

Death and Dying: Conceptual Characteristics of Grief and Religiosity in a Hospice Population

Edgar Garibay

Is there a relationship between our degree of religiosity and how we grieve? Is the level of intrinsic or extrinsic religiosity related to the level of acceptance of loss? Because intrinsic and extrinsic levels of religiosity fall on a continuum, individuals do not fit neatly into a fixed category. Even so, my research suggests a strong positive relationship between intrinsic religiosity and the acceptance of loss.

Death. It is a difficult to avoid the universal human experience that a loved one has passed away. At times the personal meaning of death triggers emotional reactions in the individual (Ciccarelli, 2001). If an individual who has recently lost a loved one associates death with negative consequences, this can engender various fears or concerns about death and dying (Ciccarelli, 2001). But if the experience of loss is so common, why do we fear the thought of dying? There could be endless answers to this question, but often we deny the inevitable during early parts of our life. Often our culture helps buffer us from the initial impact of death through the use of euphemisms such as “passed away,” “moved on,” or “departed” (Jung, 1934; Wahl, 1958). Wahl (18, 1958) suggests the reason many of us identify with a religion or philosophical system is to help us cope with the reality of a loved one’s death. Religion and philosophical systems often assert the experience of death is not spiritual death, allowing us to see death as a transition from one world to another.

Grief. Addressing this question from a psychological perspective, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross thinks “it is inconceivable for our unconscious to imagine an actual ending of our own life here on earth... In simple terms, in our unconscious mind we can only be killed; it is inconceivable to die of a natural

cause of old age. Therefore death itself is associated with a bad act, a frightening happening, something that in itself calls for retribution and punishment (Kübler-Ross, 4, 1999).” To some people, death marks the cessation of a body, while others believe the death of the body allows for the departure of the soul into an eternal life (Bardis, 1979).

Despite these differences in perceptions about death, we know that one day we will perish from this world. Experiencing the death of a loved one, on the other hand, is one of the most profoundly difficult experiences that loosely define grief (Folkman, 1997). Cassarett, Kutner, and Abraham (218, 2001), defines grief as, “a multifaceted response to loss that includes psychological, behavioral and physical reactions combined with cognitive, emotional, behavioral, social, spiritual and somatic elements.” During grief every system of an individual is assaulted by profound grief, and thus coping strategies are necessary. That is to say that many people attempt to buffer the effects of loss by turning to their religion for guidance through this process. Other people may search other sources for guidance such as bereavement counseling or talking to others.

The focus of the current research is to explore grieving perceptions of individuals who search for religious guidance. Specifically, of those who identify as religious, is there a relationship between the way an individual grieves and his/her approach to religion?

Religiosity. The term that psychologist use to describe the role religion plays in the interpretation and response to particular events in a person’s life is referred to as religiosity (Hackney & Sanders, 2003).

Certain psychologists contend (Allport & Ross 1950, & Jung 1933) that religiosity functions as a source of “meaning and stability in an uncertain world and is conducive to positive psychological health (Hackney, et. al, 2003, 43).” Others do not think that factors of religiosity are conducive to meaning and stability in this world of uncertainty as Jung and Allport stress. This question has long been debated and further researched with different results: some beneficial, neutral, or detrimental. Despite these results, many experts in this field conclude that the religiosity can be best applied as a multidimensional study(Hackney, et. al, 2003). The factors that determine this multidimensional study vary depending upon the definition and measuring dimensions of religiosity (Albrecht, Cunningham, & Pitcher, 2003). The Allport-Ross measures of religious orientation explore the extrinsic-intrinsic dimensions scale. The easiest way to characterize these two dimensions is that extrinsically motivated person “uses his religion,” while intrinsically motivated person “lives his religion” (Allport & Ross, 1967). Under this assumption Allport goes on to further define these terms as follows: extrinsic values are instrumental and utilitarian, meaning that these people find their religion useful in many ways, such as: to provide security and solace, sociability and distraction, status and self-justification. Theologically speaking this implies that the extrinsically oriented person turns to God, but without turning away from the self (Allport & Ross, 1967). On the other hand, intrinsically oriented people’s sole motive is their religion. Other needs are not as strong as their religious beliefs or devotions. Therefore, their intrinsic values are not utilitarian and it is through this that they live their religion (Allport & Ross, 1967). A clergyman identified the difference between these dimensions best:

Some people come to Church to thank God, to acknowledge His glory and to ask

for His guidance.... Others come for what they want to get. Their interest in the Church is to run it or exploit it rather than serve it. (Allport & Ross, 1967)

Method

Participants. Participants in the study must meet the following requirement: (1) direct family member must have passed away in the last 6 to 12 months and (2) must be at least 18 years of age. Optimal Hospice Care will send a packet in the mail to about 300 potential participants. The packet will contain debriefing forms about the study, a demographic form, and two questionnaires (“Stages of the Grieving Process” and “Religious Orientation Measures: Allport-Ross Measures of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Characteristics”) and a letter from Optimal Hospice Care informing participants about their support of this study. A self-addressed envelope will be included, and participants who take part in the study will be instructed to send the surveys back to the Honors Program.

