"Babeş-Bolyai" University
Faculty of Psychology and Education Sciences
Department of Psychology
Ph. D. School for Applied Cognitive Psychology

Ph.D. THESIS

PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC ASPECTS IN FUNERAL RITUALS

Ph. D. student: Bianca Macavei
Scientific coordinator: Prof. Mircea MICLEA, Ph.D.

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INTRODUCTORY ASPECTS
Science and religion. Defining the concepts

The religion and spirituality have dominated the life, behaviors, decisions and emotions of mankind from its origins and up to present. As an explanation of altruistic and generous behaviors beyond human understanding, but also as a justification of acts of breathtaking cruelty, the religion astonishes and fascinates precisely because of its contrasts.

The relation between science and religion / spirituality has experienced many changes and contortions along the time. The "scientific revolution" of the 16th century made visible the need to conciliate the hunger for knowledge of mankind with its imperious need for sense and significance.

Science studies the nature and its phenomena. Can religion be considered a natural phenomenon? In its large diversity, religion enters many areas of the human activity. Daniel Dennett (2006) highlights the way in which the religious phenomenon can be easily approached as a natural phenomenon, studied by scientific means. Just like a neurologist and a psychologist can approach the same cognitive process (for instance the inattention) at different levels of analysis, the priest and the man of science can try, in the same way, to understand the religious behavior with the help of their fields of investigations (Dennett, 2006). Thus, more possibilities occur:

(1)   the religious phenomenon is like any other natural phenomenon and can be investigated by science as such;
(2)   the religion and the science should have different fields of investigation;
(3)   there are phenomena that can be investigated by religious means and with the help of science, as well, and others that belong exclusively to one or the other of the two fields (Dennett, 2006).

An alternative approach could be clearly defining the phenomenon as such, beyond defining the field of investigation. The same phenomenon, defined differently in different approaches, could be investigated with means specific to the two fields, without the need to determine one's supremacy.

Traditionally, the concepts of *religiousness* and *spirituality* were used interchangeably; the psychologists agreed upon that, regardless of the definition, we are facing multidimensional constructs (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005).

Recently, there existed controversies about the extension of the two concepts. In a first understanding, the spirituality was a broader construct than religiosity and it is defined as "a personal or group search of the sacred", while the religiousness would be "the personal or group search of the sacred that is manifested in a sacred traditional frame" (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, pp. 35). The difference between the two constructs is given by the context of search, as it can be sacred or laic.

In an alternative variant, the spirituality is "the search for the sacred", while the religiousness if defined as a broader construct, representing "The search of the significance in a manner related to the sacred" (Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005, pp. 36). In this perspective, the separation criterion between the two constructs is double and it refers to the place of the sacred in the means and finality of the search process. Therefore, the spirituality would be searching for the sacred by sacred and mundane means, while the religiousness requires looking for a sacred and mundane finality by sacred means.

One should notice that, despite the differences, the central element that occurs in all definitions aims at the relation with the sacred or divine, represented in the largest part of the cultures on Earth, by means of the supernatural agents.

CHAPTER 1
THEORETICAL BASES
1.1. Rituals and funeral rituals
1.1.1. The ritual and its specific features

In all societies, the ritual is understood as a structure of components and actions with a symbolic function, that involve compulsorily emotions, values and beliefs that transcend the purely material, practical considerations (Lessa, 1971). It represents, mainly, a stereotypic form of communication, meant (1) to reduce the negative emotions, (2) to prepare the organism for action and (3) to coordinate the actions of more persons (Wallace, 1966).

The rites of passage are those answers structured, elaborated and offered by the society as a form of support in passing through the essential moments in one human's existence. They accompany moments of big crises in an individual's life, periods finalized with passing into another stage of personal evolution and changing the social identity (Van Gennep, 1966). In all human societies, the important passage moments are considered the birth, pregnancy, social puberty, marriage and death (Van Gennep, 1966). Going through these fundamental stages of life involves a structure in three steps (1) the separation, (2) the transition and (3) the incorporation (Van Gennep, 1966).

1.1.2. Funeral rituals and their structure

The funeral rituals are those ceremonies accompanying the passing away of a member of the group, and they have been present in the repertoires of mankind since Homo Neanderthalensis (Cohen, 2002).

Within the funeral rituals, elements specific to the three stages concur to creating a prescriptive structure that may last more months or years. One should notice that these ceremonies are created in the benefit of the deceased, but especially for the sake of the survivors.

Thus, the *separation* of the deceased begins with determining its death and is marked, in all cultures, by separating the body of the deceased from the rest of the community and preparing an assembly of items (material and not only), that will accompany its passage.

There follows the *transition* period, when the ones affected by the loss (i.e. family, friends) enter the mourning or wail period. This has a well-determined duration in time, its beginning and end, as well as the manifestations and compulsory and allowed activities being strictly specified for all those involved. Specific to this stage is the physical and social separation of the persons in mourning from the rest of the community, as well as reducing or ceasing current activities (Cohen, 2002).

The incorporation always begins after a ritualized moment of purifying the one in transition, that often takes the form of washing with clean water and regaining the normal physical aspect before the mourning (Cohen, 2002; O'Gorman, 1998).

"For groups, as well as for individuals, life itself means separation and reunion, change from one condition to another, life and rebirth. It is in itself the idea to act and to stop, to wait

and to rest, and then to begin acting again, in a different way ..." (Van Gennep, 1966, pp. 189-190).

In conclusion, in all known human societies, the three stages of funeral rituals – the separation, the transition and the incorporation – are saturated with well-determined activities, abounding in prescribed behaviors, meant to insure the wellbeing of the deceased and of the survivors.

1.1.3. The functions of the funeral rituals

Seen from an ethnographic-anthropologic perspective, the cult of the dead fulfills a few important functions, contouring a social-cultural dimension:

(1) the physical separation between the deceased and survivors, by removing its earthly remains from the area of the community's current activities;
(2) psychological separation of the deceased from the community, by redistributing its social roles;
(3) the community providing the guidance and social support necessary for emotionally rebalancing the persons close to the deceased;
(4) organizing a way for expressing the individual and collective feelings associated to the situation of loss, underlining the cultural identity of the group and its survival;
(5) regulating the relations between the alive and deceased, conceptualized as group norm;
(6) marking the moment of life ending and integrating it into the natural course of things, thus granting the event sense and significance;
(7) regulating the ethic norms of the alive persons (Gazda, 2006; Cohen, 2002).

One can, therefore, assume (1) a psychological dimension of the ritualized behaviors, aiming at the direct effects of the loss suffered by the persons close to the deceased and (2) a social dimension of the rituals, referring to their impact on the social structure and relations substantiating the good development of the life within a community (Cohen, 2002; Gazda, 2006).

The disappearance of a person raises a few big issues of adaptation for the family and close friends: (1) restructuring the routines in which the deceased played an important role, (2) destabilizing the self-identity, following the need to change the social roles, together with their behavior repertoire (for example passing from the status of married person to the one of widower/widow), (3) questioning the purposes, life principles, its sense and significance. All these difficulties are expressed in negative emotions, intensely felt.

For the group the deceased was part of, the fundamental issue concern: (1) reforming the social structure by redistributing the roles of the lost person and restructuring the roles of the survivors, (2) helping the survivors surpass the difficult moments by social support, for controlling the negative emotions and rebuilding the routines, (3) reaffirming and maintaining the group identity and its values (Cohen, 2002; Gazda, 2006).

As an expression of the way in which the community offers solutions to the problems mentioned before, three particular elements can be distinguished within the funeral rituals: *(a) the public mourning or funeral dirge* present in the separation period, *(b) the behavior prescriptions* and *(c) the prayer* that dominates the transition and incorporation stages.

As a conclusion, the funeral rituals are formed as complex manifestation, meant to ease the acceptance and passing through a major existential moment for the individual and community. They have the role to insure (1) maintaining the emotional and behavioral

functionality of the survivors, (2) maintaining the integrity of the self as compulsory condition for the success in adapting to a highly traumatizing moment, as well as (3) maintaining the group identity, as an expression of the victory of life over death. The structure of the ritual is built in such a way as to generate emotions and behaviors that facilitate the change, restructuring the roles and social identity, changing the perspective over the self and the self in relation with people and the Divinity. The permanent contact and communication with human and supernatural agents becomes a sine qua non condition for success, because the humans gain their human character "only in relation to their fellow creatures and God" (Stăniloae, 1993, pp. 11).

1.2. The theories of emotions and the situations of loss

1.2.1. What are emotions?
The emotional experiences define, largely, our human nature. In everything that we do, we are obstinately looking for "the feeling", the affective engagement that gratifies sufficiently our effort of cognitive involvement and investment. When we speak of emotions, two distinct elements draw our attention: (1) the emotions are the product of the personal significance allotted to life events and (2) every emotion is grounded on a "dramatic scenario, easily to be recognized" (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994, pp. 5).

The emotions of our daily life – fear, anger, sadness, depression, guilt or shame – are direct consequences of the "easily recognizable dramatic scenarios" (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994, pp. 5). Each "scenario" contains (1) our interpretations of the life situations in which we find ourselves and (2) their significance for the feeling of personal wellbeing (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994, pp. 5). The recurring "themes" behind the emotions support the organization of affective structures, that define the human being and that allow us to categorize the persons depending on dominant affective disposition. Our affective patterns are veritable "emotional patterns" that identify us with the precision of the physical ones, betraying our purposes and beliefs.

In conclusion, the emotion can be defined as a direct effect of activating a "personalized life scenario, concerning the fate of the individual's purposes in a certain situation and the beliefs it has about itself and the world it lives in ... scenario resulting from evaluating the personal significance attached to that situation" (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994, pp. 151).

1.2.2. Specific features of the emotions
(a)   Valence of emotions – positive emotions and negative emotions;
(b)   Intensity of emotions;
(c)   Utility of emotions – adaptive and maladaptive emotions;

1.2.3. The functions of emotions

(a)   **Emotions in service of adaptation – evolutionist behavior**
According to the evolutionist approach, the emotions developed to solve adaptation problems, as they are among the most relevant psychological structures from the perspective of survival and reproduction of the species. Each type of emotion responds to a certain need; the typical situations, repeated a billion times in the history of mankind and that engage, as main themes, specialized cognitive programs are as actual today as in the dawn of mankind (Tooby, & Cosmides, 2008). For example, the depression occurring after the loss of a dear person activates specialized processing systems, with the purpose of reconstructing the personal models of the

world; the ratio investment-benefit obtained is reevaluated, with implications on the attitudes and general perspective on certain aspects of life (Tooby, & Cosmides, 2008). Flagrantly reducing the cognitive processing of the situation of loss seams, in the short run and in this context, the optimal solutions of an intelligent mind to an existential, temporary debilitating dilemma (Tooby, & Cosmides, 2008). Its role is double, on one hand, it reduces the time and effort investment, and, on the other hand, it prevents the premature engagement in following new purposes, in the time immediately following an important loss (Nesse, 2000).

(b)   **Social affiliation and distancing – social perspective**
As higher programs for managing complex situations, the emotions occurred and developed in the social context (Fischer, & Manstead, 2008). In problematic issues (for example losses, traumas), recognized as such by the group, the emotions convergence, expressed by *mimetism* (i.e. automatic processing of the emotional expression and reproducing it) and *affective contagion* (i.e. influencing one's own affective experience by the experiences of others) has the role to generate the social support, by facilitating the involvement, empathy and closeness to the others (Fischer, & Manstead, 2008). The shared emotions contribute to forming and maintaining the social identity by generating the feeling of belonging grounded on positive expectations concerning the support and safety offered by the group. The emotions of other members of the group contain relevant information concerning the lonely or threatening situations (Fischer, & Manstead, 2008).

(c)   **The emotions as superior forms of inter-human communication – cultural perspective**
The emotions are so relevant to humans, that its highest and most specific human activities are dedicated to the affective experiences. The artistic product may have more functions, but its fundamental role is to evoke emotions. "The novels, the theatre and the movies have the purpose of generating real emotions about imaginary events" (Johnson-Laird, & Oatley, 2008, pp. 102).
The personal manner in which the artist presents the chain of external events creates a "suggestion structure" (Oatley, 1999), a particular simulation of a reality. The art consumer enters this reality, where it is facilitated to experience certain emotions by stimulation of (1) the empathic identification with the protagonist, (2) sympathizing with the emotions granted to the protagonist, or (3) re-experiencing an autobiographical moment saved in its long-term memory (Johnson-Laird, & Oatley, 2008; Oatley, 1999). While the pattern of external events represents a simulated reality, the emotions experienced by the person inserted into this reality are real and authentic! (Oatley, 1999, pp.114).
Mainly behavioral in manifestation, the ritual comprises in its intimate structure, emotions, values, beliefs that surpass purely material aspects, making appeal to the spirit (Lessa, 1971). The complex "suggestion structure", improved by history and perfected by practice, highly ritualized and integrated into the spiritual systems, the funeral ritual facilitates successfully passing through the mourning period and the reintegration into the active life.

(d)   The affective experiences as direct effects of conscious and unconscious cognitive processing – psychological perspective
The life situations with maximum potential to precipitate emotions such as sadness, depression, guilt, hurt are organized around the idea of loss: losing the health conditions, losing

the physical integrity, losing the psychical or physical comfort (i.e. the presence of pain), losing a dear person, losing the social status or the social image. From all these, the death of a loved person (i.e. wife, husband, child) represents one of the most stressful events that a person can experience during its life (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994).

According to the cognitive-motivational-relational theory (Lazarus, 1991), every emotion has a *centrally-related fear*, that reflects the estimation of the particular relation person-environment. There are three types of such *primary evaluations (if and how the situation is relevant for the personal wellbeing):* (1) *the motivational relevance*, that refers to estimating the degree to which the situation is important for the purposes and preoccupations of the individual, (2) *the motivational congruence*, that reflects the degree to which the situation blocks or supports the accomplishment of the individual's purposes (desirability of the situation) and (3) *involving the I*, that expresses the degree to which the situations has implications for the self-esteem, personal values, etc. As follows, the emotion is grounded on a *secondary evaluation (adaptive resources of the individual)* that comprise the evaluation of the responsibility of the situation finality (who or what will be blamed or rewarded), of the coping resources and of the expectancies about the future (Lazarus, 1991; Power, & Dalgleish, 1997).

As it involves the combined activation of different factors, the emotion becomes "a scenario of personalized life, that refers to the fate of our purposes in a situation, i.e. to the convictions that we have about ourselves and about the world we live in" (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994, pp. 151).

As a conclusion, the human emotions are based on complex scenarios, that include prewired elements, as well as a range of factors developed during the personal evolution. These scenarios are capable to generate emotions if they involve evaluating the relevance of a situation for the personal wellbeing. The scheme of the self and of the self in relation to other human and supernatural agents defines what is or what is not important in a concrete life situation.

