Effects of Religious Orientation on Attitudes Toward Death Among Students at Morehead State University

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by
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Date August 5, 1982
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ABSTRACT

Past findings focusing on factors affecting the relationship between fear of death and religion are varied, mixed, and at times contradictory. Nevertheless, this research is an attempt to explore the effects of religious orientation on attitudes toward death.

Three religious groups of Morehead State University, the Methodist Student Center, the Baptist Student Center, and the Catholic Student Center, were selected for analysis. These three religious groups were selected because they present different religious orientations toward death.

A stratified random sample of 90 students was selected from the membership lists of the three selected religious groups with 30 students (15 males and 15 females) selected from each religious group. A 50/50 split of male and female students in each group was maintained so as to control sex. Twenty-three Methodists, 24 Baptists, and 22 Catholics returned usable questionnaires. Seventy-seven percent of the questionnaires were returned.

Fifteen Likert-type items on The Leming Death Fear Scale and twenty-five mixed-type items of The Faulkner and DeJong Religiousness Scale were the two instruments used in this study to measure the effects of religious orientation on attitudes toward death. The Chi-square test of significance was used in analyzing the
relationships between religiosity and sex, and attitudes toward
death.

The Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics differed on their
attitudes toward death. Strong support for the Baptists being
the least fearful of death was found, whereas weak support was
found for Methodists being the most fearful of death. Among these
three religious groups, it was found that it is not merely denomi-
national preference but rather religiosity in general that brings
about different degrees of fear of death.

This research demonstrates that different religious orienta-
tions may have different affects on students' attitudes toward
death. However, further research using a sample of non-students
is needed.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Considerable research has been conducted on people's attitudes toward death. Numerous variables such as religion, sex, occupation, residence, marital status, leisure activities, health, education, and age have all been investigated to examine their effects on attitudes toward death.

For example, occupational differences were examined by Stacey and Markin (1952) who found that law students showed more preoccupation with death than engineering students and forestry students. In other occupational studies that dealt with retirement, Swenson (1961), Jeffers, Nichols, and Eis dorfer (1961), and Rhudick and Dibner (1961), found no differences between elderly who were working and those who were retired.

Looking next at residence differences, Shrut (1958) found that those living more independently indicated less fear of death than those living in traditional central residential areas. In addition, Swenson (1961) found that people living in nursing homes tended to have a more positive, forward-looking attitude than those living alone. Swenson (1961) also found no relationship between urban or rural residence and attitudes toward death.

In terms of marital status, Rhudick and Dibner (1961) found no differences between elderly who were widowed, single, separated, or married. On the other hand, Swenson (1961) did report differences
among these groups. Elderly widowed people were likely to evade death while single, separated, and married people were likely to look forward to death more.

An examination of the effect of leisure activities on death fear by Jeffers, Nichols, and Eisdorfer (1961) revealed that those elderly with fewer leisure activities tended to be more fearful of death. These findings are consistent with Klopfer's (1947) earlier study that found that elderly persons with greater leisure activity were less fearful of death.

Concerning the effect of health on attitudes toward death, Christ (1961) found that elderly people with better health had less death fear. That is, elderly people with better health tended to approach death in a more positive manner than those with poorer health.

Regarding studies of the effect of education on attitudes toward death, Jeffers, Nichols, and Eisdorfer (1961) found that low IQ was related to more fear of death. On the other hand, Christ (1961) and Rhudick and Dibner (1961) found no relationship between the amount of schooling and death fear.

Finally, looking at age differences, Natterson and Knudson (1960) found a relationship between old age and death fear. Their study of 33 children aged birth to 13 years who were dying of cancer and blood diseases showed that as a child grows older, its fear of death becomes more urgent, pervasive, and persistent. Conversely, Christ (1961), Swenson (1961), Rhudick and Dibner
(1961), and Jeffers et al. (1961) found no age differences in death fear.

From the studies cited above, it is evident that the topic "correlates of death fear" has received a great deal of attention. Perhaps, however, the area receiving the most attention is that of the relationship between death fear and religiosity, which is reviewed in detail in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, there is an interesting aspect of the relationship between death fear and religiosity that remains unaddressed. That is, how does denominational preference relate to fear of death? Do denominational differences differentially affect an individual's attitudes toward death? In other words, do different religious orientations affect attitudes toward death over and above the effects of religiosity? It is this issue to which the present research addresses itself.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Michael R. Leming (1980) tested George Homans' thesis, which states that religion is a great anxiety reliever as well as a great cause of death anxiety. A multistage cluster sample of 372 Northfield, Minnesota residents participated in Leming's research. The survey research method was used to test Homans' thesis. Homans' thesis was based on Bronislaw Malinowski's theory of religion as an anxiety reliever and A. R. Radcliffe-Brown's theory of religion as a cause of death anxiety.

According to Malinowski (1931), death is "the main source of religious belief" because of all human events it is the most upsetting and disorganizing crisis. Religion provides individuals with a means of dealing with death; the greatest source of anxiety for man. In fact, death, which every man faces in his lifetime, is the primary crisis of human life that calls forth religious behavior.

On the other hand, Radcliffe-Brown (1939) disagrees with Malinowski's theory of religion. Radcliffe-Brown contends that man would not have anxiety about death if it were not for religion; he hypothesizes that religion causes fears and anxieties. Otherwise man would be free from fear of spirits, fear of God, of the devil, or of hell.

Leming's (1980) study verified Homans' thesis by showing that
the intensity of commitment to religion made a difference in
explaining the relationship between religion and the fear of
death. Leming found that the highly committed religionist had
the least anxiety about death while the non-religiously committed
individuals had fear about the disruptive effects of death upon
their social life but had no fear about divine judgment. The
highly committed religionist redefined the secular loss created
by death as religious victory, and thus, he looked forward to
his rewards in an afterlife.

