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A LITERATURE REVIEW OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PURPOSES,

AND RELIGIOUS VARIATIONS OF THE FUNERAL RITUAL

By

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ABSTRACT

In the past, funerary rituals have been viewed as an important aspect in social society that were shaped by culture and need. However, now American society has become one of death avoidance that strives to ignore the subject and devalue the funeral ritual. Within this paper it is argued that participating in funerary rituals are of societal value for they are beneficial for those who are living. This is done through a review of literature that addresses rituals and their relation to symbols, the history, purposes, benefits, and drawbacks of funeral practices, and the death rituals of four major world religions. This literature review reveals that funerals provide multiple benefits that include the promotion of social cohesion, acting out grief, and finding hope and identity through one's religious beliefs.

KEYWORDS: Ritual, Funerals, Funeral Ritual, Funeral History, Funeral Purposes, Religious Funerals

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Chapter 1: Introduction

"Life asked death, 'Why do people love me but hate you?' Death responded,

'Because you are a beautiful lie and I am a painful truth" ("Life Asked Death," 2012).

Death is inevitable, all things that live eventually die; it is a reality that no one and

nothing can escape. Death as defined by Sealey (2016), an employee in the department of

anesthetics at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital, is characterized by two conditions: the

incapability of a body to produce its own energy and the body's lack of making moral

decisions. However, the true question is, how does society respond to the issue of death

and what enables society to move on? The answer is funerary and death rituals. These

rituals provide an outlet for individuals to effectively walk through the processes of

acceptance and assimilation (Rubin, 2014). Although this everyday process of individuals

dying and the survivors participating in a funeral ritual has been around for centuries,

America's societal opinion regarding the topic is changing (Kastenbaum, 2004). Today,

American society attempts to avoid its ultimate destiny, death (Becker, 2011).

According to Giblin and Hug (2006), professors at Loyola University of Chicago,

there are two popular attitudes toward death within American society, avoidance and

acceptance. Death is avoided within society by the denial of the natural action of dying.

Two capacities in which this may be found is in the language used to refer to death and

the medical view of death. In American society someone does not die, her or she "passes

on" and death is not a natural occurrence, it is a problem that needs a solution (p. 11).

Additionally, Becker (2011), an American cultural anthropologist, speaks to the medical

view of death. He suggested that one of society's main functions is the denial of death.

Evidence of this practice is death no longer occurring in homes, but being hidden within

hospitals and nursing homes (Becker, 2011; Carr, 2012). Carr (2012), a sociology

professor at Rutgers University, explains that the sociological shift in death from the 20th

century until now may account for this avoidance of death. Before and during the 20th

century the American vision of death was a sudden event that could happen at any point

in life. However, that view has shifted to one that insinuates that death only happens

among older generations. But, because death is perceived as an event for the elderly, the

young often fear that they may encounter the experience earlier in life. Therefore any

threat of death is taken into the hands of medical professionals whose goal is to maintain

life, thus reaffirming the view that death is a problem that needs a solution (Giblin &

Hug, 2006; Carr, 2012).

In contrast with the denial of death, another, less popular, American attitude

towards death, is acceptance (Giblin & Hug, 2006). According to Giblin and Hug (2006),

this attitude of accepting of death as a part of life is most commonly found within

psychotherapy, religious affiliations, and older generations. However, others embrace

denial. This denial may be recognized as an effect of death anxiety, a process of negative

thoughts related to the death of one's self or others (Rasmussen & Brems, 1996; Nienaber

& Goedereis, 2015). However, research suggests that some individuals are more prone to

experience this anxiety than others (Thorson, 1977; Thorson & Powell, 1988; Harding,

Flannelly, Weaver, & Costa, 2005).

In a study of 599 participants from ages 16 to 60 and above, Thorson and Powell

(1988) aimed to explore personal ideals about death among a large number of

generationally diverse individuals through the completion of a scale that measured levels

of death concern. Results revealed that women demonstrated a greater level of death

concern due to fears of pain associated with death and bodily decomposition.

Additionally, results demonstrated an inverse relationship of statistical significance in

regards to age and death anxiety. Moreover, within this study younger women were the

most likely to express the most concern for death. One study in which 196 undergraduate

students from the University of Alaska and elderly from Anchorage senior centers were

studied, Rasmussen and Brems (1996) discovered a correlation between age and death

anxiety. Results revealed that an inverse relationship of statistical significance existed

between one's age and psychological maturity and death anxiety. Furthermore, in a study

of 130 members of the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in New York City, the concept

of women experiencing higher death anxiety was affirmed (Harding, et al., 2005). This

study explored the relationship between religiosity, death acceptance, and death anxiety.

While results revealed that there was an inverse relationship between belief in God and

the afterlife and death anxiety, it was also discovered that being a woman was positively

related to death anxiety. Consequently, women accounted for 10.6% of the variation

among death anxiety scores. Evidence suggesting that females experienced higher levels

of death anxiety was also discovered in a study also conducted by Thorson (1977), a

psychology professor at the University of Georgia. The purpose of this study was to

determine if there was a relationship that existed between the sex, personality, and major

of college students and death anxiety. Those with the highest anxiety were social work

majors, individuals with a strong "succoring" personality, and females (p. 857). All in all,

while men experience anxiety towards death, women and younger adults are prone to

experience a greater amount of death anxiety, and will therefore avoid death to a greater

degree. But, in ignoring death and avoiding death rituals, individuals deny themselves the

opportunity to assess as well as process their emotions and the events that have taken place.

According to the CDC, there were 2.6 million registered deaths reported in the United States in the year of 2014, and today there are approximately 2.4 million funerals conducted each year in the United States ("Deaths and Mortality" n.d.; "Economics of the Funeral Industry | Homegoings| PBS," 2013). As one can see, death is unavoidable, but as time continues, funerals are either approached carefully or are avoided by the living, who possess a fear associated with the subject (Corr, 2015). But funerals, like death, are of significance. The process of funerals help individuals to make sense of the events that have taken place and provide a healthy means of coping for those who are directly involved (Varga, 2014). Presently, there is an adequate amount of research regarding the benefits of funerals for the living; however, learning more about funerary rituals and how they enable the living to process events can ultimately aid those who have experienced a death in their assimilation processes. As death anxiety and the avoidance of death become increasingly popular, the need for such research increases (Neimeyer, 1994; Rasmussen, & Brems, 1996; Harding at al., 2005; Becker, 2011; Nienaber & Goedereis, 2015).

The purpose of this paper is to discover and explore the implications of funerary practices in a way that reveals supportive evidence to suggest that participating in funeral rituals is beneficial for those who are living. This will be done through the discussion of rituals and their relation to symbols, the history, purposes, benefits, and drawbacks of funeral practices; and the death rituals of four major world religions.

Chapter 2: Rituals

Rituals are a common phenomenon that can be found in every social group and are incorporated in all societies to some extent (Rando, 1985). Bell (1997), a religious studies scholar, notes that "at one time or another, almost every human activity has been done ritually or made part of a ritual" (p. 91). A ritual, as defined by Romanoff and Terenzio (1998), is a device created by a culture that serves to preserve social order and provide a means of understanding during a complicated time. This is done through the promotion of social cohesion (Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016). Watson-Jones and Legare (2015), psychology professors at the University of Texas, propose that rituals provide individuals of a group with a bonding force that "fosters the longevity of social groups" (p. 3). Cohesion is developed through the participation in a universal activity that identifies active, concerned group members, and reveals one's commitment (Roberts-Turner, 2016; Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016).

Another aspect of a ritual is its' performance, which is done with precision and literalism, for individuals feel that a ritual must be done in a certain manner and be conducted in a way that is similar to past performances (Rappaport, 1999; Liénard & Boyer, 2006). Moreover, rituals may be described as patterned social responses that are repeated in a similar manner to past responses, with a degree of variation (Kastenbaum, 2004). Repeated elements that are included in the ritual itself are used in order to hold one's attention, allowing an individual to focus on what is being done (Bell, 1997; Schuck & Bucy, 1997; Rappaport, 1999; Rossano, 2012). Repetition within rituals may also be viewed as a means of communicating an unspoken message such as family values, goals, and attitudes (Rando, 1985).

Additionally, there is no goal that can be reached by performing the specific actions that make up the ritual, for rituals are characterized by goal demotion (Bell, 1997; Rappaport, 1999; Lienard & Boyer, 2006). Thus, the acts that are performed provide those involved with an end result of having taken part in a ritual but do not allow the performer to reach a goal (Bell, 1997; Rappaport, 1999). In a qualitative study of goal demotion and its effects on individual cooperation, 48 students from the University of Denmark were recruited and studied by authors Mitkidis, Lienard, Nielbo, and Sorensen (2014). Within this study the authors discussed the relationship between these goal demoted behaviors and one's participation in an activity. During the study, students were divided into groups of four and were given instructions on how to complete the task of building with wooden blocks. Half of the groups were given an image of the end result, while the other half were not given anything. After having built the structure, the groups were then asked to play a game in which they would invest in the project that they had completed while also estimating the investment of their teammates. In a statistically significant result, those who were given the condition that provided a clear goal demonstrated higher investments and expectations than those in the goal-demoted group. Those who were not confident in the end result of their actions were less inclined to participate in the 'ritual.' Moreover, goal-demotion within ritual may cause individuals to refrain from participating or experience less post-ritual satisfaction. However, it is also suggested that when an individual does participate, the opaqueness of the ritual practice strengthens their ability to act out of faith (Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016).