1.3. Supernatural agents, occurrence and their specific features

1.3.1. Evolution of the cognitive capacities in Homo Sapiens; mental attributes necessary for the occurrence of spirituality and religious thinking

For an intelligent, natural or artificial system to enter the environment it has to function in during its existence, it has to be "equipped" with assumptions / knowledge, as well as with specific mechanisms. These will allow the categorization and understanding of the stimuli the system will face from the beginning, but also the learning process in the following stages. The implicit universally accepted knowledge / assumptions the human processor is endowed with, concern three big areas, called by Daniel Dennett (1987) "folk knowledge": intuitive biology, intuitive physics and intuitive psychology. When a stimulus from the environment is automatically categorized in one of the three fields of intuitive knowledge, they activate naturally selected cognitive faculties (inferential processes), generating universal ontological categories (person, animal, plant, substance), in other words, there occur *intuitive concepts.* Everyday life is populated with beings whose specific features violate our expectancies about the world we live in. The cognitive psychologists call the mental representations of such phantastic beings *counterintuitive concepts.* Not any kind of counterintuitive concept will work its way in the memory and history of mankind. The key of success of such a construct lies in the relation between its properties and the common processes of human thinking (Tremlin, 2006). Inversing any expected relation will result into a *counterintuitive minimal concept* (Boyer, 2000; 2000a).

Two of the essential mental instruments for adapting to an environment saturated with agents (humans and animals), presented at birth and completely developed during the first years of life are the Agency Detection Device –ADD and the Theory of Mind Mechanism – ToMM (Tremlin, 2006).

With a mind capable (1) to separate quickly the intentional agents from the unintentional ones, (2) to create and memorize easily minimal counterintuitive constructs, (3) to grant subtle changes from the environment to international agents and (4) to associate their behaviors to their intentions, the humans already had the premises necessary for the occurrence of the concept of Deity. The justification? – The need for safety and anxiety before becoming and death.

1.3.2. Supernatural agents and their specific features

From a theological point of view, the characteristics of the Christian God derive directly from its divine, eternal and indivisible nature: absolute, indivisible, omnipresent, omnipotent, omniscient, unchanging, beyond suffering, simple, abyssal, spiritual, saint, holy, honest, wise, merciful, just, loving (Tremlin, 2006, pp. 97).

The deity is, above all, a *social agent*, in permanent interaction with the human agents, member of the social network, subject to the rules of social change. Therefore, what characteristics would a supernatural causal agent need, in order to make more for the group than any causal agent? – First of all, *unlimited access to information about all the other agents involved in the social network.* "The full-access strategic agents" (Boyer, 2000a), impersonated by Deities, have, besides the feature of omniscience, the dedication assumed for keeping the correctness of performing the social contract. The simple human being finds comfort in the fact that in the social network it belongs to, there exists a *omniscient* and *omnipotent* guarantor that is interested in the *correctness* of performing the social act, as well.

With the evolution of Homo Sapiens, the development of the cognitive capacity of mental projection into the future – necessary for calibrating the reaction to the behavior of others by predictions about their behavior – brings along, as artifacts, the contact with the idea of death and the after-world, before the occurrence of this major event. This represents the birth certificate of *the existential anxieties,* the fears for the daily dangers being completed with the more overwhelming fear of passing into an unknown and unpredictable world. By its specific features, the system of religious beliefs is capable to recruit efficiently another innate and modularized mechanism – the human attachment system (Kirkpatrick, 2006), completing the image of the justicial Deity with the features of a parental figure: warm, loving and clement. This will be capable to manage the sadness of the anticipated losses (for example dear persons, one's own life), as well as the lack of hope in the future and the confrontation with the unknown that is about to come.

With very few exceptions, the studies concerning the way in which the mental God is represented, refer to God's character / personality (i.e. the feature by which it is defined) (Gibson, 2008). The assembly of features that characterize God in the humans' minds is present in the specialty literature under various names: the "God concept", the "God image" or the "God representation" (Gibson, 2008). In general, in the literature investigating the mental representation that human beings have about God, one tries systematically to separate the purely cognitive aspects (i.e. the God concept) from the experiential ones, with a strong affective connotation (i.e. the God concept) (Gibson, 2008). Recently, it is insisted more and more on replacing those terms with the notion of *cognitive scheme*, that would cover better the mental representation of an experienced reality (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991; Gibson, 2008).

1.4. Spirituality and mental health

Numerous studies indicate the fact that the religious manifestations and beliefs have a positive impact on health, in general and on mental health, in particular, as well as on the good functioning of the organism (Levin, & Chatters, 1998). Beyond their impact on the health condition, the religious beliefs seam to influence such factors as: general content, life satisfaction, sense-making, determining the purposes in life (Chamberlain, & Zika, 1992; Ferriss, 2002). The social support and the feeling of being close to God are among the most important factors that explain the impact of religion on the wellbeing (Argyle, 1999).

Beyond the beneficial effect of the religious beliefs on the mental health, some religious beliefs and practices are capable to exacerbate the symptoms of psychic disorders, and sometimes to contribute to their etiology (Paloutzian, & Park, 2005). When God is perceived as being detached, disinterested or hostile, people prefer to try themselves to solve the problems they are facing. Therefore, not any form of spiritual or religious life has positive effects on the thoughts, emotions of wellbeing of the individual. The perceived relation with Divinity is an important protective factor, but the nature of the relation can change radically the effects of this relation.

CHAPTER 2
The framing in the study of human emotions

The notion of "framing" started to be used in the specialty literature mainly in relation with the study of the way in which people take decisions (Tverski, & Kahneman, 1981). The framing is a direct effect of: (1) formulating the problem and (2) the norms, values, thinking habits and other relevant features of the person (Tverski, & Kahneman, 1981, pp. 453). The terms in which the problem data are formulated activate different cognitive structures, that will have a different impact on the judgments issued by the decision maker (Miclea, 1999). The framings are capable to activate moral and cultural values of the individual, cultural meme and other implicit structures, thus generating complex contexts, that allow not only the representation and defining of the problem, but also determining the solution repertoire and the theoretical evaluation of their efficiency (Cappella, & Jamieson, 1997).

In the specialty literature, there exist framing categorizations, according to numerous and various criteria. The "episodic framing" offers a specific example, the case study or the description of a particular event (Gross, 2008).

Among the major objectives of the studies on the framing impact, one can count the underlining of the cognitive processing, subjacent to the observed effects (Price, Tewksbury, & Powers, 1997) and identifying the moderators that can accentuate, limit or eliminate a framing effect (Nelson, 2012). The framings that refer to the individual's values have the role to stimulate the use of those values in the process of evaluating a situation (Nelson, 2012). Therefore, the value orientation can be considered an important moderator of the framing effects (Nelson, 2012).

When the framings aim directly at the cognitive mechanisms of affects, their impact on the emotions can be easily underlined. Grounded on a whole "dramatic scenario" (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994, pp. 5), the emotions have behind them cognitive structures that allow the prediction of occurrence probability of one emotion or another (Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994; Smith, Haynes, Lazarus, & Pope, 1993). Therefore, if the episodic attempts have the force to

stimulate the occurrence of emotions in general, the type of emotion evoked depends on the framing content and the extent to which it is superposed over the cognitive scenario belonging to that emotion (Gross, 2008; Lazarus, & Lazarus, 1994).

In conclusion, when evoking an emotion in the experimental context, the most useful attempt seems to be a personalized life story, having in its center a character that the study participants can identify with, a character that acts according to the values and norms shared by subjects and that is manifested in a context showing central elements (i.e., the cognitive scenario) of the emotion to be activated.

CHAPTER 3 – ORIGINAL STUDIES

3.1. [1] 1st experimental study – The impact of activating the convictions concerning the relation human being – supernatural agent on the experienced negative emotions (sadness and concern), and on the trust in the future and on the sense-making process

Specific introductory aspects

This experimental study is based on the framing effect, a term used by A. Tversky and D. Kahneman (1981) to indicate the impact that the way of formulating the alternatives has on the decision process. In this study, different frames were used. The frames were created around a cognitive scenario based on the idea of loss. The main difference consists of (1) inserting the cause that the event is attributed to (presence of a supernatural entity) and (2) specifying the defining features of this supernatural entity.

In this experiment, the framing:
- aims at: (1) activating cognitions organized around the idea of loss and (2) activating personal beliefs connected to the relation with a supernatural agent, and
- aims at: (1) generating negative emotions by activating a dominant scenario of elements grouped around the ideas of loss and threat: death, social isolation, threat of the physical integrity and (2) control of the negative emotions generated, by specifying the cause of the event: the presence of a supernatural entity, characterized by certain defining features.

Objectives

Starting from the essential features of the Divinity of our species: omnipotence, omniscience and justice as active manifestation of the Devine in managing the social relations and adding a few of the fundamental features of the Christian tradition: love, forgiveness, kindness, mercy, we intent to investigate:
- o the impact of the mental activation of specific religious beliefs (interaction with a supernatural, spiritual entity, bearing defining features of God) on the *negative experienced emotions*, upon confrontation with the negative life situations (loss and threat) in a population without psychopathology.
- o the impact of the mental activation of specific religious beliefs (interaction with a supernatural, spiritual entity, bearing defining features of God) *on the sense-making process*, upon confrontation with the negative life situations (loss and threat) in a population without psychopathology.

Method

Subjects

70 volunteer students from "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca participated to the study. They were distributed into two groups: framing and non-framing.

Materials

A narrative scenario was created, where the following succession of events occurs:

1. An astronaut isolated on an arid and remote planet (negative event, from a statistic point of view, social isolation);
2. Losing the connection to the base (situation of loss and social isolation);
3. Death of the other survivor, that was its only companion (situation of loss and social isolation);
4. Progressive deterioration of the health condition, including the occurrence of a feeling of physical weakness (threatening and potentially dangerous situation).

The four component elements of the created scenario were selected in such a way as to cover the main theme of loss and social isolation; at the same time, an element centered around the theme of danger was inserted.

For the framing group, but *not* for the non-framing group, another two distinctive elemenst were added:

1. The belief of the astronaut ("He certainly knows") in the fact that all events on the planet are due to the presence of a supernatural, spiritual entity (assigning the cause of the events occurred);
2. The belief of the astronaut ("He certainly knows") in the fact that this spiritual entity is endowed with the following characteristics:
    i. Omnipotence
    ii. Omniscience
    iii. Kindness
    iv. Justice (towards the astronauts)
    v. Love (towards the astronauts)
    vi. Mercy (towards the astronauts)

The specific features of the spiritual entity were selected based on: (1) God's main features, as described on the website of the Romanian Orthodox Church and (2) the results of the studies of cognitive psychology and evolutionist psychology on the way of mentally representing the construct of supernatural agent.

After reading the scenario, the subjects in the "non-framing" condition were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What can the astronaut think of the aggravations he experienced ? (sense-making – free answer);
2. How confident the astronaut can be of his future? (hope of the future – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);
3. How worried could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);
4. How sad could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

5. What could the astronaut think it was the cause of the aggravations he experienced? (cause assignment – free answer).

After reading the initial scenario, to which additional pieces of information concerning the cause of the events occurred and the specific features of the present spiritual entity were added, the subjects in the "framing" condition were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What can the astronaut think of the aggravations he experienced? (sense-making – free answer);
2. How confident can the astronaut be of his future? (hope for the future – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);
3. How worried could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);
4. How sad could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);
5. What could the astronaut think it was the cause of the aggravations he experienced? (cause assignment – free answer).
6. What does the astronaut know about the spiritual entity present on the planet? (updating the specific features of the spiritual entity, evaluated by the number of recalled features).

Design

A basic experimental design with an independent variable and three dependent variable was used.

The independent variable was the context of presenting the situation, with two levels: (1) *non-framing* (the narration included only information about the physical, social and material general situation of the astronaut) and (2) *framing* (the narration also included information concerning the presence of a spiritual entity and its features). Assuming that the effect size in the investigated population is large, the number of subjects for each group should be of minimum 30 persons (Cohen, 1992).

The dependent variables were (1) *hope for the future / trust in the future*, (2) *the negative emotion – concern*, (3) *the negative emotion –sadness*.

Results

The t test for independent samples and the Mann-Whitney U test were used to compare the framing and non-framing groups, as concerns the variables *trust in the future, concern* and *sadness.*

To estimate the possible impact that the *importance of religion* might have on the responses of the subjects present in the study, separate analyses were made for the subjects that considered religion as being "very important" and "fairly important" on one hand, and the other who considered religion as being "less important", "not at all important" or having "an average importance", on the other hand.

In order to estimate the impact of *the explicit mnesic recall* of the features of the spiritual entity on the dependent variable, external groups were created, depending on the number of recalled features (m+/- 1 A.S.); the groups were then compared for the variables *trust in the future, concern* and *sadness.*

In order to underline (1) the sense-making for both groups (framing and non-framing) and (2) the causal assignment of the events for the non-framing group, a descriptive analysis was performed, by calculating the percentages.

**Table 1. t, p and d values for comparisons
between the framing and non-framing conditions**

Framing/Non-framing	t	p	D
Trust in the future	2.53	< .05	0.6
Concern	3.78	< .05	0.9
Sadness	2.26	< .05	0.5

Table 1 presents the t and p values for the comparisons between the framing and non-framing groups. At the same time, it presents the values of the Cohen's d coefficient for calculating the effect size. It is noticed that the concern, as well as the sadness are significantly more reduced in the framing group, as compared to the non-framing group. At the same time, the trust in the future is significantly increased in the framing group, as compared to the non-framing group. The effect sizes are average and large for all values obtained. In conclusion, after controlling the way for assigning the causes of the negative events, the concern, sadness and trust in the future of the subjects is amended at a perceivable level under ecologic conditions.

**Table 2. Mann-Whitney U and p values for comparisons
between the framing and non-framing conditions, in case of the subjects that value
religion less**

Framing/Non-framing	Mann-Whitney U	p
Trust in the future	19.00	> .05
Concern	11.00	> .05
Sadness	23.00	> .05

Table 2 presents the p values and the values of the Mann-Whitney U test for comparisons between the framing and non-framing groups, in case of the subjects who consider religion as being "less important", "not at all important" or having "an average importance". It is noticed that there are no significant differences between the two groups regarding the concern, sadness or trust in the future. Therefore, with subjects not interested in religion and spirituality, activating the idea of a relation with the Divinity does not cause perceivable changes in the emotions experienced and in the level of the trust in the future.

**Table 3. t and p values for comparisons
between the framing and non-framing conditions, in case of the subjects that value
religion much**

Framing/Non-framing	T	P	d
Trust in the future	2.42	$< .05$	0.6
Concern	3.18	$< .05$	0.8
Sadness	2.56	$< .05$	0.7

Table 3 presents the t and p values for comparisons between the framing and non-framing groups, in case of the subjects for whom religion is "very important" and "fairly important". At the same time, the values of Cohen's d coefficient are presented for calculating the effect size. One can notice that the concern, as well as the sadness are significantly more reduced in the framing group, as compared to the non-framing group. The effect sizes are large for all values obtained. Therefore, after controlling the way of assigning the causes to negative events, the concern, sadness and trust in the future, of the subjects to whom religion is important, are amended at a perceivable level under ecologic conditions.

In conclusion, upon confrontation with life situations that raise major adaptation issues (for instance situations of loss and threat), the activation of the convictions connected to the interaction with the Divinity may reduce the negative emotions and increase the trust in the future only for the persons to whom the religion is important.

**Table 4. Values Mann-Whitney U and p for comparisons for the subjects in the
framing condition who recalled many, i.e. few features of the spiritual entity**

Many / few recalled features	Mann-Whitney U	p
Trust in the future	52.00	$> .05$
Concern	52.00	$> .05$
Sadness	41.50	$> .05$

Because the number of positive features of the intentionally recalled spiritual entity could have a major impact on the experienced emotions, in case of the subjects in the framing conditions, two extreme groups (m+/- 1 A.S.) were formed, compared later for the variable *trust in the future, concern and sadness*. The results, presented in Table 4, did not show significant differences between the subjects who recalled more, i.e. less positive features. Therefore, once the image / scheme of a supernatural agent is activated, the presence in the working memory of the number of its features does not change the impact on the negative emotions and the trust in the future.