Death literature has supported Malinowski’s and Radcliffe-
Brown’s theories. The studies of Martin and Wrightman (1965),
Berman and Hays (1973), Burrows (1971), Templer (1972), and
Shearer (1972) have supported Malinowski, while the work of
Chenard (1972) and Faunce and Fulton (1958) have supported
Radcliffe-Brown.

In Martin’s and Wrightman’s (1965) research on the relation-
ship between religious attitudes and concern about death among 58
church-going adults, it was found that those who reported greater
religious participation demonstrated less fear of death. These
findings indicate that religion may serve as a means of reducing
one’s death anxiety. Furthermore, Berman and Hays (1973) found a
significant relationship between belief in an afterlife and fear
of death, indicating that religion tended to reduce death anxiety.
Those persons who believed in an afterlife had less death anxiety
than those who did not.
However, Burrows (1971) contends that it is comfort with one’s religious beliefs, and not religiosity per se, that influences one’s fear of death and attitudes toward death. In Templer’s (1972) research, it was demonstrated that among religiously involved individuals, those who were more religious indicated less death anxiety.

In addition, Shearer’s (1972) research indicated a significant relationship between religion and death fear. He found variations in the way Christians and non-Christians handled death. Christians were found to have a lower death anxiety than non-Christians. Nevertheless, Christians who were more orthodox in their religious beliefs were found to be even less fearful of death than those who were more liberal. Also, Christians who had their beliefs integrated into their lives were less fearful of death than those who had not.

On the other hand, studies by Chenard (1972) and Faunce and Fulton (1958) have supported Radcliffe-Brown’s theory. Chenard’s (1972) study of "Traditional Christian Beliefs and Attitudes Toward Dying and Death" concludes that based on a sample of 295 married women, variations in involvement and commitment to traditional Christian beliefs about afterlife and religious practices are associated with differences in one’s reaction toward one’s own death. Chenard found that women who scored high on religiosity were more likely to fear their own death than women low in religiosity. Furthermore, Faunce and Fulton (1958) found that, based on
a sample of 104 Wayne Street University students, spiritually oriented individuals were more fearful of death than temporally oriented individuals.

Nevertheless, Homans (1965) declares that both Malinowski and Radcliffe-Brown are correct in their theories of religion. According to Homans, Malinowski is concerned about the individual whereas Radcliffe-Brown is concerned about society. Homans theorizes that religious beliefs in the immortality of the soul and a coming judgment increase death anxiety, but religious commitment serves as a means of decreasing death anxiety.

Studies on sex differences and death fear have discovered conflicting findings. Middleton's (1936) early research demonstrated that females think about and fear their own death more than males do. Furthermore, Templer, Ruff, and Franks (1971) found that females had significantly higher death fear than males. Finally, McDonald's (1976) research has shown that females have higher levels of death fear than males. Diggory's and Rothman's (1961) suggestion that females fear dissolution of the body more than males because they value their physical attractiveness more may help explain their greater fear of death in general.

On the other hand, Christ (1961) found no relationship between sex differences and death fear among elderly psychiatric patients, and Rhudick and Dibner (1961) similarly found no relationship between high death concern and sex differences among
normal elderly subjects. Furthermore, Swenson (1961), Jeffers, Nichols, and Eisdorfer (1961) found no relationship between sex differences and death fear among elderly people.

This investigator's review of literature shows that the issue of the relationship between death fear and denominational preference remains largely unaddressed. Therefore, it is suggested here that denominational preference and its relationship to death fear are worthy of investigation.
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND DERIVATION OF HYPOTHESES

The preceding review of literature reveals no studies of the effects of denominational preference on the fear of death. In response to the neglect of this issue, this research attempts to discover whether or not denominational preference is related to the fear of death. In order to have a clearer understanding of the relationship between denominational preference and the fear of death, religiosity and sex are used as control variables. That is, the relationship between denominational preference and the fear of death may well be affected by the religiosity and sex of the respondents. However, since denominational boundaries reflect differences in beliefs related to death and its consequences, it is reasonable to assume denominational preference affects fear of death beyond the effects of religiosity or sex.

Regarding religious beliefs, Baptists generally believe that God has only one plan of "salvation" for all people and has never provided any other means. Moreover, they believe that "salvation" is by God's grace and is appropriated through personal repentance of sins and personal faith in Jesus Christ. They further believe that when an individual repents and puts his trust in Christ, God not only forgives his sins but also restores him to divine favor and treats him as if he had not sinned at all. This means that people are justified by faith and not by works.
In addition, Baptists strongly believe in the "once saved, forever saved" doctrine. This doctrine is sometimes known as the perseverance of the saints on the human side, and as divine preservation on God's side (Turner, 1969:87). The strong belief of Baptists in this doctrine helps them to be very certain of their "salvation."

According to McMordie's (1981) research, strong belief system helps to reduce death fear. Based on a sample of 320 undergraduate psychology students, McMordie found that a strong belief system fostered perceptions of control and predictability for the highly religious or non-religious person. The strength of one's convictions in being religious or even non-religious thus helps to lesson death fear.

Moreover, according to Mead (1975), many Baptists in America today basically uphold the doctrine of predestination, which states that some people are predestined to be "saved" and others foreordained to be "condemned." Thus, if a person is once "saved," he is forever "saved," and conversely, if he is once "condemned," he is forever "condemned." This doctrine of predestination contends that since God takes the initiative and calls people to a special purpose, He elects some people unto "salvation" and others unto "condemnation."

One who believes in the doctrine of predestination is likely to look for signs that he is among the elect. One of the signs is faith. Lacking faith to believe that he is "once saved, forever saved," he cannot depend upon works. His "salvation" is thus in doubt. This doubt about his "salvation" will cause him to fear
that he will be cast into a hell of outer darkness and unquenchable fire.