Although rituals are not used to obtain a specific goal, they are often performed for a purpose. Rituals are performed for the purpose of aiding individuals in coping with

a change while minimizing the disruption of their life (Rosenthal & Marshall, 1988; Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006). According to Wolin and Bennett (1984), this can take place in three different forms: patterned interactions, family traditions, and family celebrations. Patterned interactions consist of daily events that are not necessarily planned such as dinner time, while family traditions are events that are less culturally specific, such as birthdays or family reunions, and family celebrations encompass other ritual activities that are specific to culture, such as weddings and funerals (Malaquias, Crespo, & Francisco, 2015). However, a significant disruption within the family unit may threaten the meaningfulness of ritual practices (Fiese, 2007; Migliorini, Rania, Tassara, & Cardinali, 2016). Thus, if a ritual is to be successful in providing a means for individuals to cope, then it must minimize life disruption. In a quantitative study of 124 individuals, local Italian and migrant Italian couples completed two instruments that measured ritual meaning and ritual organization (Migliorini et. al, 2016). Between the two groups, a statistically significant difference was found to exist in relation to local Italian couples and symbolic significance. This reveals that those couples who migrated to Italy found rituals to be less meaningful. Therefore, it may be suggested that when a family system is influenced by stress or a change that disrupts rituals, the practice loses meaning. Fiese (2007) reports that when a family is faced with unanticipated disruption, rituals become hollow and lose meaning. For this reason, it is further argued that generating meaningful rituals will pose a challenge to families who must adjust to a new setting or have lost a loved one (Migliorini et. al, 2016).

Symbols and Rituals

Among researchers, it is agreed upon that rituals not only involve specific actions, multiple steps, and repetition, but also the inclusion of symbolic elements (Legare & Souza, 2012). Altogether, rituals are usually short in duration, thus "powerful tools are needed to direct and invite participants' attention away from their everyday thoughts and actions" so that they will focus on the purpose of the ceremony. Symbol is usually the "tool" used to obtain this shift in focus (Reeves, 2011, p. 7). Through symbolic meaning, rituals are able to maintain family focus by promoting identity and cohesion amongst family members. (Cigoli & Scabini, 2006; Migliorini, et al., 2016). A three-year longitudinal, quantitative study of 1,774 New Zealand students and parents supports this idea (Crespo, Kielpikowski, Pryor, & Jose, 2011). In the study, instruments were completed once a year to measure family ritual meaning, family cohesion, and well-being. The study revealed positive correlations between parental ritual meaning and the adolescent's perspective of family cohesion. Additionally, because family is a form of societal structure, and a large sample size was examined during this study, it may be generalized that other societal structures may promote cohesion through ritual. While those surveyed do not account for a whole structure, they are each small pieces of many structures through which they may reflect similar behavior. Furthermore, in a quantitative study of 389 Portuguese children with cancer and their parents, Santos, Crespo, Canavarro, and Kazak (2015) also discussed the relationship between rituals and family cohesion. Participants completed four instruments that were used to measure ritual meaning, family cohesion, hope, and quality of life. Results revealed a relationship of statistical significance exists between parent and child perceptions of ritual and family

cohesion. Those who reported high levels of ritual meaningfulness experienced greater

family cohesion than those who reported lower levels, therefore supporting the idea that

rituals promote cohesion. Additionally, as cohesion increased, quality of family life

increased as well. In return, family cohesion promotes quality of life via a feeling of

belonging amongst family members that essentially strengthens the core of the family

culture (Bossard & Boll, 1950; Fiese, 2007). Moreover, symbolic ritual promotes

cohesion through the development of social belonging. Additionally, through the use of

symbol, rituals also provide individuals with a sense of interconnectedness not only

between participants, but across generations with the use of social cohesion (Fiese, 2007;

Migliorini, et al., 2016). Thus, rituals also have the ability to maintain family life by

supporting organization and communication throughout the family and across

generations.

Because the effects of rituals have the ability to transfer across generations, rituals

are structures that foster a sense of continuity of experience from the past to the future

(Fiese, 2007; Migliorini, et al., 2016). This symbolic connection through time is an

important aspect of ritual that is often used to ensure continuity among a collection of

history, or the history of an individual (Rosenthal & Marshall, 1988). Rituals also

promote continuity through their reminding function. According to Roberts-Turner

(2016), a ritual is a "vessel in time by which we remember what's important to us" (p.

38). Rituals are able to cue memories that help individuals maintain both values and

standards of social groups (Rossano, 2012). Furthermore, because rituals are highly

symbolic, they possess the ability to communicate on a deeper level than the words that

are said (Fiese, 2007). Symbolism communicates the hidden meanings that are not

explicitly stated but can be inferred from words and actions.

Chapter 3: A Modern Ritual: The Funeral

Historic Funeral Rituals

According to Kastenbaum (2004), the founder of the journal Omega: Journal of Death and Dying, death rituals have "been at the core of virtually all world cultures" (p. 5). In a review of literature, he continues this point to say that one of the key elements to a society's survival is its willingness to perform rituals that connect individuals to the dead. Furthermore, Irion (1991), a professor at the Lancaster Theological Seminary, proposes that the funeral ritual comes from the history of the human community, or society. Moreover, to understand the modern American funeral ritual, one must study rituals from the past of some of the most influential societies.

Funerals of Early Humanity. "Human concern for the dead predates written history" (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2011, p. 86). Excavated remains from the Paleolithic period indicate that 10,000 to 40,000 years ago humans were intentionally burying those who had died. This evidence is supported by the presence of handmade objects and personal items that had been placed in the earth both inside and outside of the graves (Harder, 2001). The burials of long ago indicate that from the beginning of society until now, social groups have been gathering to bond and express emotion and purpose upon the occurrence of death. However as society developed, cultural views and perspectives on death also continued to develop (DeSpelder & Strickland, 2011). Throughout time, it became evident that many cultures maintained bonds with those who had died and also believed that the dead obtained supernatural power (Kastenbaum, 2004; DeSpelder & Strickland, 2011). Because of this, the living felt compelled to respect the dead through ceremony in order to show respect to those who died before them. In the eyes of the living, the dead who were not properly cared for were both dangerous and vulnerable.

During early tribal civilizations, if the dead were not guided into the next life, the living

would not only suffer the wrath of the dead, but the dead would also be lost from the

afterlife (Kastenbaum, 2004). Therefore, unlike those rituals of the modern American

society, funerals were not originally performed out of grief or hope, but they were

performed out of fear (Irion, 1991). Thus, not only did earlier civilizations perform

funeral rituals to create and maintain bonds with the living, but ceremonies were also

performed to "secure the goodwill" of the dead (Kastenbaum, 2004, p. 6). While some

cultures still hold these beliefs and customs, others have evolved over the centuries.

Egyptian Funerals. During the fourth millennium BC, those of ancient Egypt

developed death practices and funerals as a way in which the dead could be preserved

and carried into the afterlife (Taylor, 2001). The Egyptians believed that when one died

his or her life continued on beyond the grave in the realm of the dead. However, to enter

into this realm the deceased needed the help of the living (Taylor, 2001; Dunand &

Lichtenberg, 2006). In order to continue into the afterlife the deceased's body had to be

preserved and unified with the deceased's spiritual elements known as the ka and ba

(Taylor, 2001). To ensure preservation of the body, the individual was mummified

immediately after death. This process included the washing of the corpse, the removal of

the brain and organs, with the exception of the heart, drying the body to prevent

decomposition, packing and anointing the body, as well as wrapping the body in linens.

After this process was completed the funerary ritual would be performed (Dunand &

Lichtenberg, 2006). The ceremony began by placing the mummified individual in a

wooden container and relinquishing the body to the family. Then a procession of family,

friends, and other mourners would carry the body to the tomb which was located to the

west of the Nile River, towards the land of the dead Dunand & Lichtenberg, 2006). The

body would then be placed in a pit-like grave and covered with dirt in order to protect the

body and ensure one's afterlife (Taylor, 2001; Dunand & Lichtenberg, 2006). Afterward,

the oldest son of the family would provide the corpse with the nourishment that would be

needed to sustain the deceased in the afterlife by placing cakes and other foods beside the

grave (Dunand & Lichtenberg, 2006). During this time funerals were used as a means to

ensure the deceased's immortal life.

Roman Funerals. During the Roman era, individuals sought to immortalize the

dead through the use of memory. As a result, many individuals held such a strong desire

to be remembered that they would prepare for their own funeral by creating and

decorating their own grave in order to prepare for their death (Hope, 1997). However, it

was not the dead that one hoped would be remembered, but the living associated with

them. In this time, funerals were mainly used as a means to express social status and

display the family's connections. While spiritual and emotional aspects were

incorporated into the ritual, the display of familial status was the primary purpose (Hope,

1997) According to Roman burial customs, graveyards were to be located outside of the

settlement that used them, but there was an exception. Because the gesture

communicated great esteem and respect, those who were deemed honorable by society or

belonged to a higher class could be buried within the established town (Hope, 1997;

DeSpelder & Strickland, 2011).

