

How does Psychology of Religion and Spirituality approach *Age and Aging?*

- ❖ Lifespan Developmental Approach

- emergence of religiosity (childhood)
- religious/spiritual conversions (adolescence)
- health outcomes of religiosity (adulthood)

- ❖ Gerontology Perspective

- health outcomes of religiosity
- religiosity and disease/morbidity
- palliative therapies involving religious or spiritual themes)



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Lifespan Development

- Childhood

- ❖ “Modern research into the nature of religious or spiritual development in children falls into four general camps” (Paloutzian 2017) These camps are what informs contemporary research into Psychology of Childhood, Religion, and Spirituality.

1. Piagetian Cognitive-development Approach

“child as preset to go through invariant sequence of developmental stages of cognitive ability in which each stage is more complex than this that came before” (152)

2. Behaviourist Approach

“child as empty vessel...into which the adults deport religious ideas, doctrines, habits and rituals, thought patterns, values, assumptions, and prejudices...Meanings are learned” (152)

3. Attachment Theory Approach

“Variations in schemas [related to needs being met or unmet by a child’s caregiver] can affect one’s tendency towards religiousness in either adolescence or adulthood

4. “Interactive Agent” Theory

“child as a developing interactive agent - neither a creature that merely goes up a sequence of mental steps..., nor a being to be conditioned... child is interdependent”

- ❖ According to Paloutzian (2017), most contemporary Cognitive Oriented Research on Child Religious Development involve studies on :

1. **Stages of Religious Concepts** (understandings of God and Origins and relationships to Religious Texts)

2. **Stages of Prayer**



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Lifespan Development

- Adolescence

- ❖ Paloutzian (2017) explains that Psychoanalytic theorists have proposed that an “**identity crisis**” occurs during the teenage years and that one way they may try to resolve such a crisis is adopting a religion or other form of spirituality
- ❖ Researchers wonder why adolescence is widely considered a “**ripe age for conversion**” (Paloutzian, 228) across cultures. What do you think?
- ❖ Longo and Spoon (2014) suggest that “it is likely that adolescents...might have a difficult time distinguishing nuanced differences between denominations...and might be strongly influenced by these forces as opposed to theological reasoning” and recommend more research to understand the “importance of **social and familial factors in religious conversion.**” (Longo and Spoon, 284)



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Lifespan Development

- Adulthood

- ❖ Most of the research into Psychology of Religion involves adult participants, so much of the scholarly literature could be said to address this phase of life. What is interesting when contrasting research focusing on the different phases of life is that after adolescence, **the subject of religiosity is treated as a more medical matter and research turns in the direction of health outcomes and religiosity.**
- ❖ Other areas of interest for research into adulthood are the intersections between religion and spirituality and : **mental health/ substance abuse, stress, coping, and cognitive functioning.**
- ❖ According to Paloutzian (2017), Psychoanalysts think middle and later years represent “**another phase of religious interest.** These authors argue that during middle age people begin to strive for more inner understanding, wholeness, and personal integrity. This ***striving sets the stage for religion-related questions, facilitating heightened interest in religious or spiritual matters and in developing intimate connections, ego integrity, and wisdom as one gets old.***”



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Psychology of Religion and Spirituality & Gerontology

❖ What is **Gerontology**?

“The study of the social, cultural, psychological, cognitive, and biological aspects of aging” -
Wikipedia

❖ How are Gerontologists working on **Psychology of Religion and Spirituality**?

“Gerontologists have utilized *social and behavioral research methods* to study the influence of numerous religious indicators on even more numerous measures of *psychosocial constructs*, physical and mental health, and general well-being” (Levin, Chatters, and Taylor 2011)



Psychology of Religion and Spirituality & Gerontology cont.

- ❖ “Research on whether religiousness is related to mortality yields a generally consistent pattern: being a regular **participant** in one’s religious organization, in particular, shows a positive relationship with good health and a negative relationship with early mortality” (Paloutzian, 312)
- ❖ “Frequent **participation** in the activities of one’s religious organization was a predictor of living longer” (Paloutzian, 312)
- ❖ “**Participation** includes ample social contact, and social support and reduces isolation and loneliness” (Paloutzian, 312)
- ❖ Research “focuses on Western populations; future studies in other regions and cultures will illuminate the degree of robustness of these findings.” (Paloutzian, 312)



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Psychology of Religion & Spirituality

& *End-of-Life*

- ❖ “Afterlife beliefs and fear of death, bereavement and loneliness, and suffering and well-being are all intimately involved in caring for people whose lives will soon end” (Paloutzian 2017, 318)
- ❖ Moss and Dobson (2006) discuss the concept of a “good death” and stress its “prime importance for the majority of palliative patients”. In assisting “patients in their quest for a “good death,” physicians psychosocial professionals, and caregivers need to be aware of the unique concerns and values of patients facing death.” according to Moss and Dobson (2006). Their paper discusses the value of taking a “holisitic biopsychosocial-spiritual model of health” in order to incorporate religion and spirituality into end-of-life care.
- ❖ In light of the myriad of religious and spiritual belief systems that exist (include the “Nones”), how can we ensure that health care providers are supported in providing “a good quality of death experience” (Moss and Dobson, 284) to everyone?



photo courtesy of : <http://pearl-diving.blogspot.ca/2008/12/dang-those-white-religious-old-poor.html>



photo courtesy of : <https://www.mynoblecare.com/dementia-treatment-causes-prevention/>

Psychology of Religion & Spirituality

& End of Life cont.

❖ *Some Comments on Grief and Loss :*

“The evidence to date suggests that **using rituals**, whether the formal rituals associated with many religions or the informal rituals we can create for ourselves, **can help people regain some feeling of control in their lives as well as cope with loss**. Considering the devastating impact that grief can have on physical and mental health, relying on rituals can play an important role in alleviating the deep grief of loss as well as the more mundane losses we all experience.”

(<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/media-spotlight/201403/can-rituals-help-us-deal-grief>)

“Due to the development of the funeral industry...many responsibilities which were traditionally handled by the family are passed over to **professionals** who **are becoming experts and trendsetters for new burial rituals and customs**, when people cannot refer to family tradition or religion”https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233031606_The_Psychology_of_Funeral_Rituals



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Thank You!

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