Table 5. Percentage representation of sense-making in the framing and non-framing groups

	Divine plan with positive ending	Learning experience	Punishment from the spiritual entity	Lack of chance / bad luck	Destiny / fate
Framing N=39	29 (74.35%)	3 (7.69%)	7 (17.94 %)	-	-
Non-framing N=31	5 (16.12%)	1 (3.22%)	13 (41.93%)	5 (16.12%)	7 (22.58%)

One can notice that in the group where the idea of the presence and intervention of a supernatural agent (i.e. the framing group) was induced, most of the subjects (74.35%) tend to explain the situation in terms of the divine plan with positive ending.

One should notice that, if no reference was made to the intervention of a supernatural agent (i.e. the non-framing group), 41.93% of the subjects show the tendency to assume the intervention of a spiritual entity. We should keep in mind that most of the subjects included in the study declared that religion is "fairly important" for them (80%).

Table 6. Percentage representation of the cause assignment for the aggravations suffered by the astronaut in the non-framing group

	Other people	Own person	Upset spiritual entity	Destiny / fate	Profession features	Flawed equipment	Unidentified causes
Non-framing N=31	2 (6.45%)	2 (6.45%)	2 (6.45%)	7 (22.58%)	4 (12.90%)	9 (29.03%)	5 (16.12%)

Under the conditions of the absence of the references to possible causes of the negative events (i.e. non-framing group), the subjects tend to assume as causal element a multitude of factors, one of them being the existential factor – "destiny / fate" (22.58%) and a practical, material one – "flawed equipment"" (29.03%).

3.2. 2nd experimental study – The impact of activating the convictions concerning the relation human being – supernatural agent (with the dominance of conditional and unconditional acceptance) on the experienced negative emotions (general distress, sadness / depression,

concern / anxiety), on the trust in the future, automatic negative thoughts and on the sense-making process

Specific introductory aspects

In the second study, two distinct types of frames will be created, both designed to activate convictions connected to the relation human – supernatural agent. The distinction between the two frames refers to the way of formulating the relation of Divinity to the human being, described in terms of conditional, i.e. unconditional acceptance.

Objectives

Starting from the essential features of the Divinity of our species: omnipotence, omniscience and justice as active manifestation of the Devine in managing the social relations and adding a few of the fundamental features of the Christian tradition: love, forgiveness, kindness, mercy, we intent to investigate:

o the impact of activating the convictions about the relation human being – supernatural agent (interaction with a supernatural entity / endowed with God's defining features, formulated in terms of conditional and unconditional acceptance) on *negative emotions*, upon confrontation with the negative life situations (loss and threat) in a population without psychopathology;

o the impact of activating the convictions about the relation human being – supernatural agent (interaction with a supernatural entity / endowed with God's defining features, formulated in terms of conditional and unconditional acceptance) on *creative negative automatic thoughts*, on the impact of the confrontation with the negative life situations (loss and threat) in a population without psychopathology;

o the impact of activating the convictions about the relation human being – supernatural agent (interaction with a supernatural entity / endowed with God's defining features, formulated in terms of conditional and unconditional acceptance) on *the sense-making process,* upon confrontation with the negative life situations (loss and threat) in a population without psychopathology;

Method
Subjects

149 volunteer students from "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca participated to the study. They were distributed into two groups: conditional framing, unconditional framing and non-framing.

Materials

A narrative scenario was created, where the following succession of events occurs:

1. An astronaut isolated on an arid and remote planet (negative event, from a statistic point of view, social isolation);
2. Losing the connection to the base (situation of loss and social isolation);
3. Death of the other survivor, that was its only companion (situation of loss and social isolation);
4. Progressive deterioration of the health condition, including the occurrence of a feeling of physical weakness (threatening and potentially dangerous situation).

5. Suggested presence ("It seems like / He thinks") of two kinds of dangers: (a) possible threat from environmental agents and (b) possible threat from intentional agents (human beings).

For the framing group, but *not* for the non-framing group, another two distinctive elemenst were added:

1. The belief of the astronaut ("He certainly knows") in the fact that all events on the planet are due to the presence of a supernatural, spiritual entity (assigning the cause of the events occurred);
2. The belief of the astronaut ("He certainly knows") in the fact that this spiritual entity is endowed with the following characteristics:
   i. Omnipotence
   ii. Omniscience
   iii. Kindness
   iv. Justice (towards the astronauts)
   v. Love (towards the astronauts)
   vi. Mercy (towards the astronauts)

Besides the elements mentioned before, the "conditional *framing*" group also received a description of the attitude of the spiritual entity towards the astronaut, in terms of *conditional acceptance* (the person is valued only if it behaves in an expected way) and *occasional relating* (the entity decides the moment and conditions of the interaction):

- it loves him, although it requests that he listen to its indications without any divergence and does things without mistake;
- it always punishes him when he commits bad things, even when he regrets what he has done (although in the end, it can forgive him);
- it considers him fully valuable, only if it behaves well;
- it may choose to communicate with him, listening to his point of view, although it does not always proceed this way.

In parallel, the *"unconditional framing"* group also received a completion, in which the attitude of the spiritual entity towards the astronaut is described in terms of *unconditional acceptance* (the person is valued in its essence, regardless if he behaves or not aberrantly) and *permanent relating* (the entity is an integral part of the astronaut's being):

- it loves him as he is, with his flaws and qualities;
- it forgives him, even if it commits bad things sometimes, but he regrets what he has done;
- it always considers him valuable, regardless of the fact that he behaves well or badly;
- it knows and feels every thought, intention or emotion, because it is – without being capable of saying how – an integral part of its being.

After reading the scenario, the subjects in the *"non-framing"* condition were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What can the astronaut think of the aggravations he experienced? (sense-making – free answer);

2. How confident can the astronaut be of his future? (hope of the future – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

3. How worried could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

4. How sad could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

5. What could the astronaut think it is the cause of the aggravations he experienced? (cause assignment – free answer).

6. How often do you think the astronaut contemplates the thoughts below?

The list of thoughts that follow this question is made up of 15 thoughts that represent the items of the ATQ questionnaire ATQ (Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire - Hollon, & Kendall, 1980).

7. How often do you think the astronaut feels the emotions below?

The list of positive and negative emotions that follows this question is made up of the 39 emotions that form the items of the PDA scale (Affective Distress Profile - Opriş, & Macavei, 2007).

After reading the initial scenario, including the additional pieces of information concerning the cause of the events occurred and the specific features of the present spiritual entity and the attitude of its conditional acceptance, the subjects in the *"conditional framing"* and *"unconditional framing"* conditions were asked to answer the following questions:

1. What can the astronaut think of the aggravations he experienced ? (sense-making – free answer);

2. How confident can the astronaut be of his future? (hope of the future – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

3. How worried could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

4. How sad could the astronaut feel? (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-100 scale);

5. What does the astronaut know about the spiritual entity present on the planet? (recalling the specific features of the spiritual entity, evaluated by the number of recalled features).

6. How often do you think the astronaut contemplates the thoughts below?

The list of thought that follow this question is made up of 15 thoughts that represent the items of the ATQ questionnaire ATQ (Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire - Hollon, & Kendall, 1980).

7. How often do you think the astronaut feels the emotions below?

The list of positive and negative emotions that follows this question is made up of the 39 emotions that form the items of the PDA scale (Affective Distress Profile - Opriş, & Macavei, 2007).

Design

A multifactorial experimental design with an independent variable, with three levels and eight dependent variable was used.

The independent variable was the context of presenting the situation, with three levels: (1) *non-framing* (the narration/scenario included only information about the general physical, social and material situation of the astronaut, as well as the threat suggested from environmental agents or intentional agents and the loss of the connection with the society) and (2) *conditional framing* (as compared the non-framing condition, the narration/scenario also included information concerning the presence of a spiritual entity and its positive features, as well as its attitude of conditional acceptance) and *unconditional framing* (as compared the non-framing

condition, the narration/scenario also included information about the presence of a spiritual entity and its positive features, as well as its attitude of unconditional acceptance). Assuming that the effect size in the investigated population is large, the number of subjects for each group should be of minimum 21 persons (Cohen, 1992). For an average effect size, the number of subjects in each group should be 52 (Cohen, 1992).

The dependent variables were (1) *hope for the future / trust in the future*, (2) *negative emotion – concern*, (3) *negative emotion –sadness, (4) automatic negative thoughts, (5) positive emotions, (6) negative emotions from the category Sadness – Depression, (7) negative emotions from the category Fear – Anxiety and (8) general distress*.

Results

The ANOVA test for independent samples was used, to compare the groups of conditional framing, unconditional framing and non-framing, for the variables *trust in the future*, *concern*, *sadness, automatic negative thoughts, positive emotions, negative emotions from the category Sadness – Depression, negative emotions from the category Fear – Anxiety and general distress.*

In order to underline (1) the sense-making for both groups (framing and non-framing) and (2) the causal assignment of the events for the non-framing group, a descriptive analysis was performed, by calculating the percentages.

Table 7. F, p and d values for the comparisons between the non-framing, conditional framing and unconditional framing conditions

Dependent variables	F values	Total P	p values between conditions	D	Cohen's d converted into percentage
Trust in the future	F (2.146) =22.86	p <.01	**N -FC, p<.05**	**0.8**	**79%**
			N -FN, p<.05	**1.2**	**88%**
			FC-FN, p>.05	-	-
Concern	F (2.145) =17.91	p <.01	**N -FC, p<.05**	**0.9**	**82%**
			N -FN, p<.05	**1.1**	**88%**
			FC-FN, p>.05	-	-
Sadness	F (2,146) =8.92	p <.01	**N -FC, p<.05**	**0.6**	**73%**
			N -FN, p<.05	**0.8**	**79%**
			FC-FN, p>.05	-	-
Automatic negative thoughts	F (2.146) =16.55	p <.01	N -FC, p>.05	-	-
			N -FN, p<.05	**1.0**	**84%**
			FC-FN, p<.05	**0.7**	**76%**
Positive emotions	F (2.146) =12.93	p <.01	N -FC, p>.05	-	-
			N -FN, p<.05	**1.0**	**84%**
			FC-FN, p<.05	**0.4**	**66%**
Negative emotions – sadness / depression	F (2.146) =19.11	p <.01	N -FC, p>.05	-	-
			N -FN, p<.05	**1.2**	**88%**
			FC-FN, p<.05	**0.6**	**73%**

Negative emotions – concern / anxiety	F (2.146) =19.13	p <.01	N -FC, p>.05 **N -FN, p<.05** **FC-FN, p<.05**	- **1.2** **0.6**	- **88%** **73%**
General distress	F (2.146) =20.75	p <.01	N -FC, p>.05 **N -FN, p<.05** **FC-FN, p<.05**	- **1.3** **0.6**	- **92%** **73%**

Table 7 presents the F and p values for the comparisons between the non-framing, conditional framing and unconditional framing groups. At the same time, it presents the values of the Cohen's d coefficient for calculating the effect size.

It is noticed that *the trust in the future*, measured by only one item, is significantly increased at persons within the framing group, as compared to the ones in the non-framing group. At the same time, there are no significant differences between the two types of framing. *The concern and sadness* – measured one-dimensionally, by only one item – are significantly reduced in the framing groups, as compared to the non-framing group. No significant differences were noticed between the two framing groups. As concerns *the automatic negative thoughts*, there are differences only between the unconditional framing group and the other two experimental conditions. Comparing the means obtained for the experimental groups, with the ones in the general population (available sampling), we notice that: (1) the averages of the groups in the non-framing and conditional framing conditions are included in the 5th level – very high level of the automatic negative thoughts, while (2) the average of the group in the unconditional framing condition is included at the 4th level – high level of the automatic negative thoughts (Moldovan, 2007). Therefore, the unconditional framing generated a sufficiently large impact on the automatic negative thoughts, so that it is relevant in ecologic conditions; the scores recorded were included in another category of the test norm.

The positive emotions – measured with the PDA items – are significantly *increased* in the unconditional framing group, as compared to the other two groups. No significant differences existed between the non-framing and the conditional framing group.

The negative emotions of the type concern / anxiety and sadness / depression – measured with the PDA items – are significantly *more reduced* in the unconditional framing group, as compared to the other two groups. No significant differences existed between the non-framing and the conditional framing group.

The general distress – measured with the PDA items – are significantly *more reduced* in the unconditional framing group, as compared to the other two groups. No significant differences existed between the non-framing and the conditional framing group. Comparing the means obtained in the experimental groups with the ones in the general population, we notice that: (1) the averages of the groups in the non-framing and conditional framing conditions are included in the 5th level – very high level of distress, while (2) the average of the group in the unconditional framing condition is included at the 4th level – increased level of distress (Opriş, & Macavei, 2007). Similar to the pattern recorded in case of the automatic negative thoughts, the unconditional framing generated a sufficiently high impact on the general distress, so that it is relevant under ecologic conditions; the scores recorded were included in another category of the test norm.

The effect sizes are large for all values obtained, except for the positive emotions, where one can notice an average effect size between the conditional framing and the unconditional framing conditions.

In conclusion, after controlling the way for assigning the causes of the negative events, by determining a relation with a Divinity that accepts unconditionally the person, the negative emotions, the automatic negative thoughts, the positive emotions and the trust in the future are changed at a perceivable level under ecologic conditions.

In the *non-framing* condition, the sense-making is made most frequently around the idea of chance, destiny and is associated frequently to the idea of a future danger.

In the *conditional framing* condition, the sense is mainly determined in association with the idea of punishment (most of the times well-earned) from a correct and strong spiritual entity, a kind of "parental figure", entitled to do justice.

In the *unconditional framing* condition, the involvement in negative events is seen more likely as part of a divine plan, meant to offer the mortals learning opportunities, often by testing their qualities and perseverance / commitment.

When the source of the negative events the astronaut faces, is not explained, the subjects tend to assign his aggravations especially to destiny, to the physical and material conditions, as well to its own person (errors, inadequacy, unprofessionalism).

3.3. **3ʳᵈ experimental study** – The differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (trust) on the experienced emotions, automatic negative thoughts, despair, trust in one's own forces and trust in the future

Specific introductory aspects
The 3ʳᵈ study aims at a comparative analysis of the impact of (1) *knowing the finality of the events* and (2) *trust in the relation with the Divinity* on the subjects' emotions and thoughts.

Objectives
Starting from the idea of relation between human agent – human agent and human agent – supernatural agent and from the impact of these relations on the humans' thoughts and emotions, we intend to investigate:
- o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (trust) on *emotions*, to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (trust) on the *occurrence of automatic negative depressive thoughts,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (trust) on the *trust in the future,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (trust) on the *trust in one's own strengths,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (trust) on the *despair,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

Method

Subjects

140 volunteer students of "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca took part to the study; 110 of them from the undergraduate level and 30 from the master's studies. They were distributed into three groups: (1) non-framing, (2) framing 1 – trust in the supernatural agent (God) and (3) framing 2 – certain information (knowing the finality of the events).