Greek Funerals. Like the Romans, ancient Greeks also sought to memorialize

the dead through the use of memory, however the family was given this responsibility as

opposed to the deceased doing it ahead of time (Hope, 1997; "Sweet relief," 2015).

Greeks believed that upon one's death his or her soul left the body through a puff of

wind, once this occurred the body could be prepared for burial ("Death, Burial, and the

Afterlife in Ancient Greece" n.d.; "Sweet relief," 2015). Greek death and burial practices

began with the washing of the deceased's body, its anointment with oil, and then the

placement of the body on a high table within the deceased's home. This time was referred

to as the "prosthesis," or the laying out of the body so that the community could mourn

and pay their respects ("Sweet relief," 2015, p. 53). Often members of the community

would perform laments during this time as a means to express their loss and praise the

dead (Ochs, 1993). After this time came the funeral procession, and then the burial of the

body that was marked with a small mound of earth ("Sweet relief," 2015). According to

Greek beliefs, if anyone was denied these rites by the living, then the living would have

insulted the dead's dignity. Moreover, Greek funerals were a time during which the living

could express emotion and communicate respect for the dead.

History of American Funerals

In 19th century America, the family of the deceased took on the role of caring for

the body and performing a funeral ritual (Hunt, 1971). This of which was done as a

response to death that communicated family grief, loss, and hope (Irion, 1991). The

family was responsible for washing the body, while a local carpenter made the coffin and

a church leader dug the grave (Hunt, 1971). Traditionally, in the 1800's the family of the

deceased would conduct a wake (Weber, 1961). The wake was a precautionary measure

in which the dead individual was laid out and watched over through the night. This was to

ensure that the individual was truly dead, for during this time it was often hard to tell due

to the lack of medical expertise. After the wake the family would place the deceased in

the parlor of the home so that friends and family may come and pay their respects just as

the Greeks did (Fuller, 1982; "Sweet relief," 2015,). Later, just as in Roman times, close

family members of the deceased would lower the casket into the grave, which was

usually located in a nearby church cemetery, and would then fill the grave with dirt

(Fuller, 1982; Dunand & Lichtenberg, 2006). Moreover, the funeral ritual was the

responsibility of the family.

   However, in the later 19th century the funeral began to evolve. During this time

coffins began to be referred to as caskets, and the dead were referred to as the deceased

and the role of the family changed as the role of an undertaker evolved (Hunt, 1971). As

America became an industrialized nation and populations increased, families needed

more help to dispose of and honor their dead. Therefore, the role of the funeral director

emerged. Front parlors no longer housed the funerary practice, for these were held at a

funeral home instead, and the family was no longer responsible for caring for the body or

performing a funeral (Hunt, 1971; Fuller, 1982). Thus, attention began to shift from

focusing on the dead, to focusing on the mourner (Hunt, 1971). Furthermore, the loss that

the bereaved felt led individuals to memorialize the dead in order to outwardly express

their inner grief (Lensing, 2001). Such memorials were more than burying the dead in

cemeteries, like the Romans; they included greater symbols of remembrance such as

gravestones, epitaphs, and a range of mourning paraphernalia (Hope; 1977; DeSpelder &

Strickland, 2011; Irwin, 2015).

Funeral Purposes and Their Fulfillment

   Although funerals have been used in the past to satisfy the dead or display social

class, these ceremonies have evolved in such a way that they are now used as a

community experience to address death and provide structure (Irion, 1991). Research

suggests that "people need help to bring about order in a time of grief and crisis, when

almost everything has seemed to change" (Nilsson & Ängarne-Lindberg, 2016, p. 205).

Essentially, funerals serve the purpose of disposing of a body, but they also offer

survivors the opportunity to search for an understanding of the change and of their

personal values (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006; Kastenbaum, 2004). This ritual is

used as both an endpoint and a starting point for the survivors, for funerals mark the end

of one person's life while also presenting others with the opportunity to affirm life by

affirming death (Irion, 1991; Kastenbaum, 2004). Funerals also serve the purpose of

remembering who the deceased was by memorializing in an effort not to forget an

individual (Irwin, 2015). It is proposed that "only through memorialization is the memory

of anyone prolonged beyond the lifetimes of those who remember them based on

experience" (Smith, 1996, p. 192). Therefore, this is an act of appreciating the life that

has come to an end through the recollection of memories so that they seem to live on

(Long & Buehring, 2014; Irwin, 2015). These symbolic behaviors are a means through

which individuals may address feelings that are too difficult to communicate with others.

Evidence presented in a study by Gamino, Easterling, Stirman, and Sewell (2000)

reveals that funerals have the ability to aid bereaved individuals in the process of

adjustment to life after the loss. In a mixed methods study of 74 bereaved individuals, the

authors reported their findings regarding the relationship between funeral perception and

measurable grief. Researchers administered two forms of research methods in order to

gather information. First, the Grief Experience Inventory (GEI) was given to measure

symptoms of grief. Then, participants were interviewed to provide a personal report on

the funeral experience. Those who perceived the funeral ritual to be a comforting

experience received a lower score on the GEI, which was of statistical significance, as

opposed to those who found little to no comfort. Moreover, those who found the funeral

as a comforting and helpful ritual were able to effectively adjust to life after loss through

the regulation of grief which is in direct connection to one's perception of the funeral.

Thus, the living obtain benefits from taking part in a funeral, not the dead. Individuals are

given the opportunity to act out their deep feelings, to obtain an emotional outlet, find

meaning through symbols, and to memorialize the dead through a meaningful ritual

(Rando, 1985). In other words, funerals include benefits that help individuals make sense

of the events that have taken place and provide a healthy means of coping for those who

are directly involved (Varga, 2014).

   However, while some researchers (Irion, 1991; Kastenbaum, 2004; Long &

Buehring, 2014; Irwin, 2015) view the funeral process as being a societal process that

aids one in coming to terms with death, others like Lageman (1986), a counselor at

Harford Pastoral Counseling Service in California, view the funeral as an intervention of

the grief process. Lageman (1986) suggests that funerals often only help individuals on a

cognitive level, therefore it is the facilitator's responsibility to provide attendants with

emotional understanding and support. Moreover, it is proposed that in order for a

facilitator to meet the needs of the bereaved, the funeral must serve the purpose of

proclaiming the faith of mourners, providing mourners with an emotional outlet, and the

opportunity to celebrate the life of the deceased.

   According to a study of 10 black males between the ages of 12 and 15 that was

conducted in New Orleans, funeral rituals serve two of those purposes mentioned by

Lageman (1986) and Bordere (2008). The purpose of this study was to discover how black adolescent males perceived and understood the funeral ritual, which included second-lines. Results revealed that these individuals understood death to be a celebration of the deceased, a time of remembrance, and the promotion of unity, all of which could be achieved through the funeral ritual. Therefore, the funeral ritual served the purpose of meeting these social needs.

During the time after a death the funeral becomes the place in which family and friends can say goodbye to the dead, as well as pay their respects (Søfting, Dyregrov, & Dyregrov, 2016). A funeral often acts as a reunion of friends and family, during which the family of the deceased naturally forms into an opportunity for individuals to receive counseling and support from someone with whom they are familiar (Thursby, 2006; Shabanowitz, 2013; Draper, Holloway, & Adamson, 2014; Søfting, Dyregrov, & Dyregrov, 2016). Therefore, family and friendship become prevalent themes at the gathering (Shabanowitz, 2013).

Moreover, the attendance of family and friends also provides those who are directly impacted the reaffirming and strengthening of social ties through connecting with those around them (Geschiere, 2005; Søfting, Dyregrov, & Dyregrov, 2016). Thus, the presence of numerous individuals at a funeral acts as a secondary support system for those who are mourning (Shabanowitz, 2013; Draper, Holloway, & Adamson, 2014; Søfting, Dyregrov, & Dyregrov, 2016). However, it is not only the bereaved who benefit from this experience, but other attendees as well. Through such a gathering, those within the family's social environment are given a time to share stories and wisdom, as well as celebrate and transfer their culture from one generation to another (Thursby, 2006).

While the attendance of a funeral ritual is most often perceived as beneficial for adults, these rituals are also beneficial through the eyes of children. A qualitative study of 11 bereaved children and one of their parents sought to investigate the link between children and funerals (Søfting, Dyregrov, & Dyregrov, 2016). This study was conducted in Norway and included bereaved children from the ages of seven to 12 who had participated in a death related ritual. The driving focus of the study was to discover the significance of children attending and participating in funerals and how it affected their experiences. All children who were interviewed expressed the pleasure they gained from participating in the funeral of their loved one even though it was stressful. Results revealed that the participating children recommend that if given the chance, other children should participate in funerals. The children also disclosed that by participating in the ritual they felt included in the family during this hard time and also had the chance to say goodbye, or obtain closure. Thus, in this study the inclusion of children in the funeral ritual promoted a sense of cohesion among participants.

