows) and by resource (column) were considered. The Dispersion of Dependency Index (DDI) therefore has a row range between 8.32 and 8.91, group mean 8.54 (DS = 0.21). The column range was between 4.21 (CP1) and 5.79 (CP3), group mean 5.12 (DS = 0.55). Subsequently, indices that emerged in re-

lation to *specific resources*, such as God, Priest, Psychologist/Psychotherapist, Doctor and Self were considered.

Among the selected elements (Fig. 3), the participants mainly referred to one role: the Self (min. value: 9; max. value: 25), selected on average in 18.50 situations (DS = 5.98). The ranking continues with the friend of the same sex (M = 16.13), the mother (M = 11.75), the partner (M = 11.75), the

friend of the opposite sex (M = 9.25), the father (M = 7.88). The roles related to the psychologist/ psychotherapist and the doctor, were chosen in a lower number of circumstances, on average respectively: 1.38 (DS = 3.50) and 0.38 (DS = 0.52). The figure of God and the priest, on the other hand, were not chosen in any situation.

**Between groups:**

In addition to the within-subject analysis, a comparison was made between the two different samples involved, using the data collected through the dependency grids. Table 3 shows all the mean indices and the results of the comparison between means. The analysis does not show a significant difference between the two groups regarding the chosen resources, the total dependencies and the comparison of the DDI. On the other hand, significant differences were observed with regard to a specific analysis of selected resources (targets of the present study). The figure of God was chosen on average in 9.90 situations by Believers but in no situations by Non-Believers (t = 0.68), whereas the Self was chosen on average in 9.90 situations by believers and in 18.50 situations by Non-Believers with a t = 3.40 (p = 0.00037).

**Questionnaire:**

**Description of religion:**

Many in the group of *Believers* described religion in terms of: trust, faith, protection, support and guide. Some described it in term of: values, introspection, listening, life choice, coherence, community, prayer, holy ritual, interpretation of reality, openness and stated that this dimension is important in their life: using a Likert scale from 1 (not significant) to 7 (significant), the group of believers expressed on average an importance of 5.3 (DS: 0.67 – answers range from 5 to 7).

In the group of *Non-Believers*, some described religion with different words such as: culture, tradition, lie, limit, sacrifice, static, fanaticism, paradigm, whereas others described religion as faith, protection, guide, hope and comfort. For this group religion is less important in their life than for the Christian-Catholic group - using a Likert scale from 1 (not significant) to 7 (significant) the group of Non-Believers expressed, on average, an importance of 2 (DS: 0.93 – answers range from 1 to 4).

Table 3: Comparison between groups

		RESOURCES		TOTAL DEPENDENCIES		DDI						
		N° (Out of 16)	%	N° (Out of 400)	%	SIT	RES	GOD	PRIEST	PSY	DOC	SELF
<b>B</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>7.9</b>	<b>48%</b>	<b>74.2</b>	<b>19%</b>	<b>8.55</b>	<b>5.30</b>	<b>9.90</b>	<b>1.90</b>	<b>1.40</b>	<b>0.80</b>	<b>9.90</b>
	<b>DS</b>	1.97	0.15	35.82	0.09	0.35	0.99	5.34	4.01	3.50	1.23	4.77
<b>NB</b>	<b>M</b>	<b>7.38</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>84.88</b>	<b>22%</b>	<b>8.54</b>	<b>5.12</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>0.00</b>	<b>1.38</b>	<b>0.38</b>	<b>18.50</b>
	<b>DS</b>	1.06	0.06	35.18	0.09	0.21	0.55	0.00	0.00	3.50	0.52	5.98
	<b>t</b>	0.68		0.64		0.06	0.46	5.21	1.33	0.02	0.91	3.40
	<b>p</b>	0.51		0.53		0.95	0.65	0.0001	0.20	0.99	0.38	0.00037
	<b>sig</b>	NO		NO		NO	NO	YES	NO	NO	NO	YES

***Contrast pole of religion:***

The contrast pole for *Believers* seemed to have negative implications such as: violence, hate, refusal, closure, ignorance, lack of rules and prejudice, whereas for *Non-Believers* the contrast pole of religion was more shared within the group and they talked about science, freedom, dynamism and egocentricity (2 people described the contrast poles of fundamentalism and war).