Materials

For activating the negative emotions, the subjects were presented with a cognitive scenario consisting of a fragment from the play scenario ("O scrisoare pierdută" – "A Lost Letter" by I. L. Caragiale, Fragment from Act II, scene VI). Before presenting the dialogue – to make sure that the study participants know the dramatic events of the play – a short summary was offered, accentuating the main idea, the evolution of events, as well as their positive finality (i.e. avoiding any social losses or dangers for the main characters).

For the framing groups, but *not* for the non-framing group, besides the summary and the play fragment, another two distinctive elements were added:

- the instruction of focusing on the mental relating of the human agent to a supernatural agent (i.e. to answer to questions by referring to the perspective of the main character, if it were a person with great trust in God, in its help and in its forgiveness);

  Instruction for Framing 1 – trust in God:

  „Referring to Zoe's perspective and thinking that:
  - Zoe were a person with great trust in God and in its help;
  - Zoe were a person with great trust in God's forgiveness;

  please answer the following questions".

- The instruction of focusing on the access to certain information about the event evolution – unlimited access of the target character to the perspective and thinking of the play author. In order to prime the information / knowledge about the positive finality of the events, besides the summary at the beginning of the play, the idea of access to the playwright's perspective was provided. The purpose of this doubling is to resume the idea of relation, this time between human agents, for the purpose of information exchange.

  Instruction for Framing 2 – knowing the finality of the events (by access to the perspective of a human agent):

  "Starting from the idea that Zoe could have unlimited access to the playwright's perspective and thinking, please answer the following questions".

Both instructions have in mind the reiteration of the idea of relation with an intentional agent (supernatural, i.e. human), relation that facilitates (by support and faith, i.e. information offer) the emotional and behavioral control.

For the "*non-framing*" group, the instruction was:

"Referring to Zoe's perspective, please answer the following questions".

After reading the scenario, with the mentioned completions, the subjects in the conditions *"non-framing", "framing 1"* and *"framing 2"* were asked to answer the following questions:

1. How confident could Zoe be, *at this time*, in her future (hope for the future – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);
2. How worried could Zoe be, *at this time?* (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);
3. How sad could Zoe feel, *at this time?* (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);
4. How desperate could Zoe feel, *at this time?* (disadaptive cognitions / emotions, desperation – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);
5. How confident could Zoe be, *at this time*, in her capacity to change the situation for the better (trust in her own strengths / self-efficiency – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);
6. Which of the thoughts below do you think Zoe contemplates mostly, *at this time?*

The list of thoughts following this question is made up of 15 thoughts that represent the items of the ATQ questionnaire (Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire, Hollon, & Kendall, 1980). 10 assertions were added to the 15 items of ATQ that reflect *the knowledge of the evolution of the concrete situation towards a positive finality*. These assertions were added to control the efficiency of reminding the scenario unwind and its evolution towards completely avoiding the losses and threats in social relations.

7. How much do you think Zoe feels of the below emotions, *at this time*?

The list of positive and negative emotions that follows this question is made up of the 39 emotions that form the items of the PDA scale (Affective Distress Profile - Opriş, & Macavei, 2007).

Design

A multifactorial experimental design with one independent variable, with three levels and eleven dependent variable was used.

The independent variable was the context of presenting the situation, with three levels: (1) ***non-framing*** (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its ending, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective), (2) ***framing 1 – trust in the supernatural agent (God)*** (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its resolution, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective, who is a person with trust in God, His help and forgiveness) and (3) ***framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality by relating to the perspective of a human agent*** (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its resolution, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective, if she had unlimited access to the playwright's perspective).

The dependent variables were (1) *hope for the future / trust in the future*, (2) *negative emotion – concern*, (3) *negative emotion –sadness, (4) despair, (5) trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better, (6) automatic negative thoughts, (7) negative emotions – sadness, (8) negative emotions – depression, (9) negative emotions – concern, (10) negative emotions – anxiety, (11) general distress*.

Assuming that the effect size in the investigated population is large, the number of subjects for each group should be of minimum 21 persons (Cohen, 1992). For an average effect size, the number of subjects in each group should be 52 (Cohen, 1992).

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Results

The ANOVA test for independent samples was used to compare the groups of non-framing, framing 1 – trust in God and framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality, for the dependent variables *trust in the future*, *concern*, *sadness*, *despair*, *trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better*, *automatic negative thoughts*, *negative emotions (sadness, depression, concern, anxiety)*, *general distress*.

Table 8. F, p and d values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 – trust in the supernatural agent (God) and framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality

Dependent variables	F values	Total P	p values between conditions	D	Cohen's d converted into percentage
Trust in the future	F (2.137) =20.79	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** F1-F2, p>.05	1.4 0.9 -	95% 82% -
Concern	F (2.137) =17.78	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** F1-F2, p>.05	1.1 1.2 -	88% 88% -
Sadness	F (2.137) =3.49	p =.033	N-F1, p>.05 **N –F2, p<.05** F1-F2, p>.05	- 0.5 -	- 69% -
Despair	F (2.137) =16.37	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.05** **N –F2, p<.05** F1-F2, p>.05	1.1 1.1 -	88% 88% -
Trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better	F (2.137) =9.01	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** F1-F2, p>.05	0.7 0.7 -	76% 76% -
Automatic negative thoughts	F (2.137) =5.63	p <.01	N-F1, p>.05 **N –F2, p<.05** F1-F2, p>.05	- 0.6 -	- 73% -
Negative emotions – sadness	F (2.137) =4.68	p =.011	N-F1, p>.05 **N –F2, p<.05** F1-F2, p>.05	- 0.6 -	- 73% -
Negative emotions – depression	F (2.137) =7.04	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** F1-F2, p>.05	0.7 0.6 -	76% 73% -
Negative emotions – concern	F (2.137) =6.93	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.05** **N –F2, p<.01** F1-F2, p>.05	0.6 0.7 -	73% 76% -
Negative emotions – anxiety	F (2.137) =11.07	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01**	0.7 0.9	76% 82%

			F1-F2, p>.05	-	-
General distress	F (2.137) =8.36	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.05**	0.7	76%
			N –F2, p<.01	0.7	76%
			F1-F2, p>.05	-	-

Table 8 presents the F and p values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 (trust in God) and framing 2 (certain knowledge of the positive finality) conditions. At the same time, it presents the values of the Cohen's d coefficient for calculating the effect size.

It is noticed that for the variables *trust in the future, concern, despair* and *trust in one's capacity to change things for the better* - measured one-dimensionally, by only one item – the values obtained by the framing groups are significantly different than those of the non-framing group. No significant differences were noticed between the two framing groups.

Thus, the *concern and despair* are significantly more increased at persons in the non-framing group, as compared to the two framing groups. *The trust in the future* and *the trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better* are significantly more increased at the framing groups, as compared to the control group (i.e. non-framing).

The same pattern of results – in which the values obtained by the framing groups are significantly different from the ones of the non-framing group – is noticed in case of the *depression* measured with PDA, of the *anxiety*, measured with PDA, *concern,* measured with PDA and *general distress,* measured with PDA. No significant differences were noticed between the two framing groups. For all the four dependent variables, the values obtained by the control group (i.e. non-framing) are significantly more increased than of the groups of framing 1 and framing 2, indicating increased levels of negative emotions for the group without manipulation. The calculated indicators show large effect sizes.

In case of *sadness* – measured one-dimensionally, by only one item and with PDA sadness scale – only the certain knowledge of the positive evolution of the events (i.e. framing 2) lead to a significant decrease of the negative emotion experienced by the subjects.

A similar pattern to the one of the variable "sadness" is observed in case of the *automatic negative depressive thoughts.* Comparing the means obtained by the three study groups with the ones in the general population (available sampling), we notice that the averages of the groups in the non-framing and framing 1 (trust in God) conditions are included in the 5th level of the norm (i.e. very high level of the automatic negative thoughts), while the average of the framing 2 group is included at the 4th level – high level of the automatic negative thoughts (Moldovan, 2007). Therefore, the certain knowledge of the evolution and positive finality of the events reduces the automatic negative depressive thoughts in a relevant measure, from an ecologic point of view.

The values obtained for all dependent variables indicate a large effect size, except for the sadness (measured one-dimensionally), where an average effect size was obtained.

In order to estimate to what extend the subjects consider that the main character of the fragment (i.e. Zoe) thinks about the positive evolution of things and the finality in her favor, for the three levels of the study, the scores to the 10 questions were compared. Because all subjects knew from the summary provided , as well as from their previous experience with the play, how the events unfolded and what the ending was, the target questions brought more information on the subjects' adherence to the instructions offered for the three conditions of the study (i.e. non-framing, framing 1 and framing 2).

Table 9. F, p and d values for the comparisons between the conditions non-framing, framing 1 – trust in the supernatural agent (God), framing 2 – certain information in case of positive thoughts connected to the evolution of events

Dependent variables	F values	Total P	Values of p between conditions	d	Cohen's d converted into percentage
Thoughts about the positive evolution of things	F (2.137) =7.65	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** F1-F2, p>.05	0.7 0.7 -	76% 76%

The data obtained indicated that the thoughts connected to the positive evolution of things were significantly more in the two framing conditions, as compared to the non-framing group, indicating the fact that the subjects observed the instructions (i.e. the ones on the non-framing group did not start with the idea that Zoe knew that things would be favorable to her). At the same time, the resemblance between the framing 1 and framing 2 groups suggests their similarity as concerns the reference to the future – the trust, as well as the knowledge stimulated the positive expectancies for the future. The effect sizes were large.

3.4.   4th experimental study – The differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (conditional acceptance and unconditional acceptance) on the experienced emotions, automatic negative thoughts, despair, trust in one's own forces and trust in the future

Specific introductory aspects
The 4th study aims at a comparative analysis of the impact of (1) *knowing the finality of the events* and (2) *knowledge of the existence of the relation human-Divinity (characterized by unconditional vs. conditional acceptance)* on the subjects' emotions and thoughts.

Objectives
Starting from the idea of relation between human agent – human agent and human agent – supernatural agent and from the impact of these relations on the humans' thoughts and emotions, we intend to investigate:
- o   the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (unconditional vs. conditional acceptance) on *emotions*, to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o   the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (unconditional vs. conditional acceptance) on the *occurrence of automatic negative depressive thoughts,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o   the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (unconditional vs. conditional acceptance) on the *trust in the future,*

to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (unconditional vs. conditional acceptance) on the *trust in one's own strengths,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

o the differentiated impact of relating to a human agent (access to information) versus a supernatural agent (unconditional vs. conditional acceptance) on the *despair,* to the confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

Method
Subjects
119 volunteer undergraduate students of "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca took part to the study. They were distributed into three groups: (1) non-framing (N=31), (2) framing 1 – relation to God (unconditional acceptance) and (3) framing 1bis – relation to a human agent (certain knowledge of the finality of the events).

Materials
The subjects were provided with the same summary and play fragment used in the 3rd experimental study.

For the framing groups, but *not* for the non-framing group, besides the summary and the play fragment, another three distinctive elements were added:

- the instruction of focusing on the metal relating of the human agent to a supernatural agent
  Instruction for Framing 1 – relation to God (unconditional acceptance):
  Referring to Zoe's perspective and thinking that:
  Zoe knows that all her life's events are determined by an almighty, kind, merciful and all-knowing divine being, that:
  - loves her, although it requests that she listen to its indications without any divergence and does thing without mistake;
  - always punishes her when she commits bad things, even when she regrets what she has done (although in the end, it can forgive her);
  - considers her fully valuable, only if she behaves well;
  - may choose to communicate with her, listening to her point of view, although it does not always act in this way.
  please answer the following questions.
  Instruction for Framing 1bis – relation to God (conditional acceptance):
  Referring to Zoe's perspective and thinking that:
  Zoe knows that all her life's events are determined by an almighty, good, merciful and all-knowing divine being, that:
  - loves her as she is, with her flaws and qualities;
  - forgives her, even if she commits bad things sometimes, but she regrets what she has done;

- always considers her valuable, regardless of the fact that she behaves well of badly;
- knows and feels every thought, intention or emotion, because she part of its being.

  please answer the following questions.
- The instruction of focusing on the access to certain information about the event evolution – unlimited access of the target character to the perspective and thinking of the playwright. In order to prime the information / knowledge about the positive finality of the events, besides the summary at the beginning of the play summary, the idea of access to the playwright's perspective was provided. The purpose of this doubling is to resume the idea of relation, this time between human agents, for the purpose of information exchange.
  Instruction for Framing 2 – knowing the finality of the events (by access to the perspective of a human agent):
  "Starting from the idea that Zoe could have unlimited access to the playwright's perspective and thinking, please answer the following questions".

The three instructions have in mind the reiteration of the idea of relation with an intentional agent (supernatural, i.e. human), relation that facilitates (by support and faith, i.e. information offer) the emotional and behavioral control.

For the *"non-framing"* group, the instruction was:
"Referring to Zoe's perspective, please answer the following questions".

After reading the scenario, with the mentioned completions, the subjects in the conditions *"non-framing", "framing 1"* and *"framing 2"* were asked to answer the following questions:

1. How confident could Zoe be, *at this time*, in her future (hope for the future – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

2. How worried could Zoe be, *at this time?* (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

3. How sad could Zoe feel, *at this time?* (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

4. How desperate could Zoe feel, *at this time?* (disadaptive cognitions / emotions, desperation – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

5. How confident could Zoe be, *at this time*, in her capacity to change the situation for the better (trust in her own strengths / self-efficiency – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

6. Which of the thoughts below do you think Zoe contemplates mostly, *at this time?*

The list of thoughts following this question is made up of 15 thoughts that represent the items of the ATQ questionnaire (Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire, Hollon, & Kendall, 1980). 10 assertions were added to the 15 items of ATQ that reflect *the knowledge of the evolution way of the concrete situation towards a positive finality.* These assertions were added to control the efficiency of reminding the scenario unwind and its evolution towards completely avoiding the losses and threats in social relations.

7. How much do you think Zoe feels of the below emotions, *at this time*?

The list of positive and negative emotions that follows this question is made up of the 39 emotions that form the items of the PDA scale (Affective Distress Profile - Opriş, & Macavei, 2007).

Design

A multifactorial experimental design with one independent variable, with four levels and eleven dependent variable was used.

The independent variable was the context of presenting the situation, with four levels: (1) *non-framing* (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its ending, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective), (2) *framing 1 – the relation with God (unconditional acceptance)* (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its resolution, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective, who knows that her life's events are determined by a divine being who accepts her unconditionally), (3) *framing 1bis – the relation with God (conditional acceptance)* (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its resolution, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective, who knows that her life's events are determined by a divine being who accepts her conditionally) and (4) *framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality by relating to the perspective of a human agent* (the scenario included the general presentation of the situation and its resolution, the dialogue fragment and the requirement to answer by relating to Zoe's perspective, if she has unlimited access to the playwright's perspective).

The dependent variables were (1) *hope for the future / trust in the future*, (2) *negative emotion – concern*, (3) *negative emotion –sadness, (4) despair, (5) trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better, (6) automatic negative thoughts, (7) negative emotions – sadness, (8) negative emotions – depression, (9) negative emotions – concern, (10) negative emotions – anxiety, (11) general distress*.

Assuming that the effect size in the investigated population is large, the number of subjects for each group should be of minimum 18 persons (Cohen, 1992). For an average effect size, the number of subjects in each group should be 45 (Cohen, 1992).