Furthermore, Baptists believe in the immortality of the soul. Death does not mark the cessation of one's existence of life on earth; his soul lives on. If one's personal "salvation" has been secured, one has eternal life in paradise (Turner, 1969:125-128). However, if "salvation" has not been secured at the time of death, no opportunity to acquire it remains. As for the "unsaved" or "unrighteous" dead, they go to Hell, a real and eternal place of outer darkness and unquenchable fire. These beliefs make Baptists more certain of personal "salvation" and eternal life (Turner, 1969:136-138).

In contrast to Baptists, the Catholics believe in purgatory where the souls of the righteous must undergo a period of suffering before they can enter heaven. This suffering involves the purging away of unrepented sins or imperfections. It varies greatly in intensity and duration from a few hours to even as long as thousands of years and serves two functions, that of privation from God for a time and that of physical pain. After the believers have been purged of their sins or imperfections and have attained a state of Christian perfection, they are then admitted to the glory and happiness of heaven, a place where perfect believers will enjoy forever the face-to-face vision of God (Brantl, 1961:232-243).

Finally, Methodists have yet a different view of "salvation." In order to be saved, a person has to find a certain way or type
of life and become that type of person. Otherwise, he is "lost."

This way of life has these characteristics: deliverance from one's own self-will, self-centeredness, self-conscious fears and worries; yielding oneself entirely to God's will, and knowing his forgiveness for one's wrongdoing; finding greatest joy in a close fellowship with God and a sympathetic fellowship with other people; and a resultant happiness which the ups and downs of life are unable to touch. Unlike Baptists, Methodists believe that "salvation" is not a "once saved, forever saved" principle. When one possesses "salvation," it does not always remain there without change. Rather it is a growth, a development, or a slow achievement. Like a prodigal son, a person is "saved" from the moment his life is headed in the Father's direction, but ten thousand years from now he will be more fully "saved" than he is now (Harner, 1954: 111-116). Furthermore, Methodists believe that everyday is a judgment day. Also, Methodists believe in future rewards and punishments (Harner, 1954: 83).

To summarize, Mead (1975) points out that Baptists generally believe in the immortality of the soul and basically believe in the doctrine of predestination, while Methodists generally believe in a certain type of life which is necessary for "salvation."

Greeley (1972) states that since Catholics in the United States have become more militantly oriented, they tend to be very loyal and devout in their beliefs in life after death.

The comments of Turner, Brantl, Harner, Mead, and Greeley
have several implications for this study. Turner's, Harner's, and Mead's comments would imply that as Baptists are oriented toward the immortality of the soul and the doctrine of predestination, they are geared toward the hope of life after death. Although Baptists may not be oriented toward punishment, they believe that if they are not "saved," they will suffer punishment throughout eternity. What is important is that a Baptist "true believer" does not worry about going to Hell, but is certain that he will enjoy eternal life with God. Consequently, fear of death is less implanted in Baptists than in their counterparts, the Methodists. Since the Methodists are oriented toward the type of life they should live and future punishments, they fear punishments by God. Furthermore, since Methodists are not as certain of their salvation experience as are Baptists, they are likely to be more likely to be more fearful of death than Baptists. On the other hand, the more militantly religious orientation of the Catholics would imply that they would be taught rigidly about life after death and, as a result, take this seriously. In fact, the Catholics are always encouraged to meditate on the moments of their death (Brantl, 1961:228). This meditation about their own death has the fear of death less implanted into them than their counterparts, the Methodists, and thus it helps them to face death less fearfully than the Methodists. But since the Catholics are not so certain of their salvation experience as Baptists are, the Catholics are likely to be more fearful of death than the Baptists.
Based on the comments of Turner, Brantl, Harner, Mead, and Greeley, it is hypothesized that different religious orientations concerning the immortality of the soul, doctrine of predestination, afterlife, type of life, future punishments, and religiosity in general will bring about different degrees of fear of death.

Thus, it was predicted that among the three selected religious groups, Baptists are least fearful of death, while Methodists are most fearful of death.

Resulting hypotheses to be tested are:

1. Baptists possess a lower degree of death fear than Catholics or Methodists.
2. Baptists and Catholics possess a lower degree of death fear than Methodists.
3. Controlling for religiosity, the independent variable (denominational preference) affects the dependent variable (attitudes toward death).
4. Controlling for sex, the independent variable (denominational preference) affects the dependent variable (attitudes toward death).

The above hypotheses are tested using the research design discussed in the following chapter.
Morehead State University students who were randomly selected from the Methodist Student Center, the Baptist Student Center, and the Catholic Student Center were given questionnaires to determine the effects of religious orientation on attitudes toward death. Using a table of random numbers, a random sample of 30 students was selected from the membership lists of each of the three selected religious groups.

Having obtained the names, addresses, and phone numbers of the randomly selected students, they were contacted by phone, informed about the study, and their consent was obtained to participate in it. In addition, the randomly selected students were screened to ensure that their denominational preference was one of the three selected religious groups being studied. If a randomly selected student was found not to belong to any of the three selected religious groups, the student was not asked to participate in the study. Furthermore, in the sampling procedure, since research had found that females had higher levels of death fear than males (McDonald, 1976), sex was treated as a control variable. In order to guarantee representation, the stratified random sample method was used for this study. Students from the three religious groups were divided into male and female subgroups, and 15 students from
each subgroup were randomly sampled. Such a procedure eliminates sampling error of the variable sex and assu...s of each sex to permit comparisons. Next, a questionnaire was mailed to the participating students.

The questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter (see Appendix 1) and a self-addressed envelope. A total of 90 questionnaires were mailed to a stratified random sample of 90 students (45 males and 45 females) selected from the membership lists of the three religious groups with 30 students (15 males and 15 females) in each group. Out of the 90 mailed questionnaires, 69 were returned. After the first contact by phone, 48 questionnaires were returned. Another 21 questionnaires were returned after the second contact by phone. Of the students responding, 36 were females. Out of the 30 questionnaires mailed to each group, 23 Methodists, 24 Baptists, and 22 Catholics returned usable questionnaires. The overall return rate was 77 percent.
INSTRUMENTATION

The instruments used in this study to measure the effects of religious orientation on attitudes toward death were the Leming Death Fear Scale and the Faulkner and DeJong Religiosity Scale. The Leming Death Fear Scale contains fifteen Likert-type items (see Appendix 2, items 9-23). The Faulkner and DeJong Religiosity Scale contains twenty-five mixed-type items (see Appendix 2, items 24-48).

First, an item analysis was performed to ensure that each item correlated positively with the total score. The analysis revealed no negatively correlated items, thus a reliability test was then performed.

Although Leming (1980) did not indicate if he had validated his scale, an item analysis of his scale was made in this study with the aid of the SPSS computer system. A Cronbach's (1951) alpha coefficient of 0.70 is generally adequate. Alpha, the mean of all possible split-half coefficients, represents the reliability test. It was found that the fifteen items met the 0.70 minimum alpha coefficient. The Leming Death Fear Scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.84. Conversely, Faulkner and DeJong (1966) did attempt to validate their scale of twenty-five mixed-type items utilizing Guttman scaling techniques. They found that all these items had the coefficient of scalability ranging from 0.71 to 0.76 which was above the minimum coefficient of scalability of between
0.60 and 0.65 established by Menzel (1953). In addition, the present study found that all the twenty-five items correlated positively in the item analysis, and they collectively met the 0.70 minimum Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The Faulkner and DeJong Religiosity Scale had a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.87. A further examination of the reliability of the subscales showed that out of the five subscales only two, the ideological and experiential subscales, met the minimum 0.70 Cronbach's alpha coefficient. These two subscales were used in part of the research analysis.

The Leming Death Fear Scale contains Likert-type items which measure eight areas of death fear - "fears of dependency at death, isolation at death, pain in the dying process, the indignity of dying, concern for unknown and afterlife, fear of the fate of the body, apprehension concerning the finality of death and not being able to complete one's unfinished business, and the anxiety of leaving loved ones" (Leming, 1980:352). Each area was weighted equally and the subscale scores were summed to obtain a combined death fear score which ranged from 15 (very low death fear) to 75 (very high death fear). In the Likert-type items of this scale, the respondents were asked to respond to the statements on a five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, undecided, disagree, strongly disagree). On the other hand, the Faulkner and DeJong Religiosity Scale contains twenty-five mixed-type items which measure the ideological, the intellectual, the ritualistic, the experiential,
and the consequential dimensions of religiosity (Faulkner and DeJong, 1966). Responses to traditional religious beliefs in each item of the five dimensions of religiosity were scored highest, and progressive deviations from such a belief were scored in a descending order. The ideological dimension of religiosity had a minimum score of 5 and a maximum score of 19. The intellectual dimension of religiosity had a minimum score of 5 and a maximum score of 20. The ritualistic dimension of religiosity was scored from 5 to 18. The experiential dimension of religiosity was scored from 5 to 24. The consequential dimension of religiosity was scored from 5 to 16. The subscale scores of all these five dimensions were summed to obtain a combined religiosity score which ranged from 25 (very low religiosity) to 97 (very high religiosity). Due to the small number of cases, for purposes of analysis, the religiosity scale and the death fear scale were dichotomized. A 50 percent split of the cumulative frequencies for the number of cases was made so that a composite score of 15 to 40 indicated a low degree of death fear whereas a composite score of 41 to 64 indicated a high degree of death fear. As for religiosity, it was established that a composite score of 50 to 87 indicated a low degree of religiosity whereas a composite score of 88 to 97 indicated a high degree of religiosity.
STATISTICS

The Chi-square test of significance was used to test the statistical significance of the relationship between the independent variable, denominational preference, and the dependent variable attitudes toward death. Chi-square was used in the statistical analysis of the collected data because of its usefulness in testing for significance of relationships in cross-tabulation analysis. The data were statistically analyzed by using SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences).

From the SPSS computer system print-out, a statistical significance is shown for each table of data analysis. If the level of statistical significance indicates 0.05, then the null hypothesis at that level is rejected, and therefore, an independent variable is positively related to a dependent variable.
CHAPTER 5

ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Table 1 demonstrates that Baptists indicate the least fear of death, with 54.2 percent indicating a low degree of fear. The Baptists were followed by the Methodists with 43.5 percent and the Catholics with 40.9 percent. While Table 1 does not indicate a statistically significant relationship between fear of death and denominational preference at the .05 level, it does show that differences do exist. More specifically, it indicates that consistent with the first hypothesis, Baptists are the least fearful of

TABLE 1

Relation Between Fear of Death and Denominational Preference

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Fear of Death</th>
<th>Methodists</th>
<th>Baptists</th>
<th>Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>56.5</td>
<td>45.8</td>
<td>59.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>43.5</td>
<td>54.2</td>
<td>40.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(n=23) (n=24) (n=22)

Chi-square = 0.9278

df = 2

p = 0.6288
death. However, the results indicate no support for the hypothesized relationship between Methodists and Baptists. In fact, while the differences are small, they are in the opposite direction from hypothesized.

A clearer understanding of the relationship between denominational preference and death fear may be gained by controlling for religiosity. That is, the relationship between denominational preference and death fear may well be affected by the religiosity of the respondents.

Looking at Table 2, the relationship between death fear and

| TABLE 2

Relation Between Fear of Death and Denominational Preference Controlling for Religiosity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religiosity</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=13)</td>
<td>(n=17)</td>
<td>(n=5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 1.0547  Chi-square = 0.2355

df = 2  df = 2

p = 0.5902  p = 0.8889
denominational preference is subdivided into two partial relationships:

1. a relationship between death fear and denominational preference in the high-religiosity group, and

2. a relationship between death fear and denominational preference in the low-religiosity group.