However, while funerals promote a sense of cohesion, they also allow individuals to express their deeper feelings. In a qualitative study of 25 recently bereaved people and 18 funeral directors from across the southern region of the United States these expressions were studied (McIlwain, 2002). The purpose of the study was to investigate the differences of the social interactions of black and white families during a funeral ritual. This information was gathered through in-person interviewing of the funeral directors and an online discussion-based questionnaire for the recently bereaved. Results revealed that while both families used funerals as a means of outward expression of internal emotions, black families practiced greater outward emotional expression. During

a funeral, white families primarily expressed feelings through crying and anything else could be viewed as a distraction. However, black family members in the study expressed their emotions through crying, wailing, convulsions, fainting, and many other acts. Although those who did not belong to black culture viewed these actions as disruptions, those black individuals studied found this to be extremely helpful in expressing their internal feelings. Results also reveal that funerals allow white families to express the same emotions and obtain similar benefits, however grief is outwardly expressed to a lesser degree. Altogether, this study reveals that funerals provide survivors of different races with an outlet that allows them to act out their deeper feelings that may not always be expressed in words (Irion, 1991).

This was further expressed in a follow up study of 21 bereaved individuals who had previously participated in a qualitative study of the therapeutic benefits of funeral rituals (Bosley & Cook, 1993). The purpose of the present study was to discover how participating in bereavement research had affected the participants. Results of this study revealed that the experience of the research and the participation in a funeral ritual were perceived as an overall positive event. The study also revealed that participants not only perceived benefits provided by participation in research, but they expressed their perception of a funeral's purpose as well. This purpose was to provide a time and place in which the bereaved may express their feelings of loss.

It is said that a "funeral rite is a social rite par excellence. Its ostensible object is the dead person, but it benefits not the dead, but the living" (Firth, 1964, p. 63). According to Bosley and Cook (1993) this statement holds truth. In a study of 32 adults ages 27 to 79, Bosley and Cook (1993) questioned those who had lost a parent or spouse

about their funeral experiences in order to explore therapeutic aspects of funerals. The responses of participants, which were gathered through the use of mixed questioning methods, revealed five therapeutic benefits that the ritual provided. These were memory as a means of acceptance, affirming faith, expressing emotions, receiving social support, and reconnecting to family heritage. Thus, this study suggests, but does not prove, that funerals may provide the bereaved with multiple therapeutic benefits. These results also affirm the use of a funeral ritual as a means to express difficult emotions (Irion, 1993; Bosley & Cook, 1993; McIlwain, 2002). Another study that produced similar results is one that was conducted by Hung (2013), a professor at Chinse Culture University in Taipei City, Taiwan. The purpose of this study was to study social and cultural aspects of the funeral tradition and how it affected mourning through the interviewing of one rural Taiwanese family. The results of an in-depth interview and researcher observation revealed among the studied family, funerals had functions of mourning and healing. These functions were accepting the death, promotion of the expression of emotions, provision of a space for grief healing and familial psychological support, family connectedness, and the expression of fear of death. While the sample size of this study prevents generalizability of these results, the results confirm that a funeral has the ability to provide the mourner with therapeutic benefits. Within both of these studies, which were conducted in different years and geographic locations, the same benefits were found (Bosley & Cook, 1993; Hung 2013).

All in all, the purpose of a funeral is to meet the social needs of understanding social change, celebrating and remembering the deceased, promoting unity between

survivors, and the expression of deep emotion among the bereaved (Bosley & Cook, 1993; McIlwain, 2002; Bordere, 2008; Long & Buehring, 2014; Irwin, 2015).

Drawbacks of Funerals

Despite the benefits that funerals provide, they are often avoided by the living due to fear associated with the subject (Corr, 2015). During this ritual individuals are reminded of and exposed to the uncomfortable reality that both aging and death are inevitable (Kastenbaum, 2004). In a society that celebrates life, people often avoid thoughts about death. Some find the ritual to have a negative connotation that is linked with finality of separation from the dead, isolation, and weeping (Thursby, 2006). Grief is also largely associated with this ritual, for funerals are a patterned response to loss (Kastenbaum, 2004).

Additionally, funerals often only help the facilitation of grief and do not lead to its resolve, leaving individuals frustrated. Gamino, Easterling, Stirman, and Sewell (2000). In a study of the relationship between funerals and grief; individual funeral perception, measurable grief, and adverse events were explored. Those individuals who experienced adverse events during the ritual and did not view the experience comforting scored the highest on the GEI. The relationships that exist between these components are also of statistical significance. Thus, if an individual is not satisfied with the funeral ritual or experiences events that enhance or add additional stressors, their grief will remain at a higher level.

Furthermore, Doka (1985) reports that participation in funeral practices do not affect the facilitation of one's grief work when a death is expected. This statement is supported by the results of a mixed methods study of 50 individuals who had experienced

a death one to one and a half years prior to the study. The Carey Adjustment Scale (CAS) was used to measure one's adjustment to the death. While 96% or participants reported finding funeral satisfaction and 72% actively participated in the ceremony, only 57% of those who had an active role felt that participation had helped initially. This 57% was comprised of those individuals who had experienced an unexpected death. While the funeral ritual was reported by some to aid the grieving process immediately after death, no participants reported long term effects of having attended a funeral. The CAS did not reveal any significant differences in grief adjustment between those who actively participated in the ritual and those who did not. This study suggests that funerals have the potential to provide participants with temporary relief; however, they may not provide participants with lasting effects.

Additionally, some research suggests that if participants desire to be positively affected by a funeral ritual, they must be actively involved in the process, otherwise no satisfaction will be found by the attendant. Through the use of a series of quantitative measures, authors Hayslip, Booher, Scoles, and Guarnaccia (2007) studied 348 individuals who had experienced the loss of a close friend or family member within the past two years. The goal of this study was to develop an instrument that would measure difficulties individuals experienced in regards to the funeral ritual. Participants completed 15 different measurements that assessed grief, death anxiety, personality, adjustment, funeral-related measures, and the ability to cope with funerals. Results of this research revealed three factors of statistical significance. These factors included trust in funeral businesses, concerns regarding the cemetery, and issues regarding grief. While the study helped aid in the production of an assessment inventory, it also revealed how the

discovered factors affected the funeral experience. It was found that older individuals and those who were heavily involved in the funeral process experienced fewer coping difficulties. Therefore, one may conclude from this study that the level of one's involvement in a funeral is directly related to the ritual's overall effectiveness. Moreover, this is problematic for those who are seeking to find comfort in the benefits of the funerary ritual, for they may not have to desire to actively participate in the funeral. Kastenbaum (2004) reports that funerals are a pattern response to death that allow survivors to model their response based off of societal norms and previous experiences. Therefore, meaning may not be found in the ritual because the pattern allows individuals to go through the motions of a ritual without provoking meaning.

Chapter 4: Major World Religions and Death Rituals

"Religion occupies a wide spectrum of human activities and existence" and effects all individuals, whether consciously or unconsciously (Mulaa, 2014, p. 1). While some may believe that religion has little to no effect on their lives, others depend on aspects of their faith for the structure of everyday life, or during times of chaos (Ladd, 2007). In a quantitative study of 406 individuals diagnosed with a mental illness, researchers tested the relationship between religion and chaos by studying the relationship between coping with a mental illness and religion (Tepper, Rogers, Coleman, & Malony, 2001). This study was conducted through the recruitment of Los Angeles County mental health facilities patients. Participants completed a questionnaire that obtained demographics and measured religious coping, symptomatology and everyday functioning. Results revealed that 80 percent of those surveyed used religious activities as a means of coping with daily stress or frustrations. These practices included actions such as reading the Bible and spending time in prayer. Altogether, scores on the Religious Coping Index and the Symptoms Checklist 90-R were negatively correlated. Thus, it can be concluded that religion has the ability to act as a buffer among those with not only mental illness, but everyday stressors. Additionally, in a review of literature conducted by Van Uden and Zondag (2016) the relationship existing between religion and coping was studied further in an effort to contribute to the treatment of Post-traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). The focus of this study includes religious meaning, coping, and rituals. Religion was discussed as a refuge from everyday stressors and traumatic events of those who had PTSD, which consequentially led to effective coping. Results revealed that individuals sought understanding and meaning within their presenting problems through the medium

of religion. The authors suggested that religion had the ability to enable individuals to

find order and purpose in chaos and proposed that religions may also be used in order to

cope with death and suffering. The authors also proposed that while religion had the

ability to provide an effective means of coping, religious coping often occurred after

other options of coping had been exhausted, such as breathing or taking a walk.

Therefore, the authors concluded that religion was that last strategy for coping with

stressors (Van Uden & Zondag, 2016).

One instance in which religion heavily influences everyday stressors and the

coping of the individual, is during a time of loss. A study performed at Kansas State

University that aimed to gather data about death and bereavement from a student body on

both macro and micro levels revealed a relationship between religion and coping through

the study of 18 college students, who were randomly selected from a group of 813 who

had participated in a previous study (Balk, 1997). Results revealed that 11 of the 18

participants used spiritual practices as an effective means of coping. Furthermore, a study

of 130 individuals conducted at the Episcopal Church of the Epiphany in New York City

explored the relationship between religiosity, death acceptance, and death anxiety and

revealed similar results (Harding et al., 2005). Religiosity was found to have a negatively

associated relationship with death anxiety, meaning that those with a strong sense of

religious beliefs experienced less death-related stress. Although spiritual beliefs aid

individuals during the processes of loss, each spiritual practice may look different in

various religious settings. This variation may be viewed through many different practices,

but one of the most common practices associated with loss that displays religious

influence is the funeral.