Results

The ANOVA test for independent samples was used, to compare the groups of non-framing, framing 1 – relation with God (unconditional acceptance), framing 1bis – relation with God (conditional acceptance) trust in God and framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality, for the dependent variables *trust in the future*, *concern*, *sadness, despair, trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better, automatic negative thoughts, negative emotions (sadness, depression, concern, anxiety), general distress.*

Table 10. F, p and d values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 – relation with God (unconditional acceptance), framing 1bis – relation with God (conditional acceptance) and framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality

Dependent variables	F values	Total P	p values between conditions	D	Cohen's d converted into percentage

Trust in the future	F (3.115) =14.11	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** **F1-F1bis, p<.01** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	1.3 1.3 1.0 1.0 - - -	92% 92% 84% 84% - - -
Concern	F (3.115) =9.90	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** **F1-F1bis, p<.05** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	1.1 1.0 0.8 0.8 - - -	88% 84% 79% 79% - - -
Sadness	F (3.115) =2.48	p =.06	N –F1, p>.05 N –F2, p>.05 F1-F1bis, p>.05 F2 –F1bis, p>.05 N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	- - - - -	- - - - -
Despair	F (3.115) =10.43	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** **F1-F1bis, p<.05** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	1.2 1.0 0.9 0.8 - -	88% 84% 82% 79% - -
Trust in one's capacity to change things for the better	F (3.115) =6.73	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.05** **N –F2, p<.05** **F1-F1bis, p<.05** **F2 –F1bis, p<.05** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	0.8 0.8 0.8 0.8 - -	79% 79% 79% 79% - -
Automatic negative thoughts	F (3.115) =10.26	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p=.06** **F1-F1bis, p<.01** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	0.9 0.6 1.3 1.0 - -	82% 73% 92% 84% - -

Negative emotions – sadness	F (3.115) =5.20	p <.01	**N –F1, p>.05** **N –F2, p=.058** **F1-F1bis, p=.058** **F2 –F1bis, p<.05** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	- 0.6 0.7 0.7 - - -	- 73% 76% 76% - - -
Negative emotions – depression	F (3.115) =7.05	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.05** **N –F2, p<.05** **F1-F1bis, p<.05** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	0.7 0.7 0.9 0.9 - - -	76% 76% 82% 82% - - -
Negative emotions – concern	F (3.115) =5.80	p <.01	N –F1, p>.05 **N –F2, p=.061** **F1-F1bis, p<.05** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	0.5 0.7 0.7 0.8 - -	69% 76% 76% 79% - -
Negative emotions – anxiety	F (3.115) =9.16	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** **F1-F1bis, p<.01** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	1.1 1.0 0.8 0.8 - -	88% 84% 79% 79% - -
General distress	F (3.115) =7.99	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** **N –F2, p<.01** **F1-F1bis, p<.01** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	0.8 0.8 0.9 0.9 - -	79% 79% 82% 82% - -

Table 10 presents the F and p values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 (relation to God – unconditional acceptance), framing 1bis (relation to God – conditional acceptance) and framing 2 (certain knowledge of the positive finality). At the same time, it presents the values of the Cohen's d coefficient for calculating the effect size.

It is noticed that for the variables *trust in the future, concern, despair* and *trust in one's capacity to change things for the better* - measured one-dimensionally, by only one item – the pattern of results is similar to the one obtained at the PDA scores for *depression, anxiety* and *general distress.* For all these comparisons, the effect size was large; many of the subjects in the

control condition obtained a worse score than the average score of the subjects in the experimental groups (Table 10). Thus:

- Significant differences were noticed between the groups of non-framing and framing 1 (relation to God – unconditional acceptance). After the instruction that underlined the unconditional acceptance by the Divinity, the subjects indicated the fact that the target character experienced more trust in the future and in its own capacity to change things for the better, as well as less distress, sadness, depression, anxiety and despair;
- Significant differences were noticed between the groups of non-framing and framing 2 (certain information from a human agent). After the instruction that underlined the certain knowledge of the favorable evolution of the events, the subjects considered that the main character experienced more trust in the future and in its own capacity to change things for the better, as well as less distress, sadness, depression, anxiety and despair;
- No significant differences exist between the framing conditions mentioned previously (i.e. framing 1 and framing 2); but they differ significantly from the condition framing 1bis. In other words, the relation with a God that accepts only conditionally the human being does not influence as much the humans' emotions and thoughts, as does the relation with a benevolent God, that offers unconditional acceptance or the knowledge of the positive evolution of things;
- The third framing condition – framing 1bis (relation to God – conditional acceptance) is not different from the control condition. Thus, the subjects to whom the idea of a relation with a Divinity accepting the mortals conditionally was underlined, considered that the main character would be as depressed, anxious, concerned, desperate and stressed as those to whom only the initial scenario was presented. At the same time, they indicated less trust in the future and in the person's capacity to change something as for those in the control group.

In case of *sadness* – measured one-dimensionally, by only one item – no significant differences were noticed between the four conditions (p>.05). Thus, regardless of the framing following the scenario that aimed at activating the negative emotions, all subjects considered that the target character remains as sad, even if it knew with certainty that things would go for the better (i.e. framing 2 group).

Nevertheless, the PDA measuring underlined the impact of the certain information on the negative functional emotions (i.e. *concern* and *sadness*). Thus, one notices significant differences between the non-framing and the framing 2 groups for both mentioned dependent variables. Therefore, certainly knowing the negative evolution of events seems capable to reduce perceivably even the natural negative emotions in a problematic life situation. The subjects in the framing 1bis group, to whom the relation with a Divinity that sets up conditions in order to accept people, was underlined, assumed that the aimed character would be as concerned and sad, as the subjects in the control group. In case of these functional emotions, the relation to a benevolent Divinity, capable of unconditional acceptance does not reduce perceivably the fears upon contact with life's adversities. In the comparisons aiming at the concern and sadness measured with PDA, a few marginal thresholds (Table 10) were obtained. Given the relatively small number of subjects in each group and the large effect size, they were considered significant in our analysis. For all these comparisons, the effect size was average and large.

The automatic negative depressive thoughts follow the pattern seen for despair and dysfunctional negative emotions (i.e. anxiety and depression). Thus, the subjects in the framing 1 (relation with God) and framing 2 (certain positive finality) groups indicated far less negative thoughts than the subjects in the control group and those to whom the relation with a God that accepts humans conditionally (i.e. framing 1bis group) was underlined. In case of this variable, the marginal threshold of .06 was considered as indicating a significant difference, because of the same reasons as the ones discussed in case of the functional negative emotions measured with PDA. For all these comparisons, the effect size was average and large.

Comparing the means obtained by the study groups with the ones in the general population for the general distress measured with PDA, we notice that the averages of the groups in the non-framing and framing 1bis (relation to God – conditional acceptance) are included in the 5th level of the norm (very high level of distress), while the averages of the framing 1 group (relation to God, unconditional acceptance) and framing 2 (knowing the positive finality) is included at the 4th level (high level of distress) (Opriş, & Macavei, 2007). Thus, after priming the negative emotions up to the highest level in the population, the framing 1 and framing 2 decreased significantly their level, sufficiently enough to produce a transfer of the quotas recorded in an inferior class of the test norm. These data offer consistent arguments for the strong effects, perceivable in concrete life conditions. An identical transfer from the 5th category to the 4th category of the norm for the framing 1 and framing 2 groups are noticed for the automatic negative thoughts, measured with ATQ, as well (Moldovan, 2007). Therefore, the certain knowledge of the evolution and positive finality of the events and relating to a God who accepts unconditionally the mortals reduces the automatic negative depressive thoughts in a relevant measure, from an ecologic point of view.

In order to estimate to what extend the subjects consider that the main character of the fragment (i.e. Zoe) thinks about the positive evolution of things and the finality in her favor, for the three levels of the study, the scores to the 10 questions were compared. Because all subjects knew from the summary provided , as well as from their previous experience with the play, how the events unfolded and what the ending was, the target questions brought more information on the subjects' adherence to the instructions offered for the three conditions of the study (i.e. non-framing, framing 1, framing 1bis and framing 2).

Table 11. F, p and d values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 – relation with God (unconditional acceptance), framing 1bis – relation with God (conditional acceptance) and framing 2 – certain knowledge of the positive finality

Dependent variables	F values	Total P	p values between conditions	d	Cohen's d converted into percentage
Thoughts connected to the positive evolution of things	F (3.115) =6.79	p <.01	**N –F2, p<.01** **F2 –F1bis, p<.01** N –F1, p>.05 F1-F1bis, , p>.05 N-F1bis,p>.05 F1-F2, p>.05	0.5 0.6 - - - -	69% 73% - - - -

The data obtained indicate that the thoughts connected to the positive evolution of things were significantly more in the framing 2 condition (knowing the positive evolution of events), as compared to the other groups, indicating the fact that the subjects observed the instructions (i.e. the ones on the non-framing group did not start with the idea that Zoe knew that things would be favorable to her).

The subjects in the framing 1bis group had a behavior similar to the subjects in the control group. Therefore, the relation with an authoritarian God, that imposes conditions to people does not stimulate the positive expectancies towards the outcome of the events.

Although it does not differ significantly from framing 2, the results of the subjects in the group framing 1 are similar to the ones in the control group. Therefore, the relation with a benevolent God stimulates a little, but not enough, the positive expectancies for a favorable outcome of the events. The mere trust in the relation with the Divinity may reduce the negative emotions and thoughts, without being always doubled by thoughts concerning the proper course of things.

3.5.   5th experimental study – The differentiated impact of the trust in a relation of unconditional acceptance from a supernatural agent (God) versus the interaction with the supernatural agent (i.e. prayer) that reiterates the unconditional acceptance on the experienced emotions, automatic negative thoughts, despair, trust in one's own forces and trust in the future

Specific introductory aspects

Selecting the materials for this study was focused on generating a text that could fulfill the criteria of a "distinct cognitive scenario" for the emotions of "fear" and "sadness" and that has the force to stimulate the identification of the characters, to insure the immersion into the story, as well as the experience of highly intense emotions.

The 5th study analyzes comparatively the impact (1) *of initiating an interaction with a supernatural agent considered to accept people unconditionally (i.e. prayer)* and (2) *trust in a relation of unconditional acceptance with God* on the subjects' emotions and thoughts.

Objectives

Starting from the idea of the different impact for initiating the behaviors of an interaction with the supernatural agent and of the belief in it, on the humans' thoughts and emotions, we intend to investigate:

- o the differentiated impact of initiating an interaction with the supernatural agent vs. the belief in its specific features (i.e. unconditional acceptance) on *emotions*, upon confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o the differentiated impact of initiating an interaction with the supernatural agent vs. the belief in its specific features (i.e. unconditional acceptance) on the *occureence of automatic negative depressive thoughts*, upon confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;
- o the differentiated impact of initiating an interaction with the supernatural agent vs. the belief in its specific features (i.e. unconditional acceptance) on the *trust in the future*,

upon confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

- o the differentiated impact of initiating an interaction with the supernatural agent vs. the belief in its specific features (i.e. unconditional acceptance) on the *trust in one's own strengths*, upon confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

- o the differentiated impact of initiating an interaction with the supernatural agent vs. the belief in its specific features (i.e. unconditional acceptance) on *despair*, upon confrontation with negative life situations (loss and threat) within a population without psychopathology;

Method
Subjects

93 volunteer undergraduate students of "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca took part to the study. They were distributed into three groups: (1) non-framing, (2) framing 1 – belief in a supernatural agent (God) and (3) framing 2 – interaction with a supernatural agent (i.e. prayer).

Materials

For activating the negative emotions, the subjects were presented with a distinct cognitive scenario consisting of a narration created to cover the theme of sadness / depression (mainly) and concern / anxiety (subsidiary).

The scenario created presented the image of a young woman, living alone in a big city who is confronted with a plausible situation for most of the subjects included in the study (they have to be in percentage of 84.9% young, single women). The main elements of the scenario concern the loss, within a short period of time, of more relevant social relations and the feeling of loneliness, despite the fact that the woman lives in a city. The theme of isolation and alienation of the individual lost in a big mass of people is frequently used in art, to stimulate the feeling of depression in a contemporary context, atypical for the beginnings of mankind.

This variant was chosen because the intention was:

1. to use a dramatic scenario, that contained the themes aimed at in an efficient manner and to generate intense emotions;
2. to use a scenario that could unfold efficiently the themes connected to the *irrevocable loss of the social relations, loneliness and isolation, as well as vague threat;*
3. to maximize the possibility of identifying the subjects of the study (84.9% of the study subjects were young single women) with the main character of the scenario, in a life situation plausible for most of them;
4. the immersion in the third person narration, to avoid activating the defense systems (see discussion in the 1st experimental study).

For the framing groups, but *not* for the non-framing group, besides the narration, another two distinctive elements were added:

- the specific features of the supernatural agent (omniscience, omnipotence, kindness, mercy, unconditional acceptance) – to both framing conditions;
- two different instructions, for the two types of framing.
  Instruction for Framing 1 – belief in God:

"Knowing that the woman believes that God is almighty, kind, merciful and all-knowing:

- loves her as she is, with her flaws and qualities;
- forgives her, even if she commits bad things sometimes, but she regrets what she has done;
- always considers her valuable, regardless of the fact that she behaves well of badly;
- knows and feels every thought, intention or emotion, because she part of its being.

please answer the following questions.

Instruction framing 2 – initiating the relation with the supernatural agent:

Knowing that the woman prays to God as follows:

"God almighty, kind, merciful and all-knowing. Thou who love me as I am, with my flaws and qualities. Thou who can forgive me even when I do bad things. Thou who believe in the value of my being, beyond my good or bad behaviors. Thou who feel any thought, intention or emotions, as Thou are a part of my being. Please give me the power to accept Thy decision over my life. Amen!"

Both instructions have in mind the reiteration of the idea of unconditional acceptance by a supernatural intentional agent, relation that facilitates (by support and faith, i.e. communication) the emotional and behavioral control.

For the "*non-framing*" group, the instruction was:

"Starting from the text above, please answer the following questions".

After reading the scenario, the subjects in the conditions "*non-framing*", "*framing 1*" and "*framing 2*" were asked to answer the following questions:

1. How confident could the woman be, *at this time*, in her future (hope for the future – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

2. How worried could the woman be, *at this time?* (negative emotions, concern – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

3. How sad could the woman feel, *at this time?* (negative emotions, sadness – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

4. How desperate could the woman feel, *at this time?* (disadaptive cognitions / emotions, desperation – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

5. How confident could the woman be, *at this time*, in her capacity to change the situation for the better (trust in her own strengths / self-efficiency – evaluated on a 1-10 scale);

6. Which of the thoughts below do you think the woman contemplates mostly, *at this time?*

The list of thoughts following this question is made up of 15 thoughts that represent the items of the ATQ questionnaire (Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire, Hollon, & Kendall, 1980).

7. How much do you think the woman feels of the below emotions, *at this time*?

The list of positive and negative emotions that follows this question is made up of the 39 emotions that form the items of the PDA scale (Affective Distress Profile - Opriş, & Macavei, 2007).

Design

A multifactorial experimental design with one independent variable, with 3 levels and 10 dependent variable was used.

The independent variable was the context of presenting the situation, with three levels: (1) ***non-framing*** (the scenario and the requirement to answer by relating to the woman's perspective), (2) ***framing 1 – belief in the supernatural agent (God)*** (the scenario and the requirement to answer by relating to the woman's perspective who believes in a God that accepts her unconditionally) and (3) ***framing 2 – initiating the interaction with a supernatural agent*** (the scenario and the prayer to the supernatural agent).