For the high-religiosity group, the original relationship is not maintained, and additional support is found for the hypothesis. That is, while Baptists are still found to be the least fearful of death, Methodists are the most fearful of death. Nearly 54 percent of high-religiosity Methodists had high death fear as compared to 35.3 percent of high-religiosity Baptists and 40 percent of high-religiosity Catholics.

It can be seen that among the high-religiosity group, support is found for the first two hypotheses. That is, fear of death is least among the highly religious Baptists and greatest among the Methodists. This is consistent with the theoretical rationale that those who are most committed are most affected by denominational doctrine and lends support to the proposition that different belief systems are associated with different degrees of death fear.

McMordie (1981) has reported that a strong belief system is an important factor affecting death fear. Belief or ideology is a central component of religiosity. The ideological subscale of the religiosity scale measures the strength of religious beliefs. The ideological subscale included items concerned with beliefs such as: "Do you believe that the world will come to an end according
to the will of God?" and "Do you believe it is necessary for a person to repent before God will forgive his sins?" The strength of one's religious convictions helps one to reduce death fear.

In order to assess the strength of the religiosity of Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics in terms of ideological differences, the ideological subscale of the Faulkner and DeJong Religiosity Scale is used to analyze these differences (see Table 3).

TABLE 3

Relation Between Fear of Death and Denominational Preference Controlling Ideology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ideology</th>
<th>High</th>
<th>Low</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>66.7</td>
<td>36.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>63.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=15)</td>
<td>(n=19)</td>
<td>(n=5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square = 3.1588</td>
<td>Chi-square = 2.6776</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>df = 2</td>
<td>df = 2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p = 0.2061</td>
<td>p = 0.2621</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Looking at Table 3, 63.2 percent of highly ideological Baptists have low death fear as compared to 60 percent of highly ideological...
Catholics and 33.3 percent of highly ideological Methodists. This supports the idea that a strong belief system reduces death fear. It also supports what Kavanaugh (1974) says about belief. According to Kavanaugh, at death, one's belief in what one holds will bring the peace and promise one needs for one's future. As one has peace and promise of a future, one will likely have less fear of death.

Turning to the low-religiosity group (see Table 2), a very different pattern emerges. That is, Baptists who showed the least death fear among the highly religious are the most fearful of death while Methodists are the least fearful of death. Over 71 percent of low-religiosity Baptists had high death fear as compared to 60 percent of low-religiosity Methodists and 64.7 percent of low-religiosity Catholics.

For the low-religiosity Baptists, religiosity seems to have a different affect on their attitudes toward death. A possible explanation for the high death fear among the low-religiosity Baptists lies in the Baptist belief in election and the "once saved, forever saved" doctrine. Since, in the view of Baptists, God takes the initiative to call certain people unto "salvation," He also elects certain people unto "condemnation." Those who believe in these doctrines must seek signs that they are among the elect. When low-religiosity Baptists experience doubts about their religious beliefs, they begin to look for signs of being among the elect. One of the signs they look for is faith. Lacking faith, they cannot depend upon works. Their salvation is thus in doubt. This doubt about
their salvation causes a greater degree of fear of being forever cast into a "hell of outer darkness and unquenchable fire." In other words, they have difficulty accepting the validity of traditional Baptist doctrines, but are troubled by the horrible consequences of disbelief, if these doctrines are in fact true. Thus, it is their ambivalence toward the traditional Baptist beliefs held by many of their significant others, for example parents and other relatives, that illicits high death fear.

Although Catholic beliefs may be different, the low-religiosity Catholics exhibit a similar pattern. The pattern of responses shown in Table 3 supports this explanation. Eighty percent of the Baptists scoring low in the ideological subscale have high death fear as compared to 64.7 percent of the Catholics but only 37.5 percent of the Methodists.

Although items in the experiential subscale may not be as central to religiosity in general as those in the ideological subscale, they do appear to measure a similar phenomenon. They simply focus upon how individuals experience their beliefs in everyday life. Therefore, a similar pattern of responses to the experiential items should lend support to the argument made earlier regarding the ideological component of religiosity. The responses shown in Table 4 do indeed exhibit a similar pattern. Seventy-one percent of the Baptists scoring low on the experiential subscale have high death fear as compared to 68.8 percent of the Catholics and 58.3 percent of the Methodists.
TABLE 4

Relation Between Fear of Death and Denominational Preference Controlling for Experiential Subscale

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Fear of Death</th>
<th>Experiential Subscale</th>
<th>Denominational Preference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>35.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>45.5</td>
<td>64.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=11)</td>
<td>(n=17)</td>
<td>(n=6)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 1.20          Chi-square = 0.45
df = 2                    df = 2
p = 0.5469                p = 0.7957

On the other hand, religiosity seems to have a limited effect on the low-religiosity Methodists, and so they are the least fearful of death. Another possible explanation for the least death fear among the low-religiosity Methodists may be that they do not view religiosity to be more important than the type of life they should live in order to be "saved." If they live a good life they are saved. But if they fall back, they can still return to live that type of life, since they view "salvation" as an ever-changing phenomenon. Looking at Table 3, 62.5 percent of the low-ideological
Methodists have low death fear as compared to 35.3 percent of the low-ideological Catholics and 20 percent of the low-ideological Baptists. In addition, referring to Table 4, it is seen that the low-experiential Methodists have a low death fear, 41.7 percent as compared to 31.3 percent of the low-experiential Catholics and 28.6 percent of the low-experiential Baptists.

Among the low-religiosity groups, Catholics are in between Methodists and Baptists in terms of death fear. A possible explanation for the lower incidence of death fear among low-religiosity Catholics is that they believe in the existence of purgatory; they tend to think that they can depart from living a pure life and can make up for penance in the purgatory before they enter heaven. Thus, religiosity does not affect Catholics as much as it does Baptists.