***Description of spirituality:***

With regard to spirituality, *Believers* mentioned “being on a path” in search of meaning, introspection or faith. They used words like introspection, awareness, intimacy, freedom, calm, something that involves trust and devotion, a sensation that drives one along the path of life and that completes the human being and the perception that in each of us there is more than what appears. The majority of participants appeared not to link this construct to religious experience, even if the importance of this construct in life is the same as religion: using a Likert scale from 1 (not significant) to 7 (significant), the group of believers expressed, on average, an importance of 5.5 (DS: 0.85 – answers range from 4 to 7).

The group of *Non-Believers* described spirituality in terms of connection with something that goes beyond the material context, and aspects of research, reflection and balance. They used words like: introversion, expansion, connection, person, precepts, self-improvement and “the possibility that everything makes sense”. Only one person defined spirituality in terms of faith, taboo and superstition. Spirituality seemed to be more important in their life than religion: using a Likert scale from 1 (not significant) to 7 (significant), the group of Non-Believers expressed, on average, an importance of 4.5 (DS: 2.14 – answers range from 1 to 7).

***Description of believers***

The majority of *Christian-Catholics* described *their category* by mentioning their qualities such as: moral, ethical, smart, trustful, serene, strong, confident, optimistic, hopeful, sensitive, loved,

spiritual and convinced, a person who is more likely to live in a community, who knows what he/she wants, who lays trust in God, and who has that extra oomph. One participant described the believer, on the one hand, as a weak person, since he/she needs someone to lean on but, on the other hand, the believer is described as a strong person because he/she has faith and can face everything.

The *Christian-Catholic* group used 2 different descriptions for *Non-Believers*: on the one hand, they mentioned being free, realistic, pragmatic, self-confident, interesting, different and like a person who is looking for something or who believes in something else but on the other hand, the terms they used were: indifferent, vagabond, unsatisfied, negative, an empty person, arrogant, solitary, self-referential, emotionless, sceptical, atheist, incomplete, not very hopeful, a person who is not loved and lacks support.

The *Non-Believer* group described its own *category* as independent, free, curious, rational, brave, educated, pragmatist, open-minded, determined, self-sufficient people; for one participant the non-believer is severe and for another, sceptical. The *Believer* is described by the *Non-Believer*, on the one hand, as being confident in others, in need of comfort, spiritual, traditional, helpful and kind, but on the other hand, the Believer is mainly described as closed, blind, potentially malleable, ignorant, sanctimonious, fixed, methodical, subdued, threatened, fearful, hopeless, a person who does not ask questions about him/herself.

***Sense of agency***

Finally, regarding agency, *Believers* feel that their path of life is in their hands and in those of God (9 people) and one person only in the hands of God alone, whereas *Non-Believers* feel responsible themselves for their decisions and their life (in my hands: 7 people; in other hands: 1 person).

**DISCUSSION**

The following observations are not final inferences, but only food for thought and hypotheses

to be explored in the future. The author has chosen to focus mainly on 3 aspects of the research:

- The resources chosen by participants.
- The different constructions presented in the two groups with a special focus on mutual description.
- The dimension of spirituality

Regarding the differences observed among resources in the 2 groups, it was noticed that God, even when not considered the first resource for the believer, has an important role especially in those situations that involve emotional support, closeness and presence. We imagined, however, there would have been a greater dependency on the role of the priest, which we did not find. We thought that the greatest distribution was on God because it may be a more personal and intimate relationship and implies a deeper contact. In some way, it could also be less threatening than an external and tangible figure, such as a minister of faith. This hypothesis could partially explain the absence, for believers, of the resource of the psychologist/psychotherapist, chosen only by two people (both psychosocial specialists) and also of the doctor (referred to only in the specific situation linked to the possibility of a disease). The same aspect, however, is also found in the group of Non-Believers who, as we have seen, mainly concentrates the dependencies on the self.

This result could be explained, for the Christian-Catholics, in light of the importance of trust and security in relationships that religion and the figure of God address, responding well to the clear needs of comfort, listening and help. From this perspective, it could be that the figure of the psychologist/psychotherapist is deemed unnecessary or it may be due to the difficult relations between religion and science, in this case psychology. Another possibility is that professionals are considered to be analytical, less welcoming and more inclined to judge and evaluate than other figures on which the group of believers chose to disperse their dependency (partner, friend of the same sex, mother, etc.).