Design. The *Allport-Ross Extrinsic-Intrinsic scale* attempts to measure extrinsic and intrinsic tendencies in a person’s religious life (Allport & Ross, 1967). This questionnaire divides the extrinsically worded items from the intrinsically. The scale is measured from 1 (the most intrinsic response) to 5 (the most extrinsic response). (Allport- Ross, 1967).

The questionnaire on “Characteristics of the Grieving Process” attempts to measure the level of acceptance in regard to the loss of a loved one. The scale is measured from 1 (the most positive response) to 5 (most negative). Questions were randomly assigned. Questions 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, and 11 that score high under low level of acceptance over the loss will receive a score of 5 and a low score will reflect a score of 1. Reverse coding will be used on the following questions: 1, 3, 5, 7, and 9 in that a high score for the high level of acceptance over the loss will receive a 1 and a low score will receive a 5. These two

questionnaires will determine whether the acceptance of loss is strong. relationship between intrinsic religiosity and

Demographic Questionnaire

- a. Age 1. 18-25 2. 26-33 3. 34-41 4. 42-49 5. 50-57 6. 58-63 7. 63-69 8. 69-76
- b. How long it has been seen the loved one died? _____ year(s) _____ months
- c. Gender *male* *female*
- d. Level of Education 1. Primary school 2. Middle school 3. High school
 4. Some college 5. College graduate 6. Masters 7. Doctorate
- e. How important is religion? 1. All the time 2. Often 3. Occasionally
 4. Seldom 5. Never
- f. Ethnicity 1. African-American 2. Caucasian 3. Asian 4. Hispanic 5. Pacific Islander
 6. White non-Hispanic 7. Other
- g. Who has recently passed away? 1. Mother 2. Father 3. Brother 4. Sister
 5. Grandfather 6. Grandmother
 7. Uncle 8. Aunt 9. Cousin 10. Other

Stages of the Grieving Process					
Answer the questions below as it best relates to your grief experience.					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I am beginning to accept the death of my loved one.					
2. I feel guilty that I am living when my loved one is dead.					
3. I socialize with others as a way to cope with this loss					
4. This loss has left me feeling abandoned.					
5. I feel at peace knowing that my loved one has gone "home."					

6. I don't understand why it was not me who died instead of my loved one.				
7. I have discovered an inner strength I didn't know I had in processing the death of my loved one.				
8. I feel empty from the loss of my loved one.				
9. I have unresolved feelings about the death after the loss of my loved one.				
10. I feel anger at the death of my loved one.				

**Religious Orientation Measures: Allport-Ross Measures
of Intrinsic and Extrinsic Characteristics**

Answer the questions below as it best relates to your grief experience.

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1. I try to carry my religion over into all my other dealings in life.					
2. Quite often I have been keenly aware of the presence of God or the Divine Being					
3. My religious beliefs are what really lie behind my whole approach to life.					
4. The prayers I say when I am alone carry as much meaning and personal emotions as those said by me during services.					
5. If not prevented by unavoidable circumstance, I attend my house of worship.					
6. If I were to join a religious group I would prefer to join a study group focused on religious.					
7. If I were to join a religious group I would prefer to join a social fellowship.					

8. Religion is especially important to me because it answers many questions about the meaning of life.				
9. I read literature about my faith.				
10. It is important to me to spend periods of time in private religious thought and meditation.				
11. What religion offers me most is comfort when sorrows and misfortunes strike.				
12. One reason for my being a congregation member is that such membership helps to establish a person in the community.				
13. The purpose of prayer is to secure a happy and peaceful life.				
14. It doesn't matter so much what I believe as long as I lead a moral life.				
15. Although I am a religious person, I refuse to let religious considerations influence my everyday affairs.				
16. My house of worship is most important as a place to formulate good social relations.				
17. Although I believe in my religion, I feel there are many more important things in life.				
18. I pray chiefly because I have been taught to pray.				
19. A primary reason for my interest in religion is that my house of worship is a congenial social activity.				

20. Occasionally I find it necessary to compromise my religious beliefs in order to protect my social and economic well-being.				
21. The primary purpose of prayer is to gain relief and protection.				

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