To further assess the effects of religiosity, a comparison was made between the high-religiosity respondents and the low-religiosity respondents for each denomination (see Table 2). Looking first at the Methodists, we observe a within-group difference of 6.2 percent while the Catholics show a 24.7 percent within-group difference and the Baptists a 36.1 percent within-group difference.

These within-group differences reveal that religiosity as a factor affecting attitudes toward death is most important among the Baptists, followed by the Catholics. It appears that religiosity has a little or limited effect on the Methodists as they merely have a within-group difference of 6.2 percent. However, the wide within-group differences among Baptists reveal the relative importance of
their commitment to their religious beliefs in terms of fear of
death. This lends support to the idea that fear of death is higher
among those who are not totally committed to their beliefs.

In order to assess the relative importance of denominational
preference as opposed to religiosity, it is necessary to make a
between-group comparison of the denominational groups in both the
high- and low-religiosity categories. For the high-religiosity
group, the percentage difference between Methodists and Baptists
is 18.5, that between Baptists and Catholics is 4.7, and that
between Methodists and Catholics is 13.8. The percent differences
in the high-religiosity group indicate that Baptists differ much
more from Methodists than from Catholics. Indeed, for the highly
religious, the difference between Baptists and Catholics is rela-
tively small, with the major differences being between the Methodists
on the one hand and the Baptists and Catholics on the other. While
these differences do indicate that denominational preference (parti-
cularly for the Methodists) does exert an influence over and above
the affects of religiosity, the differences do not approach the
magnitude of the differences between the low and high groups cited
earlier (36.1 percent Baptists, 24.7 percent Catholics, and 6.2
percent Methodists). Thus for the highly religious group, religio-
sity appears to influence fear of death more than denominational
preference, although more so for the Catholics and Baptists than
for Methodists.

For the low-religiosity group, the percent difference between
Methodists and Baptists is 11.4, that between Baptists and Catholics is 6.7, and that between Methodists and Catholics is 4.7. On the other hand, in the low-religiosity group, the percent difference between Methodists and Baptists, that between Baptists and Catholics, and that between Methodists and Catholics is relatively small. These relatively small differences indicate that denominational preference (particularly for the Methodists) does exert an influence over and above the effects of religiosity, though these differences do not approach the magnitude differences between the low and high groups cited earlier. Thus for the low-religiosity group, religiosity appears to affect fear of death more than denominational preference, although again, more so for Baptists and Catholics than for Methodists.

The introduction of sex as a control variable is also required in order to more clearly understand the relationship between Death Fear and Denominational Preference.

Referring to Table 5, it is seen that the relationship between death fear and denominational preference is also subdivided into two partial relationships:

(1) a relationship between death fear and denominational preference among males, and

(2) a relationship between death fear and denominational preference among females.

For males, the original relationship is not maintained, but additional support is found for the second hypothesis. That is,
TABLE 5

Relation Between Fear of Death and Denominational Preference Controlling for Sex

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of Fear of Death</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th></th>
<th>Female</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meth</td>
<td>Bapt</td>
<td>Cath.</td>
<td>Meth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>70.0</td>
<td>53.8</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td>30.0</td>
<td>46.2</td>
<td>50.0</td>
<td>53.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td>(n=13)</td>
<td>(n=10)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(n=13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Chi-square = 0.9409  
Chi-square = 2.2284  
df = 2  
p = 0.6247  
p = 0.3282

while Methodists are still found to be the most fearful of death, Catholics are the least fearful of death. Seventy percent of male Methodists had high death fear as compared to 53.8 percent of male Baptists and 50 percent of male Catholics.

It can be seen that among males, the second hypothesis is further supported. However, although no support is found for the first hypothesis among the male group, the percent differences between Baptists and Catholics are relatively small, merely 3.8 percent.

Looking at females, different findings emerge. That is, Catholics who showed the least death fear among males are the most
fearful of death. Again it can be seen that among females, further
support is found for the first hypothesis. That is, fear of death
is least among the female Baptists. Sixty-seven percent of female
Catholics had high death fear as compared to 36.4 percent of female
Baptists and 46.2 percent of females Methodists.

Among female Catholics, gender seems to have a greater effect
on attitudes toward death than it has on the attitudes of female
Methodists and Baptists. A possible explanation is that since
Catholics believe in the existence of purgatory, female Catholics
are concerned about what would happen to their appearance in purga-
tory. In terms of purgatory, female Catholics are likely to fear
death more than female Methodists and Baptists. This explanation
is consistent with Diggory's and Rothman's (1961) research that
females value their physical attractiveness more than males do.
In any event, gender affects Catholics' attitudes toward death more
than it does Methodists' or Baptists'.

In order to further assess the effects of gender, a comparison
was made between male and female respondents for each denomination
(see Table 5). It can be seen that Methodists have a within-group
difference of 23.8 percent while Baptists and Catholics show a 17.4
percent difference and a 16.7 percent difference, respectively.
These within-group differences demonstrate that gender, as a factor
affecting attitudes toward death, is somewhat more important among
Methodists, followed by Baptists.

To further assess the relative importance of denominational
preference as opposed to sex, it is necessary to make a between-group comparison of the denominational groups in both the male and female categories. For males, the percentage difference between Methodists and Baptists is 16.2, that between Baptists and Catholics is 3.8, and between Methodists and Catholics is 20. The percentage differences among males indicate that Methodists differ much more from Catholics than from Baptists. However, the differences between Baptists and Catholics are relatively small. Major differences are seen to be between the Methodists on the one hand and the Baptists and Catholics on the other. While these differences indicate that denominational preference (particularly for the Methodists) does exert an influence over and above the effects of sex, the differences do not approach the magnitude of those between the male and female groups mentioned earlier (23.8 percent Methodists, 17.4 percent Baptists, and 16.7 percent Catholics). Hence for males, gender seems to influence fear of death more than denominational preference, although this is more so for the Catholics and Baptists than for Methodists.