The dependent variables were (1) *hope for the future / trust in the future*, (2) *negative emotion – concern*, (3) *negative emotion –sadness, (4) despair, (5) trust in her own capacity to change things for the better, (6) automatic negative thoughts, (7) negative emotions - depression, (8) negative emotions - anxiety and (10) positive emotions*.

Assuming that the effect size in the investigated population is large, the number of subjects for each group should be of minimum 21 persons (Cohen, 1992). For an average effect size, the number of subjects in each group should be 52 (Cohen, 1992).

Results

The ANOVA test for independent samples was used, to compare the groups of non-framing, framing 1 – belief in God and framing 2 – initiating the interaction with God (prayer) for the dependent variables *trust in the future, concern, sadness, despair, trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better, automatic negative thoughts, negative emotions (depression, anxiety), general distress and positive emotions*.

Table 12. F, p and d values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 – belief in the supernatural agent (God), framing 2 – initiating the interaction (prayer)

Dependent variables	F values	Total P	p values between conditions	d	Cohen's d converted into percentage
Trust in the future	F (2.90) =19.59	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01**	1.6	95%
			N –F2, p=.054	0.6	73%
			F1-F2, p<.01	0.9	82%
Concern	F (2.90) =6.82	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.05**	0.7	76%
			N –F2, p>.05	-	-
			F1-F2, p<.01	0.9	82%
Sadness	F (2.90) =3.18	p <.05	N-F1, p>.05	-	-
			N –F2 p>.05	-	-
			F1-F2, p>.05	-	-
Despair	F (2.90) =15.56	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01**	1.2	88%
			N –F2, p>.05	-	-
			F1-F2, p<.01	1.2	88%
Trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better	F (2.90) =3,72	p <.05	**N –F1, p<.05**	0.6	73%
			N –F2, p>.05	-	-
			F1-F2, p>.05	-	-

Automatic negative thoughts	F (2.90) =18.22	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** N –F2, p>.05 **F1-F2, p<.01**	1.5 - 1.0	95% - 84%
Negative emotions – depression	F (2.90) =10.84	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** N –F2, p>.05 **F1-F2, p<.01**	0.9 - 0.9	82% - 82%
Negative emotions – anxiety	F (2.90) =9.86	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** N –F2, p>.05 **F1-F2, p<.01**	0.8 - 0.9	79% - 82%
General distress	F (2.90) =12.93	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** N –F2, p>.05 **F1-F2, p<.01**	1.0 - 1.0	84% - 84%
Positive emotions	F (2,90) =8.59	p <.01	**N –F1, p<.01** N –F2, p>.05 **F1-F2, p<.01**	0.8 - 0.7	79% - 76%

Table 12 presents the F and p values for the comparisons between the non-framing, framing 1 (belief in God) and framing 2 (initiation of a relation / prayer). At the same time, it presents the values of the Cohen's d coefficient for calculating the effect size. The effect sizes are large for all significant differences.

It is noticed that for the variables *concern* and *despair* - measured one-dimensionally, by only one item – the pattern of values is similar to *depression, anxiety, general distress* and *positive emotions* (measured with PDA), as well as *the automatic negative depression thoughts* (measured with ATQ). For all these dependent variables, the framing 1 group differs significantly from the control group and the framing 2 group. No significant differences were noticed between the control group and the framing 2 group. Thus, the reiteration of the belief in God was capable to reduce the negative emotions, the despair and the automatic negative thoughts, increasing, at the same time, the positive emotions.

For the variable *sadness,* measured by only one item, no significant differences are noticed between the three conditions. Similar to the situation in the previous experiments, the sadness as a functional emotion persists in situations of loss, regardless of the mental representation of that event.

The trust in the future varies continuously, having maximum values in the framing 1 group (belief in God), decreasing a little in the framing 2 group (initiation of the interaction / prayer) and being most reduced in the non-framing group. Significant differences are registered between the framing and non-framing group (the minimal threshold indicated in Table 12 can be determined by the relatively small number of subjects).

The trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better follows the pattern of the trust in the future. Significant differences are registered between the non-framing group and the framing 1 group (belief in God). Thus, the simple initiation of the interaction with God by prayer does not seem to stimulate significantly the trust in the future and in one's own strengths.

Comparing the means obtained by the study groups with the ones in the general population for the general distress, measured by PDA and for the automatic negative thoughts measured with ARQ, we notice that in both cases, the averages of the non-framing and framing 2 (initiation of interaction / prayer) groups are included in the 5th level - very high level of distress

(Opriş, & Macavei, 2007) and by automatic negative thoughts (Moldovan, 2007). At the same time, the averages of the framing 1 group (belief in God) are included in the 4th level – highly level of distress (Opriş, & Macavei, 2007) and by automatic negative thoughts (Moldovan, 2007).

Therefore, the belief in a relation of unconditional acceptance with God influences the negative emotions and the automatic negative thoughts in a relevant measure, perceivable in every-day life.

3.6.   Case study – The impact of relating to Deity on the emotions experienced and automatic thoughts in case of a person considering itself a believer

The case study is an "empirical research investigating a contemporary phenomenon within the life context where it occurs, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not very clear; multiple sources of information are used within" (Yin, 1984, pp. 23). Among the numerous roles that the case study has, there is the clarification of complex situations, as well as supplying extra arguments on the data obtained by the previous research.

The study was performed in six steps: (1) determining the questions the research had to answer to, (2) selecting the cases and determining the way to collect data and analyze the results, (3) preparing the data collection (4) gathering data, (5) evaluating and analyzing the data and (6) preparing the report (Yin, 1984).

(1) Determining the questions the research has to answer to

This study aims at investigating the effect of involvement in the communication with Divinity (for example prayer, looking for Biblical verses), having as a purpose reducing the negative thoughts and the automatic negative thoughts in life situations of increased stress and reduced social support. The main objective refers to determining the way in which initiating an interaction with God influences the emotions experienced and the thoughts. The entire process is observed within situations of abandon and experiencing the loss in social relations.

The life context aimed at is a stressful one that raised numerous issues of professional and social adaptation.

The type of communication with the Divinity involves:
- a. Reiterating certain specific features of a God: omnipotence, omniscience, kindness, mercy ("God almighty, kind, merciful and all-knowing);
- b. Reiterating the idea of God's love ("Thou who love me as I am, with my flaws and qualities");
- c. Reiterating the idea of God's forgiveness ("Thou, who can forgive me even when I do bad things")
- d. Reiterating the idea of unconditional value of the human being from God ("Thou who believe in the value of my being, beyond my good or bad behaviors").
- e. Reiterating the idea of permanent community with God ("Thou who feel any thought, intention or emotions. Thou who are always with me, as part of my being.")
- f. Reiterating the idea of God's active implication in one person's life ("Please give me the power to accept Thy decision over my life.")

In the second part of the study, besides the elements already mentioned, the communication with the Divinity also includes a prayer that aims at the following psychological aspects (substantiated on the model of rational prayers - Johnson, 2000):

Therefore, we intend to investigate:

- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the emotions* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the automatic negative thoughts* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the trust in the future* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the trust in one's own strengths* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the despair* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?

(2) Selection of the cases and determining the ways for collecting the data and analysis of the results

The subject of the study – In order to perform this study, only one subject was selected, F., 20 years old, student. As a result of a clinical interview (DMS IV) the possibility of any psychical disorders was eliminated. The initial interview revealed a life history marked by the loss of significant relations (for example her father's death), lack of trust in her own strengths, fluctuating self-image, great reactivity to social evaluations, increased desire for acceptance. At present, the person has a few significant relations that have the potential to offer her comfort and safety. The increased vulnerability to social rejection offer a proper context for using the situations of loss (real or potential), as efficient activators of the central themes specific to the emotions such as depression, guilt, sadness.

The psychological examination confirmed the important aspects underlined within the interview; the person does not suffer from clinical depression (BDI II – 12, reduced level of depression) and has an average unconditional acceptance of her own person (USAQ – 90, average level of the unconditional acceptance of her own person). Although no personality disorders were noticed, there are few specific features of the avoidant personality (clinical interview, personality questionnaire, SCID II).

Collecting the data – For identifying the *negative and positive emotions*, the Profile of the Affective Distress (Opriş, & Macavei, 2007) was used.

The concern and sadness were measured supplementary, as distinct emotions, on a Likert scale with 10 levels.

The automatic negative thoughts were measured with the Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire (Hollon, & Kendall, 2007).

The trust in the future, the trust in one's own strengths and the despair were measured as distinct cognitions, on a Likert scale with 10 levels.

Besides the quantitative measurements, the subject's thoughts, emotions and behaviors were measured qualitatively. The subject wrote daily a personal diary, describing in her own words her thoughts, how she felt and what she did.

Therefore, in order to insure the validity of the study, the target constructs were followed by validated tests, as well as by target questions and open questions, formulated as a personal diary.

(3) Preparing the data collection
Procedure
Initially the study was announced publicly, within meetings with the 1st and 2nd year students of "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca. From the persons who expressed their availability to participate into the study (5 persons), two gave up because they could not attend the meetings weekly, one was excluded because it fulfilled the criteria of DSM IV for generalized anxiety disorder and one manifested borderline disadaptive personality traits.

After the initial meeting, the subject received a brochure for the 1st week, that included, for each of the seven days of the week, four different pages / items:

1. An evaluation chart: (1) trust in the future, (2) concern, (3) sadness, (4) despair, (5) trust in her power to change things for the better. The subject was trained to think for 5 minutes, about a situation in which she felt abandoned by someone important and to describe briefly the situation.
2. ATQ test (Automatic Thoughts Questionnaire).
3. PDA test (Profile of the Affective Distress).
4. A journal with two columns; in the first column, the subject had to answer freely to the question: "What thoughts cross my mind?" and in the second column to the questions "How do I feel and what do I do?"

In the beginning of each day, it was mentioned that the four items had to be completed by the end of the day.

The meetings at the end of each of the four weeks had as a purpose the supportive counseling; the subject was encouraged to elaborate aspects connected to loss and interpersonal difficulties and to vent emotionally, without the intervention on a certain psychological mechanism.

The brochure of the second week comprised, besides the items existing for the 1st week – immediately after describing, for 5 minutes, a situation in which the person felt abandoned by someone important – the following instruction:

"Read the prayer below, focusing on your relation to God".

The indicated prayer comprised the following elements:

a. Reiterating certain specific features of a God: omnipotence, omniscience, kindness, mercy ("God almighty, kind, merciful and all-knowing);
b. Reiterating the idea of God's love ("Thou who love me as I am, with my flaws and qualities");
c. Reiterating the idea of God's forgiveness ("Thou, who can forgive me even whenIi do bad things")
d. Reiterating the idea of unconditional value of the human being from God ("Thou who believe in the value of my being, beyond my good or bad behaviors").
e. Reiterating the idea of permanent community with God ("Thou who feel any thought, intention or emotions. Thou who are always with me, as part of my being.")

f. Reiterating the idea of God's active implication in one person's life ("Please give me the power to accept Thy decision over my life.")

The brochure of the third week was identical with the one of the 1st week (basic levels).

The brochure of the 4th week was similar to the one of the 2nd week, with only one difference: besides the elements already indicated, comprised in the indicated prayer, the communication with God also includes the following psychological aspects (based on the model of the rational prayers - Johnson, 2000):

a. Accentuating the connection between own thoughts and the emotions experienced ("I confess that I myself cause a great part of my suffering and I harm myself, always repeating non-useful thoughts to myself");

b. Underlining the motivation to control the disadaptive emotions and behaviors ("I really want to master all my emotions and bad deeds");

c. Reiteration of the need to believe in the sacred text ("... I can do that only if I believe in the Holy Scripture");

d. Underlining the model role of Jesus Christ ("... I can do this only if ... and only if I follow the word of Jesus Christ, the Savior");

e. Appeal to the relation with the Divinity for restructuring the cognitions ("Help me, God, to balance in my hear these true things in the Holy Scripture");

f. Identifying the biblical verses relevant for the situations the person has to face.

The four brochures were brought by the subjects, as they were filled in, after each week.

Once a filled in brochure was delivered, the subject received the brochure for the next week. The brochures were issued starting from the procedure and results of the experimental studies presented before.

(4) Data collection

In a case study, the formal flexibility allows changes of its structure, justified by the concrete real situation. In this study, such a situation aimed at the initial training in the 1st week, that was indicated verbally to the subjects, but it did not occur written in the chart: "Think for 5 minutes about a situation in which you felt abandoned by someone important to you. Describe the situation briefly." Although the subject was clearly trained to describe the event in writing, in a certain part of the chart, at the end of the first week, there was noticed that this indication was not observed for days 2, 6, 7. The lack of recalling into the working memory of the events relevant for the emotions and thoughts investigated may change significantly their intensity and frequency. As a result, starting with the second week, the instruction was integrated in writing in the work chart.

(5) Data evaluation and analysis

The results obtained will be analyzed by referring to the initial questions of the study:

*   How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the automatic negative thoughts* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
*   How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the emotions* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
*   How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the trust in the future* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?

- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the trust in one's own strengths* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?
- How does the engagement in the communication with God influence *the despair* of a person declared a believer, in concrete life situations?

For this purpose, we will analyze:

- The themes included in the dairy, as answer to the daily questions: "What thoughts cross my mind?" and "How do I feel and what do I do?"
- The quantitative data obtained at the tests (ATQ și PDA), as well as to the five questions answered to, on a Likert scale with 1-10 levels.

(a) Themes of the diary

We present below the main themes identified in the daily filled in by the subject:

1. *Social support* – interaction with relevant persons, with a positive effect on the wellbeing of the subject;
2. *Future plans* – planning future events / positive life projections made together with a significant person.
3. *Behavioral activation* – involvement in activities that imply physical movement or travelling to certain places.
4. *Relation with the Divinity* – The feeling of communicating with the Divinity, described as "Divine revelation"
5. *Hope* – focusing on positive aspects of the present experience, even if it is perceived as being overall negative.
6. *Distracting the attention* – involvement in challenging, intellectual activities, with a blocking effect on processing the automatic negative thoughts.
7. *Frustration in the social relations* – unsatisfied expectations in her relation with significant persons.
8. *Social isolation* – abstention from any kind of social interactions (including with close persons).
9. *Lack of activity* – drastically reducing any kind of activities, with facilitating impact on the ruminations and processing the automatic negative thoughts.
10. *Danger of abandonment* – the possibility of rejection, abandonment in the future from a significant person, usually as a reaction to a negative feature of the subject (physical, intellectual, behavioral feature, etc.)
11. *Danger of failure* – the possibility to have a low performance at a certain task that could be evaluated negatively by the others.
12. *Loneliness / feeling of abandonment* – the perceived lack of attention and interest from the significant persons; the perceived lack of respect and appreciation from the others; the feeling of rejection from the others; the feeling of loneliness.

(b) Quantitative data aiming at: automatic thoughts, emotions, trust in the future, trust in one's own strength and despair

The data gathered in the four weeks were compared with the Mann-Whitney U test and grouped in four categories: negative cognitions, positive cognitions, negative emotions, positive emotions.

(6) Conclusions of the report

The influence of the engagement in the communication with God on the negative cognitions (automatic negative thoughts and despair)

The results of the study indicate the fact that, if the subject notices a decrease of the support and interest from the others, the systematic and guided relation to Divinity is expressed by an important reduction of the automatic negative depressive thoughts (i.e. having as an epicenter the theme of losing the relations) and of despair.