Islamic Beliefs

According to Dr. Hewer, whose collegiate studies and 20 years of work experience focus on Christian-Muslim relations, Muslims are individuals who actively demonstrate Islamic faith by practicing the five pillars of Islam and believing the Qur'an and the Articles of Faith (2006). "Iman," or faith, is believed to be the core foundation of Islam and is the evidence of Islamic devotion (Geaves, 2006, p. 47, *Islam*; Sardar, 2007). Essentially, faith is a belief in realities that cannot be seen that consists of two components: "verbal attestation and heartfelt conviction" (Khan, 2009, p. 144). The verbal confirmation of Iman, known as Iman al-fiqhi, is encompassed within the "Shahada," a pillar of the Islamic faith (Geaves, 2006, p. 99, *Islam*). The second level of faith, Iman al-haqeeqi, is known as a devoted faith that is demonstrated through the actions of the individual. Within the Islamic faith, not only must one believe in good, but they must practice it through actions as well. Muslims believe that their essential purpose in life is to do good and fulfill their ethical obligations. Therefore within the Qur'an, Iman al-haqeeqi is referred to as the true faith, for it produces action (Sardar, 2007). According to Islamic belief, Iman may be obtained by exercising and experiencing spiritual practices through the doing of good. As a testament to this faith, the Qur'an explains that each person will be rewarded, or punished upon death, according to the works that they have done (Qur'an 16:97). Thus, while one must verbally proclaim their faith through Iman al-fiqhi to be considered Muslim, Muslims are not judged by these proclamations but by their actions throughout life, or their Iman al-haqeeqi (Sardar, 2007; Khan, 2009).

Five pillars of Islam. The Five Pillars of Islam are the fundamental practices in which Muslim individuals are obligated to take part (Hewer, 2006; Sardar, 2007). These practices, demonstrate Iman al-haqeeqi because they elicit the need for those of Islamic faith to put forth action and do good. The pillars consist of Shahada, Salat, Zakat, Sawn, and Hajj (Geaves, 2006, p. 37, 96, 98, 121, *Islam*). Shahada, which means witness or testimony, is the verbal declaration that one must make in order to be considered Muslim (Hewer, 2006; Sardar, 2007; Khan, 2009). Altogether, the Shahada serves as a profession of faith and as a reminder to Muslims that nothing must be of equal or greater value than God (Hewer, 2006). The second pillar of faith is Salat, or the performance of prayer five times throughout the day (Sardar, 2007). These formal prayers are performed after dawn, after midday, before sunset, immediately after sunset, and at night (Hewer, 2006). Zakat, the third pillar of Islamic faith is a way in which Islamic individuals are called to purify their finances through providing for those in need. Geaves, a professor of religious studies at the University of Chester, states that the principle of Zakat ensures that Islam maintains its sense of communal care, social responsibility, and economic justice (2006). The fourth pillar of faith, Sawn, is the fasting of food, drink, sex, and immoral thoughts or actions during the ninth month of the Muslim calendar (Hewer, 2006; Sardar, 2007). The final pillar, Hajj, is "the pilgrimage to Makka once in a lifetime, if health and wealth permit" (Hewer, 2006, p. 88). The journey displays a physical and spiritual effort that one has put into their faith and also promote unity of those involved (Sardar, 2007). This is held during the twelfth month of the Muslim calendar on the eighth day through the thirteenth day.

Articles of faith. In addition to the Five Pillars of Islam, Iman is displayed through the belief in the Articles of Faith. The Articles of Faith are professed through the concept of Iman al-fiqhi, or the verbal confirmation of one's faith (Khan, 2009). These articles are derived from the Qur'an and express the core beliefs and values the Islamic faith (Hewer, 2006).The first belief within the article of faith is the belief in God and the concept of "tawheed," or God's oneness (Geaves, 2006, p. 109, *Islam*; Hewer, 2006, Sardar, 2007). In addition to God, Muslims believe in the existence of angels, who were made to obey God. The essential task of angels in the Islamic faith is to convey the guidance of God to humans without corrupting the given message (Hewer, 2006). Just as one believes in God, they must also believe in all of his prophets (Hewer, 2006). It is believed that God often sent His prophets to the earth to remind individuals of their purpose and provide them with a guide to lead them in this world and the next (Sachedina, 2005). Muslims also believe that God sent guidance not only through Prophets, but through Books such as the Qur'an and those mentioned by the Qur'an (Hewer, 2006). The Qur'an is the Islamic book of instruction that is believed to have been given to the prophet Muhammad through a series of revelations (Geaves, 2006, *Islam*; Hewer, 2006; Sardar, 2007). The fifth belief associated with the articles of faith is the Day of Judgment. Before the Day of Judgment, the last days will begin on earth with the rise of Al-Mahdi, the rightly guided one (Hewer, 2006). Then Isa will return from heaven and fight Al-Dajjal, the great evil, and will rule on earth for a while then die. After the death of Isa, the last days will end and the Day of Judgement will begin. On this day the angel Israfil will announce the judgement through the blowing of a horn, then all those living will die and the dead will be resurrected and will stand before God (Sardar,

2007). Here all people will stand judgment before God and the recording angels of each

individual will present their records to Allah. Based upon the judgment of one's actions,

individuals will either be rewarded with Paradise or punished with fire. In the Islamic

faith this day is not viewed as the end of one's life, but a gateway to eternal life in

Paradise. Finally, the last article of Islamic faith is destiny, or the belief that the outcome

of one's life is within God's control. According to Muslim beliefs, individuals are

responsible for their own actions, but God is still all-powerful and predetermines the path

of one's life (Hewer, 2006).

Islamic death and funeral practices. All in all, each element of Islam

contributes to the uniqueness of the funerary practices of this particular faith. According

to Muslim beliefs, an individual's life on earth is a stage of preparation that must be

endured in order to enter into the eternal life that awaits after death (Ross, 2001;

Greenberg, 2007). One's ultimate goal is to enter into Paradise upon the day of

Judgement. However, this may not be accomplished without the belief in the foundations

of Islam; Iman, the Five Pillars of Islam, and the Articles of Faith ("PBS - Islam: Empire

of Faith - Faith - Koran and Tradition," n.d.). By practicing these beliefs, Muslim

individuals are preparing themselves for the afterlife, for Islam dictates that the purpose

of the worldly life is to prepare for eternal life (Ross, 2001). Throughout one's life both

aspects of Iman, Iman al-fiqhi and Iman al-haqeeqi, are recorded by the designated angels

until the time of death when the deceased can do no more. It is believed that after the

grave is filled and the mourners leave, the angels Munkar and Nakir appear to interrogate

the dead (Ross, 2001; Hewer, 2006; Sardar; 2007). During this time the individual is

asked who their Lord is, what religion they followed, and who their prophet was. Based

on the answers given, the dead will enter into a time of "Barzakh," or life in the grave, that will reflect their eternal fate of heaven or hell until the days of resurrection and judgement (Geaves, 2006, p. 17, *Islam*; Hewer, 2006). At the time of death it is believed that the soul is exposed to God and is particularly vulnerable and therefore must be buried. Islamic tradition states that if a corpse is denied a burial, his or her soul cannot find eternal rest (Coward, 1997; Ross, 2001). Due to this, when the death of a Muslim individual occurs, the body must be buried on the day of death, unless the death is late in the day, then the body must be buried the next day (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006). However the Qur'an does not mention funeral practices, therefore burial practices were established without direct divine instruction and were birthed from Islamic beliefs about death, the afterlife, and the resurrection (Kassis, 1997; Greenberg, 2007). These practices are now considered religious rituals (Kassis, 1997). Once an individual is actively dying, he or she is to be placed so that they are facing the Ka'ba in Mecca and the shahada should be read to remind them of the answers they need in order to enter Paradise (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006; Hewer, 2006). The Qur'an is also read to an individual at this time based on instruction from the Hadith, the account of Muhammad (Hewer, 2006). The Hadith ensures believers that anyone who "recites the sura with correct intention will have their sins forgiven" (p. 135).

Upon death, the family will begin preparing the body for burial through a ceremonial washing ritual that is performed by individuals of the same sex of the deceased. In order to maintain the dignity of the deceased, the body is never exposed during the ritual, but is washed under a sheet. The ritual begins on the right hand side of the body and is washed an odd number of times with water and perfumed leaves (Ross,

2001). The first parts of the body to be washed are the hands, arms, mouth, nostrils, and

feet which are ceremonially cleaned by the living before prayer. Once the body is clean,

it is wrapped in cotton shrouds and placed into a wooden coffin. The funeral is conducted

by a relative of the deceased and is performed either in the home or on the grounds of a

Mosque (Kassis, 1997). At the funeral, "salat al-janaza", funeral prayers, are conducted

on the behalf of the dead in order to ask God for mercy on their soul (Geaves, 2006, p.

