

Preface

The focus of this volume is the development of adolescents' values and religiosity in cultural context. Values are a major motivational and normative basis for the development of individual identity, belief systems, and behaviors. Moreover, values serve to guide social processes in interpersonal interactions. Similarly, religious beliefs and practices play a significant role in adolescent social behaviors, relationships, and adjustment. Adolescents' values and religiosity are typically related to cultural norms and models. Cultural factors affect what specific values and religious beliefs are endorsed by adolescents in the society and how value and religious systems direct their beliefs, decision making, and actions during their development.

However, research on adolescents' values and religiosity has unfortunately been conducted primarily in Western societies, and the role of the cultural context has received relatively little attention in both theoretical and empirical approaches. As a result, our understanding of adolescents' values and religious functioning has been largely limited to Western, particularly North American, cultures.

Over the past few decades, interest in the role of culture in value and religious development in adolescence has burgeoned and has expanded exponentially in many regions of the world, particularly Asia, Europe, the Middle East, and South America. A number of research programs have developed in different cultural contexts; the findings so far are inconsistent. In this volume, we intend to address the questions of whether and how adolescent values and religious beliefs and behaviors may vary in their prevalence, interpretations, causes, and consequences across cultures. For example, across cultures, adolescents may differ in their perceived importance of values such as personal achievement and group well-being. There

are also substantial cultural variations in religious orientation, beliefs, practices, and involvement. Relatedly, cultural values guide the interpretation of specific values, religious beliefs, and behaviors and thus impart psychological “meanings” related to a worldview. Consequently, the developmental processes and patterns of values and religion may differ from one culture to another.

In preparation for this volume, the editors organized an international and interdisciplinary conference in 2010 at the Marbach Castle, supported by the Jacobs Foundation. At the conference, 25 scholars from Europe, the United States, Israel, Canada, China, Palestine, Japan, Indonesia, and India presented their studies and, together with 10 junior researchers, discussed issues related to values and religion in youth development. The conference cut across several areas of psychology, sociology, and religious studies. This book is largely a product of the conference, although the chapters in the book do not simply summarize the conference presentations and discussions. The book builds on intensive discussions and further research following the conference. The authors of each chapter attempt to provide a novel and broad perspective on culture, values, and religion in youth development, and to integrate theoretical approaches and empirical findings on a particular topic.

The chapters in this volume are concerned with various issues in the field, such as the impact of social changes and cultural conditions on values and religious orientations and practices, culturally prescribed socialization processes in value and religious development, the cultural interpretations of adolescents’ religious experience and expression, and adaptive and maladaptive values and religious activities from a cultural perspective. The authors have incorporated into their discussions findings from research programs that have used multiple methodologies, including both qualitative (e.g., interviewing) and quantitative (e.g., large-scale surveys, standardized questionnaires) approaches, and adolescents in cultures from East to West and from South to North (Asia, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and ethnic groups in the United States, and Western and Eastern Europe). The authors also pay attention to various religious and nonreligious groups (e.g., Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu for religious groups).

This volume consists of 18 chapters in 4 parts. It is unique in that it focuses on social and cultural contexts, includes perspectives from multidisciplinary backgrounds, and presents recent research findings based on diverse methodologies. Most chapters are organized according to theoretical issues with an in-depth discussion of related empirical findings concerning basic developmental processes, culture, social values, and religion. The volume is

of interest not only to social and behavioral scientists who study adolescent development, but also to sociologists, economists, and political scientists. This volume is also useful to educators and practitioners (e.g., counseling and clinical psychologists, social workers) who provide services to youth, particularly with diverse cultural backgrounds.

To conclude, values and religion as part of cultural context obviously play a substantial role in adolescent development. As most societies in today's world are undergoing rapid changes, how values, religious beliefs, and culture affect social competence, attitudes, and behaviors of adolescents in their adaptation to the new environment is an important issue for developmental scientists. Our goal in putting together this volume is to provide a forum for systematic and in-depth discussions of theoretical perspectives, research findings, existing problems in the research, and strategies to solve the problems in this area. We hope these discussions will be conducive to a better understanding of adolescent development in a changing context and further exploration of the involvement of contextual factors in development in the future.