Our team is increasingly concerned with the subject of religion. In the study described in more detail below, we have examined the extent to which misconceptions about Islam can be reduced through corrective information and unconventional education (Moritz et al., 2016). This study and a follow-up study (Moritz et al., 2018) have demonstrated that through certain modes of information presentation both prejudices against Islam among non-Muslims and prejudices against Christianity among Muslims can be reduced. Another study examined whether certain images of God (a punitive vs. a loving God) act as a risk vs. protective factor for the successful treatment of mental disorders (Agorastos et al., 2012). Extreme religious beliefs (the religious worldview of the Ku Klux Klan, Branch Davidians, Boko Haram, etc.) as well as extreme political views are potentially “delusion-capable”. Therefore, we focus on the question of when and what factors can turn piety into fanaticism. Our research studies on religion are almost exclusively supported by our own funds and rely on donations.

Corrective Information Alters Preconceptions about Islam

Since the attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001, resentment against Islam in the Western world has significantly increased. In a recent study (Moritz et al., 2016), we investigated the attitudes of a large sample draw from the German population towards the three great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, and Islam). In addition, we addressed the question of whether prejudices against Islam can be reduced through the provision of corrective information. To this end, we used an approach derived from our metacognitive training for psychosis (MCT) that is designed to induce changes in attitudes by “sowing the seeds of doubt” through exposure to surprising information.

In this study, a total of 1,715 participants from the general population were first asked to rate the three great monotheistic religions in terms of progressiveness, tolerance, and peacefulness. Then, the participants were asked to answer 11 knowledge questions about religious themes. The questions were chosen to elicit false and cliché-oriented responses or prejudices against Islam (e.g., whether female genital mutilation was an Islamic custom [false], which religion dedicated a book to Jesus’ mother Mary [Islam], which religions revere Jesus as a prophet [Christianity and also Islam]). Participants had to select the answers in a multiple-choice format, graded according to confidence. Following this, the correct answers were shown along with detailed explanations. Finally, participants were asked to provide their current attitudes towards the three religions once again

Attitudes toward Islam were initially much more negative compared to Judaism and Christianity but improved significantly after the presentation of the answers. As expected, participants displayed many gaps in knowledge about Islam (60% wrong answers). Predictor analyses showed that the attitudes of the participants who initially had been very critical towards Islam changed the most. A negative attitude towards Islam was predicted by the number of false and Islam-critical responses, older age, and male gender.

The results suggest that prejudices against Islam are at least partially caused by lack of knowledge and that a metacognitive intervention strategy can help to correct distorted views of religious beliefs. Improved education about Islam and a critical discussion regarding the potential abuse of religion (including the violent history of Christianity in Europe) can help, in our view, to weaken prejudices against Islam and other religious traditions. Emphasizing the common roots of all three monotheistic religions (Abraham/Ibrahim as the progenitor, etc.) may help to bridge the gap. Furthermore, we would like to encourage a change in language. Terms such as Islamist or Islamism suggest that terrorism is an inherent
part of the Islamic faith. Christian leaders would have been right to object if the terrorists of the Catholic IRA had been labeled as *catholicists* or if the terrorists of the Ku Klux Klan, who have persecuted and murdered not only Blacks but also Jews and Catholics in the United States, would be labeled *protestantists*.

In a follow-up study (Moritz et al., 2018), we were able to replicate this finding and also able to prejudices that Muslims have against „Western“ culture and Christianity.

Currently, we are working to raise the funds necessary to investigate the stability of the measured changes in views of religious traditions and the sustainability of our metacognitive approach.

Do you like what we are doing? Please [donate](#)!

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**References**