96, *Islam*; Hewer, 2006). After all debts are settled and certain prayers and statements are

said over the deceased, the body is taken from the coffin and buried loosely in the ground

with the head facing Mecca. Muslim culture does not permit wailing during at this time,

but does allow crying (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006). Consequently, most

Muslims do not permit women to be present at the burial or visit the grave. In a

qualitative study of individuals of the Sunni, Shiite, Alevi, and Ahmadiyya branches of

Islam, 18 Muslim men and 17 Muslim women were interviewed in order to explore the

burial practices and beliefs of Islam (Kadrouch Outmany, 2016). The study, that took

place in the Netherlands and Belgium, revealed that while most practices are ritualistic

and non-negotiable, controversy exists in regards to the presence of women at the burial.

Traditionally women are not allowed to visit cemeteries or burials due to the belief that

they are unable to control their public displays of emotion (Ross, 2001; Kadrouch

Outmany, 2016). In regards to mourning, the Muslim prophet Muhammad stated that,

"Whosoever is wept upon will suffer as a result of this weeping" ("Imam's Corner : The

Basic Rules of Islamic Funerals," n.d.). Additionally, death is believed to be a

predetermined end to this life that must be accepted unconditionally, or one is not in line

with God's will (Kassis, 1997). It is believed that the presence of mourning women could

communicate a protest of death to God which would contradict Iman (Sardar, 2007). This is an important aspect of an Islamic burial because Muslims believe that the dead are able to hear the cries of the mourning and will emotionally suffer after death if such grief threatens Islamic beliefs (Kadrouch Outmany, 2016). Despite this Islamic belief, 77% of those interviewed believed that women should be allowed at the burial of a loved one. Those who disagreed were all male participants who practiced Sunni Islam. Within the study, 53% of the female participants had attended a burial. Attending the burial of fellow Muslim is seen as an Islamic duty of returning a soul to Allah that must be fulfilled (Greenberg, 2007). It is believed that one's readiness to fully participate in religious ritual largely determines whether, at death, one is destined for either Paradise or Gehenna, heaven or hell. Moreover, not only is the ceremony a public display of Islamic beliefs that allow individuals to mourn, but it is a practice that attributes to the assurance of one's eternity.

Christian Beliefs

According to Christian beliefs, death is the direct result of "the fall" of man, or the act of sinning (Genesis 3:1-24 New Living Translation). However, Christians believe that once individuals die they will "claim victory over death" through Jesus Christ (Bloesch, 2004, p. 125). In the eyes of a Christian, death is more than the ending of one life, but it is the beginning of another life that is pure and holy. Even though death is inevitable, Christians cling to the belief of heavenly life after death (Lynch, 2014). However, one may not enter into this eternity unless they share the core Christian beliefs that encompass the Trinity, sin, and eternal life.

Within the Christian faith it is accepted that there is only one God; however, Christians hold a belief that God is three individuals within one being that share the same will, nature, and essence (Grenz, 1998; Sharp, Rentfrow, & Gibson, 2017). Although each figure of God shares the same attributes, not all Christians perceive them in the same way (Sharp, Rentfrow, & Gibson, 2017). In a mixed methods study of 50 self-proclaimed Christian individuals, Sharp, Rentfrow, and Gibson (2017) propose that each individual experiences these three persons of God in a unique way. Part one of the study aimed to measure individual cognitive representations of the Trinity. Additionally, in the second part of the study, participants were given a 10-item version of the Big Five Inventory, which measures the biggest personality dimensions, in order to assess the personality of one's self and their perception of the Trinity's personality. Both studies revealed that individuals view God according to their own capacity and life experiences, thus God becomes personal to Christians. Mullins, a Baptist minister and President at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, explains the Christian religion to be a man's relationship with a greater Being (2012). It does not consist of separation, but of one's obedience and God's revelation of himself to man. God, who is defined by Christians as being characterized by love, desires such a relationship with his creation so that He may show them love (1 John 4:8 New Living Translation; Grenz, 1998). According to the Bible no one may enter into heaven without first being in relationship with Christ (John 14:6 New Living Translation). This suggests that a Christian's relationship with Christ is of significant value because it is the only way to obtain heavenly eternity. Christians believe that this relationship between God and man may only be accomplished through Christ, the sacrifice for human sins.

Christian death and funeral practices. Overall, these beliefs not only affect the

daily life of a Christian individual, but contribute to their funerary practices as well

(Stortz, 2014). According to Christian beliefs, one's life on earth is temporary and is a

prerequisite for eternal life (Hunt, 1971). Dying acts as a doorway between these two

lives, without it no one may enter eternity (Gill, 1994). It is believed that when a

Christian individual dies, his or her soul leaves the body and is taken to either heaven or

hell, depending the state of the deceased's faith (Hunt, 1971). The ultimate goal is to

enter into heaven after a brief time of judgment in which man must answer to God for all

he has done (2 Corinthians 5:10 New Living Translation). After judgment, active

members of this faith, who have maintained a relationship with God through Christ, will

enter into heaven upon death while unbelievers will spend eternity in hell (Hunt, 1971).

However, there is great controversy within this faith in regards to the time frame in which

souls are resurrected to God (Gill, 1994). According to Hanson and Hanson, brothers

whose occupations consist of a psychologist at University College of Berkley and a

Bishop of the Church of Ireland, there are two possible fates that await the soul upon its

departure from the body (1981). The first is the traditional view of the resurrection of

Christians which is based off of a literal interpretation of "Paul's schema" in 1

Thessalonians 4:15-18 (p. 20). According to this interpretation, the resurrection of

Christian souls will take place when Christ returns to the earth; therefore, souls will be

preserved until this time. However, others have based their beliefs on the words that

Christ spoke to the robber at the cross, "Truly, I tell you, today you will be with me in

paradise" (Hanson & Hanson, 1981; Luke 23:43, New International Version). Contrary to

the previous belief, this statement alludes that the resurrection of one's soul will take

place immediately after one's death. Although there is debate among Christians about the timeframe in which souls will return to God, the ultimate goal of entering eternity remains the same.

Upon the death of a Christian there is no set funerary practice that the family must follow; therefore, the practice adapts according to the circumstance and location in which it takes place (Long, 2009). Essentially, Christian funeral practices meet the same needs as those of other cultures, to dispose of the body. However, it is done according to preference. For example, while many families will relinquish the deceased to be prepared for burial by a funeral director, others will do the same but may not leave the body (Hunt, 1971; Long, 2009).

Despite the variations in Christian funeral rituals there are general beliefs that are incorporated into the ritual's ceremony (Hunt, 1971). According to Stortz (2014), a professor of historical theology and ethics at Augsburg College of Minneapolis, there are two primary focuses of the Christian funeral. The first is the emphasis of the deceased belonging to the family of God and not to a specific earthly family. According to the Bible, all individuals are children of God; therefore, the Christian funerary practice aims to reflect the restoration of one's soul to God. The second focus of a Christian funeral is the body of Christ instead of the body of the deceased. This focus reflects Christ's sacrifice for the living, therefore giving the survivors hope for the dead.

However, Christian funeral practices are actively shifting from a ceremony of religious meaning to an experimental, personalized experience. Instead of a time on which to focus on primary religious beliefs, the practice is becoming a celebration of life through memorialization and extravagant representations of social preferences (Long,

2009). Focus is also being redirected from commemorating the dead according to their Christian beliefs to satisfying the living instead (Hunt, 1971). Moreover, Christian funerals are evolving in such a way that religious beliefs have little to no effect on how the ritual is performed or how the body is disposed.

Buddhist Beliefs

As stated by several scholars, Buddhism is a religious belief whose main focus is the human mind and its ability to end human suffering (Berry, 1989; Keown, 1996; Tanabe, 2016). The ultimate goal of a Buddhist's life is to obtain nirvana, or the highest state of peace through one's enlightenment (Bowker, 2003; Geaves, 2006, *Buddhism*). This lifelong goal may be obtained through understanding the "Four Noble Truths" and following the "Eightfold path" (Geaves, 2006, p. 24, 38, *Buddhism*; Keown, 1996). According to the religion's history, Buddhism began in Northern India around the sixth and fifth centuries with a man called Siddhartha Gautama (Bowker, 2003). Gautama, after being exposed to the concepts of human suffering and ageing, established the Buddhist faith upon achieving enlightenment. Gautama, otherwise known as Buddha, taught that the result of one's life was dependent upon individuals and their decisions to act, or their karma (Braswell, 1994). Karma as formally defined by Geaves (2006), is an intentional act performed by the body that leads to one's pleasure or suffering in this life, or another. Moreover, it is believed that individuals have the ability to shape not only their current life, but their future lives as well.

The Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths are the first lessons taught by Buddha and the foundations of the Buddhist faith (Tanabe, 2016). They are comprised of "dukkha, tanha, nirodha, and magga" (Keown, 1996, p. 43). Dukkha, which means

suffering and pain, reveals the truth of the human condition which is suffering (Keown, 1996). This fundamental belief discusses suffering as an intrinsic part of life for all but the enlightened. Tanha, or the Truth of Arising, explains to origins of dukkha. This truths state that tanha is the cause of human suffering and originates in three forms (Bowker, 2003). The first is the desire of sensual pleasure, the second is the desire of existence, and the third is the desire to destroy (Keown, 1996). The third aspect of the Four Noble Truths, nirodha, is known as the Truth of Cessation. This truth explains that it is possible for dukkha to end, but only when one achieves complete nirvana. Finally, the fourth truth, magga, is referred to as the Truth of the Path. Magga is a path by which cessation of dukkha may be achieved.