For females, the denominational differences are substantially larger than for the males. The percentage differences between Methodists and Baptists is 9.8, that between Baptists and Catholics is 30.3, and that between Methodists and Catholics is 20.5. These relatively large differences indicate that denominational preference (particularly for the Catholics) does exert an influence over and above the effects of sex. Thus for females, denominational pref-
erence seems to affect fear of death somewhat more than gender, although this is more so for the Baptists and Methodists than for Catholics.
CHAPTER 6
SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The results indicate that denominational differences among Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics differentially affect their attitudes toward death, although the data analysis does not statistically demonstrate a significant relationship between fear of death and denominational preference (possibly due to the small number of cases). Based on the results above, it is argued that the magnitude of the relationships favors denominational differences. The results reveal stronger support for the first hypothesis, that Baptists are the least fearful of death, than for the second hypothesis, that Baptists and Catholics possess a lower degree of death fear than Methodists.

Support for the first two hypotheses is consistently found at the multivariate level among the high-religiosity, high-ideological, and high-experiential Baptists, although at the bivariate level no support is found for the second hypothesis. Also among these high categories at the multivariate level, Methodists consistently indicate the most fear of death, even though no support is found for the second hypothesis at the bivariate level.

Among the low-religiosity, low-ideological, and low-experiential categories at the multivariate level, no support for the first two hypotheses is found, although support is found for the first hypothesis at the bivariate level. At these low categories, it is shown that
religiosity does not affect Methodists and Catholics as much as it does Baptists.

The different findings in the high and low categories at the multivariate level demonstrate that religious differences do exist. These differences among Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics differentially affect attitudes toward death.

Looking at the low-religiosity, low-ideological, and low-experiential categories at the multivariate level, the second hypothesis is not confirmed because religiosity has less effect on Methodists than it has on Baptists and Catholics. An explanation may be that Methodists view the type of life they should live to be more important than religiosity per se.

In addition, an examination of the low categories at the multivariate level lends some support for the third hypothesis, that denominational preference affects attitudes toward death over and above religiosity. Among Methodists and Catholics, religiosity appears to have less effect on attitudes toward death than denominational differences. Finally, at the multivariate level, the fourth hypothesis, that denominational preference affects attitudes toward death while controlling for sex, is partially supported. Among the male Methodists and the female Catholics, denominational preference is shown to exert a greater influence on their attitudes toward death than sex, although this is not so among male Baptists and Catholics, and also among female Methodists and Baptists.
To summarize, the results do indicate support for the research hypothesis, that different religious orientations concerning the immortality of the soul, doctrine of predestination, afterlife, type of life, future punishments, and religiosity in general will bring about different degrees of fear of death. Thus, the research demonstrates that different religious orientations have different affects on students' attitudes toward death.

However, the impact of denominational differences on attitudes toward death is not as clear as it might be because of the limitations imposed by the small sample. A larger sample in needed in order to fully assess this impact. In addition, it may be that the subscales of the religiosity scale did not fully tap the impact of denominational differences on attitudes toward death. A revision of some questionnaire items is needed in order to adequately assess this impact.

Further research is needed to compare with a sample of non-students to determine if differences occur between these groups. Besides Methodists, Baptists, and Catholics, other denominations can be studied to determine if differences occur between them. Hopefully, this research will spark future endeavors that probe adequately the affects of denominational preference on attitudes toward death.
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Templer, D. I., C. F. Ruff, and C. M. Franks

Turner, J. C.
Dear Fellow Student:

My name is See Hwa Teh. I am a Morehead State University graduate student and am conducting a study on students' attitude toward death. Please take a few minutes to complete the attached questionnaire and mail it back to me by using a self-addressed envelope provided for you.

Thank you very much for your assistance and cooperation,

Sincerely yours,

See Hwa Teh
APPENDIX 2

Students' Attitudinal Study
Morehead State University
Sociology Department

Number _______ Date ____________

1. Sex: Male 33 Female 36

2. Age 18(13), 19(9), 20(12), 21(21), 22(7), 23(1), 24(2), 26(1), 28(1), 32(1)

3. Marital Status: Single 66 Divorced 1
   Married 1 Separated 1

4. Classification: Freshman 20 Junior 16 Special 1
   Sophomore 14 Senior 19

5. Have you personally had a close experience with death? Yes 35
   No 34

6. If yes, when was your most recent close experience with death?
   within the past month 3
   one month to six months 5
   seven months to one year 7
   one year to three years 6
   over three years 13

7. Have you had an experience with the death of a friend of family member? Yes 60 No 8

8. If yes, when was your most recent experience with the death of a friend or family member?
   within the past month 5
   one month to six months 11
   seven months to one year 11
   one year to three years 20
   over three years 13

Please indicate whether or not you would strongly agree, agree, would be undecided, disagree, or strongly disagree (SA, A, U, D, SD) to the following statements. No right or wrong answers to these statements can be found.