The influence of the engagement in the communication with God on the negative emotions (general distress, sadness / depression, fear / anxiety)

The strong impact of the guided communication with the Divinity on the negative emotions, in case of a reduced social support, can be followed at the level of the general distress, as well as in case of specific emotions. Thus, the intervention reduces significantly the sadness / depression and diminishes strongly the fear / anxiety and distress experienced by the subject.

The influence of the engagement in the communication with God on the positive cognitions (trust in the future and self-efficacy)

The trust in the future, as well as the self-efficacy perceived in changing things for the better are stimulated by the involvement in the prayer directed to God. This has an important increase in the fourth week, under conditions of social rejection and abandonment perceived, on the ground of reiterating the positive relation with Divinity.

The influence of the engagement in the communication with God on the positive emotions

The data obtained in this study plead in favor of the relative independence of the negative and positive emotions. The decrease, following the intervention of the level of negative emotions is not accompanied automatically by an increase in the positive affects. At the same time, the results underline the specificity of the themes of the different emotions; the intervention that aims at the specific themes of sadness / depression do not affect by themselves the cognitive processing responsible for the occurrence of the positive emotions.

Comparing the two basic levels, in which the intervention is missing, there is noticed that the only differences close to significance are obtained in case of trust ($p=.06$), despair ($p=.01$) and automatic negative thoughts ($p=.09$). In other words, after eliminating the intervention, under the conditions of the existence of a low social support and the dominance of the themes of

abandonment and loneliness, the person feels less trust in her future, more despair and is dominated by more automatic negative thoughts.

Comparing the first basic level with the first form of intervention (prayer), it is noticed that the only significant differences are obtained in case of negative emotions (p=.09) and sadness / depression (p=.08). The effect of the first intervention lead to diminishing the negative emotions in general and of sadness in particular, but without changing significantly the other evaluated parameters. Considering the fact that the first two weeks are characterized by the presence of themes such as *social support* and *behavioral activation*, that play the main part, it is very likely that the differences between the lack of intervention and the intervention by prayer to the Divinity, be strongly blurred by the relation with the close ones, the positive interactions with them and the involvement in various activities.

The comparison of the second basic level (3rd week) with the second type of intervention (prayer and search of religious texts), under the condition of the clear dominance of the relevant themes (i.e. *danger of abandonment; loneliness / feeling of abandonment*) offered the most suggestive results. The *automatic negative thoughts* (p=.01), as well as *the concern* (p=.01), *sadness* (p=.01), and *despair* (p=.01) are significantly more accentuated in the week without intervention. The scores on the *sadness / depression (PDA)* scale are larger in the lack of intervention (p=.09). At the same time, after introducing the intervention, *the trust in the future* (p=.01) and *the self-perceived auto-efficiency* (i.e. the trust in the power to change things for the better) (p=.01) are increased. The trend is maintained for negative emotions, positive emotions and fear/anxiety (measured with PDA), although they are not directly connected to the theme of loss, engaged in this study.

Therefore, in the case of the investigated person, because of the loneliness, reducing the social support and the feeling of abandonment, the reiteration of the personalized relation with the Divinity reduced drastically the negative emotions, mainly the depression and sadness. At the same time, it reduces the frequency of the automatic negative thoughts and of despair, under the conditions of accentuating the trust in the future and her own strengths.

The results obtained do not indicate major differences between the two types of intervention, for none of the variables measured. Thus, for this person, looking for relevant biblical fragments does not necessarily bring extra help; the most important effect is given by the reiteration of the relation with a God seen as almighty, all-knowing, kind, merciful, who loves her, forgives her and sees her value beyond her mistakes (i.e. unconditional acceptance and support from Divinity).

Although the fix duration of monitoring the cognitive and emotional factors investigated, as well as determining in advance the monitoring period, offers clarity in the structure, facilitating the replication, and also reduces the flexibility and accuracy in interpreting the data. The future studies could bring along supplementary information, keeping the intervention for a sufficiently long period of time, for clearly stabilizing the change obtained in the dependent variables.

3.7. Building a questionnaire concerning the relation human agent – supernatural agent The questionnaire of Relating to God (CRED)

[2] **The first form of CRED - CCR (Questionnaire of religious beliefs)**

What will the questionnaire measure?

The questionnaire of religious beliefs (CCR) is a psychological instrument, made up of 12 items concerning the trust in God's *love* and *forgiveness.* Starting from the concept of *unconditional acceptance of one's own person* (Chamberlain, & Haaga, 2001), the following assertions were issued, aiming at:
  (1) God's unconditional love
  (2) God's conditional love
  (3) God's unconditional forgiveness
  (4) God's forgiveness conditioned by punishment (justitiary act)

Description of items

Considering the fact that the acceptance, love and forgiveness are either conditioned by the presence or absence of certain manifestation in the relation between two (natural or supernatural) agents, or unconditioned, the items of the questionnaire were grouped in such a way, so that the general score of the scale "God's love" is calculated by adding the scores of three items of "unconditional love" (calculated directly) and of three items of "conditional love" (calculated reversely). Another six items, formulated according to the same principle, form the scale "God's forgiveness".

Test fidelity and validity

For studying the validity and fidelity of the test, this study was performed as follows. 194 adult volunteer subjects participated in the study.

Established psychological instruments were used for measuring the following psychological constructs, considered to be in (direct or reversed) relation with the religious beliefs measured by CCR:
  ▪ Unconditional acceptance of one's own person
  ▪ Self-devalorization of one's own person;
  ▪ Emotional distress and negative emotions.

The fidelity of CCR was estimated by the method of the internal consistency. For this purpose, the Alfa Cronbach coefficient was calculated. For a sample of 194 subjects, the value of Alfa Cronbach was of 0.82. The score indicates a good internal consistency, indicating that the scale items evaluate the same construct.

In order to estimate the criterion validity of CCR, the scores for this test were correlated with the ones obtained when measuring emotions and cognitions that, theoretically, could be related to the measured construct. In a first step, the linear correlations (r) between the variables measured, were calculated. The correlation coefficients are presented in Table 13. As it can be noticed, the only significant correlations are between the religious beliefs and the negative global evaluation (self-devalorization). Although the differences are significant al a level of .05, the values are small and do not allow for extensive interpretations. Nevertheless, it is relevant to

mention that the association between the negative emotional manifestations (negative emotions and emotional issues) and the religiousness (evaluated in global terms) in the specialty literature has similar values. Thus, in a meta-analysis on 147 individual studies (N=98.975), Smith and co. (2003) found a correlation of −.09 between the depressive symptoms and religiousness.

Table 13. The correlation coefficients (r) for the religious beliefs, unconditional acceptance of one's own person, self-devalorisation and distress

	Self-devalorization	Unconditional acceptance	Distress
Religious beliefs	-.16*	.06	-.13
Religious beliefs – love	-.14*	.04	-.12
Religious beliefs - forgiveness	-.13*	.05	-.11

The correlations are significant at *p <.05

In order to estimate the impact of the religious beliefs on the negative emotions, unconditional acceptance of one's own person and self-devalorization, extreme groups were formed (m +/- 1A.S.). Thus, the subjects were selected and divided depending on the level of religious beliefs in two groups (high and low level of religious beliefs). The two groups were compared depending on the (1) distress, (2) unconditional acceptance of one's own person and (3) self-devalorization.

Table 14. t and p values for the comparisons between groups with high-level, i.e. low-level of religious beliefs and Cohen's d values for the effect size

High / low level of religious beliefs – love	t	p	d
Distress	-1.44	p>.05	-
Unconditional acceptance	-1.79	p>.05	-
Self-devalorization	-2.11	**p <.05**	**0.6**

High / low level of religious beliefs – forgiveness	t	p	d
Distress	-0.85	p>.05	-
Unconditional acceptance	0.85	p>.05	-
Self-devalorization	-2.27	**p <.05**	**0.7**

The results indicate the fact that there exist significant differences only as concerns the tendency of global negative evaluation of one's own person, in case of the groups formed depending on the level of beliefs of the type "love", as well as in the ones formed based on the

level of the beliefs of the type "forgiveness". The calculated effect size is large. In other words, the persons who believe in God's love and forgiveness tend to view themselves less negatively than those who do not have such beliefs.

Conclusions and discussions

Based on the results of the study, a few conclusions have to be drawn. First of all, it is important to notice the fact that one of the main cognitive elements in the negative emotions like sadness and depression – self-devalorization – are negatively associated with the trust in God's love and forgiveness. A hypothesis not to be neglected would be that some types of spiritual beliefs are involved in such a way in the mechanisms for producing emotions, mediating or moderating their occurrence. The relation between the cognitive mechanisms already validated of the depressive symptoms and the spiritual beliefs deserve a special attention in the future studies.

The good internal consistency of the questionnaire suggests the "success" of all items, to capture the same aspect of the relation with the Divinity. But starting from this observation, in a qualitative analysis performed by three Theology graduates, there were noticed certain lacks in the content of the questionnaire. Thus, although the items capture consistently the trust in two fundamental features of God, they do not cover sufficiently the relational aspect. From a theological point of view, the permanent relation with the Divinity forms an essential component of the grace and the occurrence of ecstatic experiences (evidently reducing the negative emotions, associated mainly with the lack of faith and the orientation towards unessential aspects of the existence). Under a psychological aspect, the lack of the social exchange between the supernatural and human agents forms one of the milestones that marks the historical explosion of the cultural manifestations of the interaction of man and Divinity. At the same time, including the specific features of the Divinity in the scheme of the self, by means of its identifying with it, could change essentially the relation between the religious beliefs and the emotional and behavioral manifestations.

Then, although the acceptance and love from God are perfectly compatible with the idea of unconditioning, the forgiveness is subjected entirely to this rule. Another essential specific feature of the Divinity –the justitiary character – modulate this aspect. Therefore, the acknowledgement of the error (central element of the social change), expressed by regret / repentance is imposed as a minimal condition of forgiveness.

As a consequence, it was decided (1) the opportunity of including another subscale that covers the construct of *perceived closeness to God* and (2) nuancing the items of unconditional forgiveness with the element of *forgiveness under the conditions of the occurrence of regret.*

The second form of CRED – CCR-R (The revised questionnaire of religious beliefs)

What does the questionnaire intend to measure?

The revised questionnaire of religious beliefs (CCR-R) is a psychological instrument, made up of 29 items concerning (1) the trust in God's *love,* (2) the trust in God's *forgiveness* and (3) *the perceived closeness* to God. Starting from the items of the initial form of the

questionnaire (CCR) another six items were added for the first two subscales – love and forgiveness – as well as another 11 items aiming at the perceived closeness to God.

In order to formulate the revised variant of CCR, there were issues assertions that aim at:
(1) God's unconditional love
(2) God's conditional love
(3) God's unconditional forgiveness (at present, the regret)
(4) God's forgiveness conditioned by punishment (justitiary act)
(5) Immediate closeness to God (direct relation with the Divinity)
(6) Mediated closeness to God (mediated relation with the Divinity)

Description of items

The items of the questionnaire were grouped so that the general score in the scale "God's love" be calculated adding the scores of five items of "unconditional love", directly calculated and of five items of "conditional love", calculated inversely. Another eight items (4 direct and 4 reversed), formulated according to the same principle, form the scale "God's forgiveness". The scale of perceived closeness to God is made up of 11 items: 3 of them represent the mediated relation with God, while the other 8 items express the direct relation with the Divinity.

Test fidelity and validity

For studying the validity of the test, this study was performed as follows. 79 adult volunteer subjects participated in the study.

Established psychological instruments were used for measuring three psychological constructs, considered to be in (direct or reversed) relation with the religious beliefs measured by CCR-R. Because in the previous study, the relation between the religious beliefs and the tendency to self-devalorization (beliefs associated to the depressive symptomatology) proved to be robust and relevant, a questionnaire for measuring the depression will be used. There were measured:

- The intensity of the depression symptomatology
- Optimism
- Negative emotions
- Positive emotions.

Because of the small number of subjects, the internal consistency of this form of CCR-R could not be calculated.

In order to estimate the criterion validity of CCR-R, the scores for this test were correlated with the ones obtained when measuring emotions and cognitions that, theoretically, could be related to the measured construct. The linear correlations (r) between the variables measured, were calculated.

The correlation coefficients are presented in Table 15. As it can be noticed, significant positive correlations were obtained between all types of religious beliefs (love, forgiveness and relation) and optimism. The same type of relation is to be noticed between the religious belief such as forgiveness and the positive emotions.

To be noticed that between the religious beliefs measured this way and the depression symptomatology, the robust relation reported in the specialty literature is identified; the correlation index identified by Smith and co. (2003) −.096, was very close to the values found on this occasion, as well.

Table 15. Correlation coefficients (r) for the religious beliefs, positive and negative emotions, optimism, depression

	Positive emotions	Negative emotions	Optimism	Depression
Religious beliefs - love	.17 N=29	-.00 N=31	.46** N=37	-.12 N=35
Religious beliefs – forgiveness	.55** N=31	-.16 N=32	.44** N=39	-.11 N=37
Religious beliefs – relation	.20 N=30	-.06 N=31	.42** N=38	-.03 N=36

The correlations are significant at **$p < .01$

Conclusions and discussions

Beyond their obvious limits – small number of subjects, relatively heterogeneous groups, lacks and omissions in filling in the psychological instruments, etc., the two studies bring useful clarifications for approximating a proper variant of the Questionnaire of Religious Beliefs. The increase of the number of items on scales, nuancing the items of conditional forgiveness, as well as introducing the scale of perceived closeness to God complete efficiently the initial form of 12 items of the questionnaire.

Corroborating the information gathered while applying these tests, with the results of other experimental studies, the conclusion was drawn that reformulating the items in the third person would be advisable. We have to remember that in the pilot study used for building the scenarios of the framing experimental studies, when the subjects were stimulated to make the insertion in the first person, the initiation of the coping mechanisms had as a result extremely defensive answers, in contradiction to the previous (and subsequent) assertions of the individuals, as concerns their own reaction to the context of the scenario. The social desirability, among others, could also alter the subjects' answers, biasing them in one direction or another.

When formulating the final variant of the questionnaire, one will have to consider all these aspects, noticed on formulating the intermediary forms.

Resulted form of CRED (Questionnaire of the Relation with God)

Starting from the two preliminary forms, the Questionnaire of religious beliefs (CCR) and the revised Questionnaire of religious beliefs (CCR-R), to which a few other items, formed according to the same criteria, were added, an item base was set up, generating the final form of the instrument: the Questionnaire of the Relation with God (CRED).

It will keep the three scales previously determined (1) beliefs concerning God's love, (2) beliefs concerning God's forgiveness and (3) beliefs concerning the relation with the Divinity.

The items that will be included in the scales, will be determined following an expert validation, where experts in psychology and theology will decide, based in the category definition, where each item can be included. The participating subjects are 16 experts, 10 bachelor psychologists and 6 theology graduates, all active in their profession.

At the end of the series of experiments performed for building the Questionnaire of the Relation with God – CRED, 30 items of three distinct categories and six subcategories were imposed. The items are formulated in the third person, to avoid activating defense mechanisms that could bias the final score. As follows, the final form of CRED will be given to a number of 920 subjects, to determine the scale fidelity and the factor load of its items.