The Noble Eightfold Path. The "Noble Eightfold Path" is encompassed within the last of the Four Noble Truths and is believed to be the only pathway to cessation. This path outlines the practices of Buddha so that others may deepen their understanding of the world and learn to live as a Buddha (Keown, 1996, p. 54; Gach, 2002). Often this concept is referred to by believers as the "Middle Way" of the way of the Buddha, for it leads to a life balanced between indulgence and strictness (Keown, 1996, p. 53; Gach, 2002). The Path is made up of eight factors that are considered to be "samma", or right and true, within the Buddhist faith (Geaves, 2006, p. 63, *Buddhism*). These eight factors are right understanding, right directed thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration (Bowker, 2003).

Buddhist death and funeral practices. Altogether, the specific beliefs held by the Buddhist culture shape its distinctive funerary customs. According to Buddhist beliefs, all things that are born begin to die when they are born, therefore death is

inevitable (Berry, 1989). Buddhists believe in a continuing life cycle that may only end

once one has achieved enlightenment (Keown, 1996). It is believed that those who do

not obtain enlightenment will continue in a process of rebirth, or reincarnation, until they

reach a state of nirvana. Upon reincarnation an individual may experience any one of six

realms of rebirth, depending on the moral deeds of their most recent life. The six realms

that one could possibly be reincarnated into are hell, animals, ghosts, Titans, humans, and

gods. Buddhists believe that when individuals are reincarnated into to hell they exist

within a purgatory where they may suffer by extreme heat or extreme cold until the bad

karma that sent them there has worn out. Next is the animal realm, which is also not

viewed as a desirable reincarnated life. As an animal, the Buddhist individual would be

hunted by man and driven by instinct without the capacity for thought. In being denied

the capacity to think, Buddhists are not able to discipline themselves in the Eightfold

Path, which could lead them to enlightenment and break the reincarnation cycle (Morris,

2008). Buddhists also believe that they may be reincarnated into the form of a ghost who

is bound to the earth and experiences constant hunger (Keown, 1996). The fourth

reincarnated reality is home to demon-like creatures who thirst for power, known as

Titans. The most desirable level to a Buddhist is to be reincarnated into the human world,

for it allows one to fully seek nirvana without the hindrances that the sixth level, a god,

would entail.

        Despite the certainty that Buddhists feel when considering their beliefs of

reincarnation, there is an element of mystery in regard to what happens when the

enlightened die (Morris, 2008). According to Buddha, it is considered more important to

think on the things of here and now instead of contemplating the later. Due to this, Buddha never addressed what happened after the enlightened died (Keown, 1996).

Upon the death of an individual, early Buddhists followed the Indian custom of cremation as a means to dispose of the deceased's body, for this is how Buddha's body was treated ("Buddhist Ceremonies and Funeral Rites for the Dead," n.d.). Due to this, the ceremony is still practiced today. However, one may also choose burial. While a Buddhist individual is actively dying, monks will come and perform prayers that will enable the dying to better obtain phowa, or the transferring of consciousness at one's death (Smith-Stoner M, 2006). After death, the body should not be touched unless necessary, for it is believed that the soul of the individual does not depart from the body immediately after death. Survivors are responsible for determining how long the body should be left undisturbed ("A Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral," n.d.). However, Tibetan Buddhists believe that upon death the individual's personality goes into a trance like state during which the person does not know who or where they are ("Buddhist Ceremonies and Funeral Rites for the Dead," n.d.). This is known as the "Bardo" (Geaves, 2006, p. 10, *Buddhism*). As explained by Geaves (2006), the Bardo is a series of states between the living and the dead during which the deceased spirit will encounter apparitions. How one handles the Bardo directly influences the process of reincarnation. It is believed that during the Bardo a great light will appear, those who accept it will achieve enlightenment and end the cycle of reincarnation, and those who fear it will continue on in the cycle ("Buddhist Ceremonies and Funeral Rites for the Dead," n.d.). This process is believed to last for a period of four days.

Nevertheless, once the body has rested the appropriate amount of time it may be prepared for cremation or burial. Buddhists should prepare their dead by washing the body and dressing it in ordinary clothing, for according to Buddhist beliefs, life should not focus on extravagancy (Keown, 1996; "A Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral," n.d.). Monks should be present at the cremation or funeral in order to perform funerary chants that will enable the spirit of the deceased to transfer into the next life more easily. Moreover, after the spirit has left the body of the deceased, the cremation or burial serves the purpose of disposing of the body in a respectful manner. Additionally, at the ceremony, Buddhists will practice goodwill towards the monks by offering sacrifices on behalf of the dead ("Buddhist Ceremonies and Funeral Rites for the Dead," n.d.). In doing this, Buddhists strive to please the Sangha, or monks, who may transfer help to the deceased during their time of reincarnation ("A Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral," n.d.). While individuals are permitted to pay last respects to the dead, they are not allowed to mourn one's loss, for it does not change their ultimate fate, death, and/or rebirth (Keown, 1996; "A Guide to a Proper Buddhist Funeral," n.d.). Overall, Buddhist death and funerary customs are performed in order to aid the deceased in the transition to the next life in order to ensure successful reincarnation. Also, while aiding the dead, Buddhists are simultaneously generating good karma for themselves through selflessly serving another (Morris, 2008).

Jewish Beliefs

According to Braswell (1994), Jews are a people group who are deeply founded in monotheistic faith based on "prophetic and ethical tradition" (p. 82). These traditions focus their attention on worshipping God and following His law. God gave this law to the

Jewish people by giving Moses the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, which the Jews have sought to obey and preserve (Solomon, 2000). Through their commitment and obedience, the Jewish people strive to remain in a covenant relationship with Yahweh, or God (Braswell, 1994). In this covenant, there is a mutual relationship of love that binds God and the Jewish people together (Lange, 2010). Additionally, because of this covenant, it is believed that Jews are God's holy people through whom He establishes His law (Braswell, 1994). The Jewish believe that as long as the law is obeyed, they will still be in relationship with God and will be protected by Him.

In the Jewish faith there are two sacred writings by which individuals follow the laws of God, the Torah and Talmud. While the Torah, otherwise known as the Old Testament, is the only book that was believed to be directly inspired by God, these sacred texts are viewed to be incomparable to other texts (Lange, 2010). Torah, which means law, is a book of Jewish and ethical law, religious statutes, and an account of creation (Braswell, 1994). Talmud, meaning study, is a collection of rabbinic studies of the Torah. It is composed of the repetition of Jewish law, Jewish sayings and stories, and commentary on the sayings and stories (Braswell, 1994).

Furthermore, while those of the Jewish faith believe that there is only one God, who is Yahweh, there is also a belief in the Messiah. The Messiah is the "anointed one of God who inaugurates a new era of justice" (Braswell, 1994, p. 87). Jews look to the Messiah to free their people from their subjection and to rule the world with righteousness (Lange, 2010). As stated by Jewish belief, the Messiah has not yet retuned, but is still to come (Braswell, 1994).

Jewish death and funeral practices. Altogether, the religious beliefs of the Jewish people affect overall beliefs about the afterlife. As many other religions, Judaism reflects a difference in opinion in beliefs related to death (Braswell, 1994). While people of the Jewish faith believe in the reign of the Messiah and Paradise, or heaven, there is debate among Jews in regards to one's soul. Some Jews believe that the soul will never die and upon death in this present life, will enter into eternity. However, based on Talmudic studies, others believe that one's soul will enter into eternity after a period of waiting, which will take place in the Garden of Eden (Lange, 2010). Based on this belief, after the coming of the Messiah the dead will be resurrected and will reunite with their bodies. Although, there is some debate over whether or not a soul immediately enters eternity, there is no dispute in regards to what takes place after the resurrection, the judgment day. On this day, each individual will be judged and welcomed into Paradise or cast into Gehinnom, or hell, according to his or her devotion to Yahweh.

Upon death, Judaic practices can be categorized into two types of ritual, those for the care of the body, and those for the care of the mourner (Riemer, 1995). In regards to one's body, most Jewish individuals believe that when an individual dies his or her soul begins to return to heaven immediately (Clements, Vigil, Manno, Henry, Wilks, Das, Kellywood & Foster, 2003; Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006). Because of this, those Jewish individuals believe that the body should also be returned to the place from which it came shortly after death, the earth. Traditionally, the burial of the deceased takes place as soon as possible and preferably takes place before sundown on the day of death (Clements et al., 2003).

Based on the Jewish belief that the body houses the soul of the individual, the deceased's body is treated with great care and respect (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006). To demonstrate this care, a family member or friend of the deceased will engage in a practice called shemirah, watching over the body from the time of death until the time of burial (Clements et al., 2003). In preparation for burial, the body is ceremonially washed and dressed in a white linen shroud by the chevrah kadisha, a holy Jewish society (Bowker, 2003; Clements et al., 2003). After cleansing, the body is not embalmed nor cremated, but is placed in a simple wooden casket. These practices are followed in order to allow the natural process of death and decomposition to take place so that the body of the deceased may return to the earth in a natural state (Clements et al., 2003).