9. Not knowing what it feels like to be dead makes me uneasy. 5 10 8 34 12
   SA A U D SD
10. The idea of never thinking again after 2 7 7 27 26 I die frightens me. SA A U D SD

11. The isolation of death does not 10 26 10 17 6 concern me. SA A U D SD

12. I fear dying a painful death. SA A U D SD

13. The loss of physical attractiveness 1 13 11 26 18 that accompanies dying is distressing to me. SA A U D SD

14. The idea that I may die young does 10 15 10 30 4 not bother me. SA A U D SD

15. The subject of life after death troubles 3 3 5 20 38 me. SA A U D SD

16. I am fearful of becoming dependent on 13 31 8 12 5 others for my physical needs. SA A U D SD

17. It worries me to think of the 8 30 9 16 6 financial situation of my survivors. SA A U D SD

18. The thought of my own body decom­posing does not bother me. 19 31 7 10 2 SA A U D SD

19. I do not have any qualms about being 14 26 13 11 5 alone after I die. SA A U D SD

20. Losing my independence due to a fatal 10 29 16 18 6 illness makes me apprehensive. SA A U D SD

21. The loss of my identity at death alarms 2 7 14 22 24 me. SA A U D SD

22. I am not bothered by the idea that I 19 35 4 9 2 may be placed in a casket when I die. SA A U D SD

23. I have misgivings about the fact that 10 21 11 21 6 I might die before achieving my goals. SA A U D SD

24. Do you believe that the world will come to an end according to the will of God?

Yes, I believe this. 64
I am uncertain about this. 3
No, I do not believe this. 2
25. Which of the following statements most clearly describes your idea about the Deity?

I believe in a Divine God, creator of the Universe, who knows my innermost thoughts and feelings, and to whom one day I shall be accountable.

I believe in a power greater than myself, which some people call God and some people call Nature.

I believe in the worth of humanity but not in a God or a Supreme Being.

The so-called universal mysteries are ultimately knowable according to the scientific method based on natural laws.

I am not quite sure what I believe.

I am an atheist.

26. Do you believe that it is necessary for a person to repent before God will forgive his sins?

Yes, God's forgiveness comes only after repentance.

No, God does not demand repentance.

I am not in need of repentance.

27. Which one of the following best expresses your opinion of God acting in history?

God has and continues to act in the history of mankind.

God acted in previous periods but is not active at the present time.

God does not act in human history.

28. Which of the following best expresses your view of the Bible?

The Bible is God's Word and all it says is true.

The Bible was written by men inspired by God, and its basic moral and religious teachings are true, but because writers were men, it contains some human errors.

The Bible is a valuable book because it was written by wise and good men, but God had nothing to do with it.
The Bible was written by men who lived so long ago that it is of little value today.

29. How do you personally view the story of creation as recorded in Genesis?

Literally true history.  

A symbolic account which is not better or worse than any other account of the beginning.  

Not a valid account of creation.  

30. Which of the following best expresses your opinion concerning miracles?

I believe the report of the miracles in the Bible; that is, they occurred through a setting aside of natural laws by a higher power.  

I do not believe in the so-called miracles of the Bible. Either such events did not occur at all, or, if they did, the report is inaccurate, and they could be explained upon scientific grounds if we had the actual facts.  

I neither believe nor disbelieve the so-called miracles of the Bible. No evidence which I have considered seems to prove conclusively that they did not happen as recorded.  

31. What is your view of the following statement: Religious truth is higher than any other form of truth.  

32. Would you write the names of the four Gospels?

Mt. (1); Mt., Mk.(1); Mt., Mk., Lk., (4); Mt., Mk., Lk., Jn. (63)  

33. What are the first five books of the Old Testament?


34. Do you feel it is possible for an individual to develop a well-rounded religious life apart from the institutional church?

No 26  Uncertain 10  Yes 33
35. How much time during a week would you say you spend reading the Bible and other religious literature?

One hour or more 34
One-half hour 19
None 16

36. How many of the past four Sabbath worship services have you attended?

Three or more 45
Two 10
One 8
None 6

37. Which of the following best describes your participation in the act of prayer?

Prayer is a regular part of my behavior. 53
I pray primarily in times of stress and/or need, but not much otherwise. 12
Prayer is restricted pretty much to formal worship services. 2
Prayer is only incidental to my life. 2
I never pray.

38. Do you believe that for your marriage the ceremony should be performed by:

A religious official. 60
Either a religious official or a civil authority. 9
A civil authority.

39. Would you say that one's religious commitment gives life a certain purpose which it could not otherwise have?

48 13 7 1
SA A U D SD

40. All religions stress that belief normally includes some experience of "union" with the Divine. Are there particular moments when you feel "close" to the Divine?

Frequently 35
Occasionally 29
Rarely 5
Never
41. Would you say that religion offers a sense of security in the face of death which is not otherwise possible?
   47 16 5 1
   SA A U D SD

42. How would you respond to the statement: "Religion provides the individual with an interpretation of his existence which could not be discovered by reason alone."
   34 25 8 2
   SA A U D SD

43. Faith, meaning putting full confidence in the things we hope for and being certain of things we cannot see, is essential to one's religious life.
   53 13 2 1
   SA A U D SD

44. What is your feeling about the operation of nonessential businesses on the Sabbath?
   They should not be open. 24
   I am uncertain about this. 23
   They have a legitimate right to be open. 22

45. A boy and a girl, both of whom attend church frequently, regularly date one another and have entered into sexual relations with each other. Do you feel that people who give at least partial support to the church by attending its worship services should behave in this manner?
   Yes 4
   Uncertain 20
   No 45

46. Which of the following statements expresses your opinion concerning the matter in item 45?

   People who identify themselves with church to the extent that they participate in its worship services should uphold its moral teachings as well. 50
   Sexual intercourse prior to marriage is a matter of individual responsibility. 19
47. Two candidates are seeking the same political office. One is a member and a strong participant in a church. The other candidate is indifferent, but not hostile, to religious organizations. Other factors being equal, do you think the candidate identified with the church would be a better public servant than the one who has no interest in religion?

- He definitely would. 1
- He probably would. 4
- Uncertain. 23
- He probably would not. 28
- He definitely would not. 13

48. Suppose you are living next door to a person who confides in you that each year he puts down on his income tax a $50.00 contribution to the church in "loose change" even though he knows that while he does contribute some money to the church in "loose change" each year, the total sum is far below that amount. Do you feel that a person's religious orientation should be reflected in all phases of his life so that such behavior is morally wrong — that it is a form of lying?

- Yes 59
- Uncertain 7
- No 3