The group of Non-Believers also produced a similar result, (a non-consideration of the psychologist/psychotherapist and the doctor). We could therefore hypothesize a connection with

the aspects related to independence, rationality and freedom, dimensions that emerged several times among the people belonging to this group. We might explain it as a cultural preference "to count on myself" rather than "confide in others and involve them". In this regard, a good question would be how the figure of the psychologist / psychotherapist is construed for the people involved in the present study. In the total sample of 18 people, 4 subjects chose this resource in the grid and all of them (both Believers and Non-Believers) construe the profession for different reasons. We could read what has been collected in this study through the Experience Corollary<sup>2</sup> and discover that the aspect of "confiding in who is most familiar" may be an important element in the dispersion of dependency; therefore, also the cultural context in which the person has experience could play an important role in the dispersion of dependency.

Regarding the mutual description between the two groups, a common thread was observed of using more positive words within the groups considered, as well as a tendency to use prejudice and constellatory constructs when people have to describe those who are not a member of their own category.

The participants, although coming from a Western cultural background, have also had different experiences of religious phenomena. While being within the same group, they share similar religious and non-religious experiences but meanings and behaviours may be different. This perspective can constitute an invitation to avoid the temptation to structure and achieve a broader understanding of the person in front of us. The Sociality Corollary (To the extent that one person construes the construction processes of another, he may play a role in a social process involving the other person, Kelly, 1955, Vol.1, p. 95) means that to relate to each other, it is essential to put oneself in someone else's shoes. The question (or more often the judgment) can then shift from "How can you be a non-believer? Or how can you be a believer?" to "What does this choice, to believe in God or not, represent for people?"

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<sup>2</sup> A person's construction system varies as he successively construes the replication of events.

The last issue has to do with spirituality. Observing the data collected, it appears that this construct could be fertile ground for the birth of meanings that could be shared by both Non-Believers and Believers. This initial evaluation allows us to find a sort of commonality between the constructions revealed by the two groups. Spirituality seems to be a dimension linked to a journey, to a path of introspection and to the awareness of a deep contact between the self and the rest of the world. For this reason, spirituality could constitute a superordinate construct of the possible narrations available to people not necessarily associated with religious aspects: a meeting point between two realities that seem to differ significantly in the process of attribution of meanings and giving sense to the world.

## LIMITATIONS

At this stage, this study presents several limitations: First of all, the process of data collection, using a questionnaire via email reduced the opportunity to further elicit meanings through the two tools.

Secondly, the limited size of the sample has an impact on the statistical data analysis. Thirdly, the sample was constituted by people coming from different geographical backgrounds and this may have had an impact on their experiences. Finally, the elements provided in the grids inevitably influenced the results and a question arises about whether the figure of God would have been chosen in the same way if the purpose of the research had not been shared in advance.

## AUTHOR'S CONSIDERATIONS

For me, this research is a small window of understanding that could encourage the future exploration of this issue. In his works, Kelly seems to attribute a directional power of individuals' choices to religion. I imagine, however, that this may be one of the possible narrations related to the experience of being a believer and belonging to a specific credo. Perhaps then, we should move away from the dimension of "Who is right? Where is the truth?" and consider the experience of the believer and the non-believer as

possible personal narrations. For this reason, I believe PCP can be a useful "lens" for exploring this issue, helping to subsume the processes behind religion. I also believe that it may be useful, using the tools offered by the theory of personal constructs, to include the figure of God among the elements of the Rep Grid and Dependency Grid, as it could play an important role in people's lives.

This reflection does not constitute an answer but rather a source of questions and new aspects to explore! Such explorations of religion and spirituality among different credos and their implications in everyday life make the position of the non-believer questionable. In the meantime, perhaps we should leave aside "lenses" that aspire to truth and use those that lead to possibilities; following the path of propositionality and trying to put ourselves in someone else's shoes to understand (understand = 'standing under', Mair, 2011) their processes and narration of the world.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Valentina Sosero is a psychologist attending the 4<sup>th</sup> year of a psychotherapy diploma at the Institute of Constructivist Psychology in Padua. She deals with activities in schools to support and integrate teaching with specific projects on classroom wellbeing and school orientation. One of her interests is exploring the dimension of parenthood and working with children and adolescents through the PCP perspective.

Contact: [valentina.sosero@libero.it](mailto:valentina.sosero@libero.it)

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