The fidelity and validity of CRED – the variant with 30 items

For studying the validity and fidelity of the test, a study with 920 adult, volunteer subjects was performed.

The fidelity of CRED was estimated by the method of the internal consistency. For this purpose, the Alfa Cronbach coefficient was calculated. For a sample of 920 subjects, the value of Alfa Cronbach was of 0.91. The score indicates a good internal consistency, indicating that the scale items evaluate the same construct. Table 36 presents the Alfa Cronbach coefficients for the CRED subscales.

Table 16. The Alfa Cronbach coefficients for the CRED subscales

Subscale	Alfa Cronbach
Unconditional love	.90
Conditional love	.83
Unconditional forgiveness	.89
Conditional forgiveness	.37
Unmediated relation	.82
Mediated relation	.77

One can notice that for the subscale "unconditional forgiveness", the coefficient of internal consistency is smaller than for the rest of the subscales. Most of the items of this subscale were eliminated following the expert validation, and only two were left. Most of the experts considered that this subscale is not very relevant for the built scale.

The rest of the Alfa Cronbach coefficients have large values, indicating a good internal consistency for this questionnaire.

In order to estimate the construct and content validity of CRED, an expert validation was performed, having as a purpose checking the correspondence between the existing formulated items and the theory on which they were grounded. The results of the study indicated the existence of a high consensus between the experts participating to the study, about the degree to which the questions of the test reflect the theory that substantiate them. In order to estimate the factorial validity of CRED, the items and the subscales of CRED were analyzed.

Following the data analysis, there were noticed significant but not too large correlations, between all CRED subscales, indicating the fact that they refer to the general measured construct – the perceived relation to God – as well as the fact that it covers relatively different aspects of this construct.

After the factorial design of CRED subscales, there resulted the saturation of CRED subscales in two extracted factors, using the analysis method of the main components. Thus, it is noticed that the Unconditional love, the Unconditional forgiveness and the Unmediated relation all load on factor 1 that we can call "Direct and unconditional relation to God".

The conditional love and the conditional forgiveness load on factor 2, called "Conditional relation to God".

The relation mediated load on both factors, with focus on factor 1. Later studies will have to clarify the utility and relevance of the items that formed the subscale "mediated relation".

In other words, all the three subscales of Love, Forgiveness, Relation load on only one component, that can be called "The perceived relation to God".

Similar to the analysis made on the CRED subscales, the item analysis also indicates the existence of two different factors that could be called "Direct and unconditional relation to God" and "Conditional relation to God".

In order to estimate the criterion validity of CRED, the scores for this test were correlated with the ones obtained at an optimism questionnaire, given the fact that this construct would be in direct relation with the perceived relation with the Divinity. After processing the data, there was noticed that the scores in the subscales of Unconditional love, Unconditional forgiveness and Unmediated relation are significantly correlated with the optimism score. In other words, relating to a God perceived as being in direct contact with the person and offering love and unconditional forgiveness is associated with high levels of optimism.

In order to estimate the the impact of the religious beliefs on optimism, self-esteem, depression and automatic negative thoughts, extreme groups were formed (m +/- 1A.S.). Thus, the subjects were selected and divided depending on the level of religious beliefs in two groups (high and low level of religious beliefs). The two groups were compared depending on the (1) optimism, (2) self-esteem and (3) depression and (4) automatic negative depression thoughts.

Table 17. t and p values for the comparisons between the groups with high level, i.e. low level of religious beliefs, depending on the optimism, self-esteem, depression and automatic negative thoughts

High / low level of the religious beliefs	t	p	d	Cohen's d converted into percentages
Optimism	2.39	**p <.01**	0.4	62%
Self-esteem	1.82	**p =.07**	0.3	66%
Depression	-.94	p>.05	-	-
Automatic negative depressive thoughts	- 1.51	p>.05	-	-

The data in table 17 indicate the fact that the persons with an increased level of religious beliefs tend to be more optimistic and have an increased level of self-esteem, as compared to the subjects who have such belief in a reduced degree. The limit threshold of .07 for the self-esteem

was considered as indicating a significant difference, because the effect size is average. In case of depression and automatic negative thoughts, no significant differences were noticed between the two groups. Given the fact that the study involved the general population and the depression has specific mechanisms, as well as certain activators, these data are largely justified.

Taken together, the results obtained indicate an organization of the items and subscales depending on the component conditioning vs. unconditioning (regardless of the fact that it is love or forgiveness). In general, in the variant with 30 items, the Questionnaire of the Relation with God seems a sufficiently valid and precise instrument to be used. Later studies should clarity the relation of the CRED scores with the ones for the scales measuring constructs associated with the perceived relation to God.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND GENERAL DISCUSSIONS

On the way people represent mentally their supernatural agents depends the interaction with them. The studies show systematically that when the Divinity is perceived as being omniscient, omnipotent, kind and implicated in people's lives, people tend to orient towards it, to trust that relation until delegating the responsibility for solving the problematic issue (Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck, 2001). A though, threatening, vengeful, disinterested or hostile image stimulates the detachment from that relation (Maynard, Gorsuch, & Bjorck, 2001).

The way man represents God was approached in numerous studies that aimed at identifying the specific features of Divinity, that can be supported by empirical data. With very few exceptions, the studies concerning the way God is represented mentally refer to God's character / personality (i.e. the specific features that define him) (Gibson, 2008). The assembly of features that characterize God in people's minds occurs in the specialty literature under various names: "God concept", "God image" or "God representation") (Gibson, 2008). Although the three terms are used interchangeably in the literature investigating the mental representation people have about God, one tries systematically to separate the purely cognitive aspects (i.e. the God concept) from the existential ones, with a strong affective load (i.e. God's image) (Gibson, 2008). Recently, the focus was more on replacing these terms with the notion of *cognitive scheme* that could cover better the mental representation of an experience reality (Fiske, & Taylor, 1991; Gibson, 2008).

The relation with God seems relevant only upon activating certain negative events primed by specific cognitive scenarios. Under normal life conditions, the individuals rarely refer to their relation with the Divinity. As a consequence, the unmediated relation to the Divinity is hard to observe in the specific populations (for instance, the monks), as they have a permanent relation to God, to build their self-image by referring to it. Therefore, accepting one's own person, the self-esteem or their automatic thoughts could be closely connected to the permanent relation with the Divinity.

In our studies, we intended to investigate the impact of priming certain religious convictions about God's specific features and attitudes on the subjects' emotions and thoughts. In a series of five experiments, we followed the way different frames, accentuating different aspects of the relation to Divinity, can modulate the experience of emotions and the frequency of certain thoughts.

In order to obtain the activation of certain specific negative emotions, we have used the concept of "cognitive scenario", organized around the theme of loss and danger. The results of the selection of this method were underlined by including the subjects in the last test sample, used to measure the negative emotions. This situation indicates the presence in our samples of a high level of negative emotions, much above the population average value. Using such a large level of the negative emotions was necessary because the impact of the religious beliefs could have been stronger in problematic life situations, in which the persons experience distress. In order to avoid activating the defense systems, the way of inserting the subjects in the scenario was presented in the third person.

Starting from the cognitive substratum of sadness and depression, besides the general distress, specific negative emotions (i.e. depression and anxiety) and automatic negative depressive thoughts, we measured in these studies the trust in the future and the trust in one's capacity to change things for the better, as well as the despair. Collaterally, we were interested in the way the subjects build the sense of the events presented and how they make causal assignments when they are not told to whom the presented aversive situation is due.

In the *1st experimental study,* the main purpose was to follow how the assignment of negative events occurred to a spiritual entity endowed with God's fundamental features can influence the subjects' emotions and thoughts.

All together, the results obtained show that, getting involved in a spiritual type scheme (characterized by underlining the connection man – supernatural agent) may activate implicit and explicit processes of activating the sense and significance, that moderate the impact of the negative events on emotions and hope for the future. The presence of a benevolent supernatural agent in the process of taking decisions is capable to influence not only the polarity of emotions, as well as the trust in people's conduct. Explaining negative life situations (i.e. loss, threat) by the intervention of a supernatural agent with features similar to God (i.e. omnipotence, omniscience, kindness, justice, love, mercy) can make the persons who have strong spiritual beliefs feel less sadness and concern and more trust in the future, as compared to the persons to whom the religious beliefs are not important. Simply said, people to whom the belief in a spiritual entity (Divinity) is strong seem to have a form of mental protection that diminishes their negative emotions and accentuates their trust in the future, when they lose something dear or they feel threatened.

The 2nd experimental study brought our investigation a step further, including in the formula the attitude of conditional versus unconditional acceptance of people by the spiritual entity. In other words, we wanted to follow if the way in which the individual perceive the attitude of the supernatural agent towards people may influence the thoughts and emotions in an aversive life situation. It seems like the relation with supernatural agents is somehow useful, even when its main coordinate is the idea of justice (with its implications as concerns the award and the punishment). Nonetheless, certain types of relations human being – Divinity are more useful, having deeper implications at a cognitive, as well as emotional level. A relation characterized by unconditional love, valorization of the person's essence, tolerance and forgiveness of mistakes and a quasi-permanent connection (that goes up to identification in case of deeply spiritual persons) between the two agents seems to be especially efficient.

Based on the results of the first two studies, the *3rd and 4th experiments* start from the premises that people's emotions and thoughts can be influence directly by the mere cognitive recognition of events (or trust in one's own capacity to anticipate the progress of things) and the

trust in the influence of a supernatural agent (without assuming the knowledge of the evolution of things). In other words, *to know* and *to have faith* could affect differently the people's emotions and thoughts, in stressful life situations. When the life context is dominated by the danger of losing the social relations and the social status and by the perception of the irrevocable loss of the chance to remedy things, the persons' reactions are modulated by the way in which they represent the evolution and personal significance of the situation they find themselves into.

If in the 3rd experiment we were interested only in the distinction between knowing the finality of the event – trust in a supernatural agent having specific features similar to God, in the 4th experiment, the trust in the spiritual entity took the form of its two different attitudes (i.e. the conditional acceptance and the unconditional acceptance) that doubled its features. The results of the 3rd study show that *to know what is going to happen* and *to believe in the help of a supernatural entity* produce similarly negative emotions (i.e. concern, anxiety, depression, general distress) and despair. At the same time, the trust in the future and the trust in one's own capacity to change things for the better increase significantly if the person knew that the things would evolve favorably or believes that it would receive divine help. The two representations of the situation – in terms of knowledge versus belief – proved to be both efficient in stimulating the trust in a better future. If the attitude of conditional or unconditional acceptance (4th experimental study) are added to the specific features of the supernatural agent, the impact of the representations formed in such a way influence differently people's thoughts and emotions. The results obtained in this study show that *knowing what would happen* and *assigning the events of your life to a supernatural agent who accepts you unconditionally* reduce the negative emotions similarly. At the same time, the two ways of mental representation of the situation decrease the intensity of despair and increase the trust in the future and in one's own forces. The relation with a good, but fair God, who gratifies and punishes depending on the other's behavior, does not help sufficiently to control the negative emotions and thoughts in unfavorable life situations, especially when the persons knows it has made mistakes. But when the individual knows it has done nothing wrong, even the mental relation to an agent who accepts it unconditionally may influence positively its emotions and thoughts (2nd experiment). Therefore, it seems that the impact of the conditional acceptance from a supernatural entity depends on the efficiency that the person manages to accept the rules imposed by it. Starting from the distinction conviction – behavior, *the 5th experimental study* aims at investigating the degree to which initiating the interaction with God by prayer has similar effects with the belief as such. The results obtained plead clearly in favor of the superiority of faith on the behavior to pray, when controlling the negative emotions and thoughts and stimulating the positive emotions.

The results of the 5th experimental study underline the fact that trust in an omnipotent, omniscient, kind, merciful God and who accepts one unconditionally is capable to reduce significantly the negative affects and thoughts. The communication by prayer with a God with the same assumed specific features, without the component *faith* manages to influence people's thoughts and emotions to a lesser degree.

In order to test under ecological conditions the results of the five experimental studies, a case study was chosen, in which the interaction with God was guided in case of a subject who declared that the religion and the relation with the Divinity are central to its life. The preference for a subject with this feature was given by the fact that, systematically, the data obtained in experiments underlined the importance of the belief in generating the impact on subjects' thoughts and emotions. Valorizing the conclusion according to which the positive representation of the supernatural agent, organized around the people's unconditional acceptance is the most

efficient in controlling thoughts and emotions, the manipulations within the study took into account the guidance towards the relation with such a Divinity. The option of such a representation of the Divinity was strengthened by the concordance with the image that the subject of the study had before about God. The results of the study indicate the fact that, under the conditions that the subject noticed a diminishing of the support and interest from the others, the systematic and guided relation with the Divinity expresses in an important reduction of the automatic negative depressive thoughts (i.e. having as a main idea the theme of losing the relations) and despair. The strong impact of the guided communication with the Divinity on the negative emotions, under the conditions of the reduced social support, can be followed at the level of the general distress, as well as in case of the specific emotions. Thus, the intervention could reduce significantly the sadness / depression and diminishes strongly the fear / anxiety and distress experienced by the subject. The trust in the future, as well as the self-efficacy perceived in changing things for the better, are stimulated by the implication in the prayer to God. They are importantly increased in case of reiterating the positive relation with the Divinity, under the conditions of social rejection and experienced abandonment. The data obtained in our study bring another argument for the relative independence of the negative and positive emotions. The diminishing, after the intervention, of the level of the negative emotions is not automatically accompanied by an increase of the positive affects. At the same time, the results underline the specificity of the themes of different emotions; the intervention that aims at the specific themes of sadness / depression does not affect by themselves the cognitive processing responsible with the occurrence of the positive emotions.

Starting from the data obtained in the first six studies, we have considered the possibility of formulating a questionnaire, grounded on the observations of Gibson (2008) that: (1) aims at the relation human being – supernatural agent, (2) characterize this relation for the notion of Divinity (God in a Christian meaning), (3) valorizes the existing studies concerning the essential features of the supernatural agents in general and of the Christian God in particular, (4) aims at the way in which God relates to people and (4) aims specifically only at those relevant features for the emotional and behavioral control.

Answering to Gibson's observations (2008), who noticed that there are no instruments that can identify the people's perception of the way in which God relates cognitively and emotionally to them, the Questionnaire of the Relation with God (CRED) contains 30 items that are grouped into three subscales: love, forgiveness and the relation with God.

Formulated in the third person, the items try to avoid the activation of the defense systems, a phenomenon observed in the pilot study that precedes the 1st experimental study.

The analysis of the factorial validity of CRED reveals two different factors that could be called "Direct and unconditioned relation to God" and „Conditioned relation to God". In general, the results obtained indicate an organization of the items and subscales depending on the conditioning versus nonconditioning component (either it is love or forgiveness). The Questionnaire of the Relation with God seems a sufficiently valid and precise instrument, to be used safely. Later studies should clarify the relation of the scores of CRED with the ones obtained from other scales that measure constructs associated with the relation perceived with God and to clarify the utility of the subscale of unmediated relation for the general population.

In general, the studies comprised in this paper bring arguments to support the importance of investigating the effect the perceived relation to God – expressed most likely in a relational social scheme – has in stabilizing the persons' emotions and cognitions in adverse life situations. The direct implications of these data aim at approaching a person's religious beliefs in

psychological counseling and psychotherapy, and guiding the person to use them in difficult moments when the social support is reduced or absent.

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