In regard to the mourner, those who practice Judaism offer great amounts of care to those who have experienced a loss. Immediately after death, the family of the deceased enters a time of deep grief mourning known as Aninut. Rubin (2014), a Psychology professor at the University of Haifa, explains that the process of Aninut requires family members to arrange and perform a timely burial. During this time, members of the family are released from their normal practices so that they may "bring the body to burial" (p. 88). Once the body has been returned to the earth and the state of Aninut comes to an end, family members will signify the grief that tears their lives by tearing their clothing (Clements et al., 2003).

After the ending of Aninut, the family of the deceased will enter into the other stages of mourning according to Jewish customs (Rubin, 2014). These stages are Shiva, Shloshim, and Shanah. Shiva is the first week after death, which Jewish beliefs deem to be a time of assimilation during which the family may come to terms with the death.

During this time, the immediate family is greeted by visitors who come to comfort the

family and avert their attention from the loss (Clements et al., 2003). Shloshim is the first

30 days after the process of Shivah. During these 30 days, the family will continue to

mourn and will not attend any celebrations; however, they will begin to integrate

themselves back into normal life routines (Clements et al., 2003; Rubin, 2014).

Furthermore, once one has experienced Aninut, Shiva, and Shloshim they may continue

on with the proper period of mourning, which is one year as stated by Jewish tradition.

This process begins with death and ends on the anniversary of the deceased's death

(Clemens et al., 2003). After one year has passed, the family may commemorate the

death by the marking of the grave with a gravestone and will no longer be in a time of

mourning. Altogether, Jewish death and funeral practices communicate a care for the

deceased and the mourning, coming to terms with death, and the use of religion to

provide one's self with structure during a time of loss and chaos (Rubin. 2014).

Chapter 5: Discussion

Despite recent societal opinion (Kastenbaum, 2004; Becker, 2011), research suggests that funeral rituals are of importance for they provide the living with benefits associated with social cohesion, emotional expression, and life affirmation.

To begin with, research revealed that amongst Americans there are two opinions in regards to funerals that affect individual responses during a time of loss, acceptance and denial. Acceptance of death is most commonly accepted amongst the older generations and those who are psychologically mature (Rasmussen & Brems, 1996; Giblin & Hug, 2006; Carr, 2012). This is because they have accepted the societal ideal that death comes with maturity and with the progression of age. In younger years, they lived life while avoiding death because society deemed that it was not time for them to die. Now, having lived a life that has brought them to the point of maturity they are able to accept death as a natural end of life process. However, those who continue to avoid death do not benefit from the aid that funeral rituals provide the living.

According to research, ritual promotes social cohesion through the universal participation in an activity or engagement, thus strengthening a sense of kinship among survivors and fostering a sense of community during a time of loss. Ritual also promotes social cohesion through the use of symbolic meaning (Reeves, 2011). The study conducted by Crespo and associates (2011) reveals that as meaningfulness of family rituals increase, cohesion increases as well. The same notion of family, or social cohesion is later supported by a similar study that surveyed Portuguese cancer patients and their parents (Santos, Crespo, Canavarro & Kazak, 2015). Funerals also support this connectedness by acting as a reunion of friends and family, during which the individual

may be comforted by someone with whom they are comfortable (Thursby, 2006, Shabanowitz, 2013).

Rituals also aid in coping and minimize disruption through creating a patterned response to life situations (Rosenthal & Marshall, 1988). Therefore, this allows the survivors to follow a pattern that does not require them to develop their own response to an unfamiliar situation. Thus, while death interrupts daily life, rituals provide individuals with the opportunity to minimize disruption by mimicking a response that has already been formed (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006). By mimicking a developed response, individuals are greeted by a sense of familiarity during a time of chaos.

Moreover, rituals provide the bereaved with as sense of connectedness and stability during a time of loss. Through the gathering of family and friends, survivors strengthen their relationships with others through the participation in a ritual practice. The support of others and the structure of the ritual combine to minimize the disruption that has taken place. This is possible through the psychological and emotional support that survivors provide each other (Rosenthal & Marshall, 1988).

Although funerary rituals are able to provide benefits for the living now, they were also able to provide the living with benefits throughout history. However, this was not always recognized by society. Funerary rituals of early civilizations reveal that rituals were practiced for the dual purposes of satisfying the dead based on beliefs of the afterlife, and to protect their own well-bring (Kastenbaum, 2004). Since that time, both people and their rituals have evolved. During the Egyptian era, while funeral rituals incorporated mourners, the primary focus of the ritual was the deceased and his/her sustainment in the afterlife (Taylor, 2001). Later, during the Roman era, the focus of

funerary rituals shifted from benefiting the dead to the living through the expression of

one's social status (Hope, 1997). These rituals were an opportunity for one to

communicate the importance to society. During the time of ancient Greeks funeral

practices were used in order to allow the survivors to mourn the deceased and honor his

or her body through ritual (Ochs, 1993). In 19th century America, funeral practices

displayed the ritual effect of strengthening kinship and community through the

involvement of the community in the ritual (Hunt, 1971; Despelder & Strickland, 2001).

While this practice focused on the deceased, it also focused on the living. But, this

become more prevalent when the role of the funeral director evolved. The family became

less concerned with the dead and more concerned with their feelings of loss and need to

adjust.

Moreover, throughout history, as seen in popular people groups, societies used the

funeral practice as a means to benefit themselves. Although this may have occurred in the

form of believed protection from the death, the display of one's wealth, or the

opportunity to mourn and incorporate death into their lives, historical society's did

benefit from funerals. Without the use of the funeral, societies of old would not have

promoted social cohesion and the processes of mourning, but would have simply

disposed of the deceased's body.

For the living of today, funerary practices serve the purpose of disposing of the

body, providing a means of understanding, marking a social change, memorializing the

dead, and expressing deep emotions through literal and symbolic actions (Lobar,

Youngblut & Brooten, 2006). As indicated by McIlwain (2002), funerals provide a time

in which individuals may express loss in a public place. During this time, individuals may

act out the feelings that they are unable to describe, allowing them to proceed in the mourning process. Funerals are also able to benefit the living by fostering a sense of comfort that enables the individual to better adjust to loss in the long run. Evidence of this is supported by Gamino, Easterling, Stirman, and Sewell (2000) during which those who found comfort in funerals scored lower on the GEI. Moreover, in a year's time the lives of those who perceived the ritual in a negative context experienced greater grief for their loss than those who used the ritual as a time to grieve. Thus, funeral rituals benefit individuals by allowing them time to grieve by expressing inward emotions outwardly.

Furthermore, often one is unable to predict the end result of having participated in a ritual practice, but they choose to participate anyways (Bell, 1997). In doing this, rituals enable participants to strengthen their faith in the midst of the unknown, for they are acting with a hope that ritual will positively influence their circumstance (Watson-Jones & Legare, 2016). This is also what many individuals of the major world religions do in terms of funerary practices. While funerals provide the living with many benefits, some benefits are specific to particular world religions.

In the Islamic faith, funerals benefit the living through the fulfillment of the Islamic duty of Iman (Greenburg, 2007). Muslims display Iman by preparing the body of the deceased for the funeral and helping the soul transition into the afterlife through the performance of a funeral. The living find comfort in knowing that they aided the deceased into the next life, therefore giving them hope amongst the sorrow. Also, by participating in the funeral ritual one influences the destination of their own personal eternity. Moreover, the participation in an Islamic funeral ceremony allows the living to both grieve and provide assurance of one's eternity.

Christian funerals, instead of being characterized by certain rituals and practices, are ever changing and heavily influenced by society (Long, 2007). While funerals associated with this faith used to associate death with life in Christ, which enabled people to live in hope, according to Hunt (1971) this practice is slowly being lost. However, for those who continue to embrace their faith, funerals are a time in which the living may affirm themselves and their loss through their faith.

Among Buddhists, the funeral ritual is a ceremony in which the living aid the dead in reincarnation into the next life (Keown, 1996). Through this practice, Buddhist faith may act as a buffer for stressors that are associated with the ceremony and the loss (Tepper, Rogers, Coleman & Malony, 2001). However, the ritual also allows the Buddhist to generate good karma while aiding the dead, which will help him or her one the day of their own death.

Finally, Jewish death practices are ceremonies that enable believers to fulfill duties of their faith by returning the body to the earth from whence it came while being surrounded by family and friends (Clements, et al., 2003). This practice also marks the beginning of the yearlong mourning period during which the mourners are provided with social support. Thus, Jewish funerals allow for an individual to mourn in a supportive environment of friends and family that is intertwined with closeness to God.

All in all, in the past funerary rituals have been viewed as an important aspect in social society that were shaped by culture and need. Today, American society has become a people of death avoidance that strive to devalue the funeral ritual and question its usefulness (Rasmussen & Brems, 1996; Nienaber & Goedereis, 2015). However, through the study of ritual in relation to symbols and anxiety, the history, purposes,

benefits, and drawbacks of funeral practices, and the death rituals of four major world religions, it is found that funeral rituals benefit the living. These benefits include the promotion of social cohesion, acting out grief, and finding hope and identity through one's religious beliefs. Society may not deem this ritual and its benefits to be as important as they were in the past, but it cannot afford to let the funeral fade, for without funerary benefits, individuals would lose their sense of connectedness and would not be given the opportunity to affirm the purpose and importance of life.

Implications for Future Research

All in all, this is a small review of literature on the large topic of the benefits of funerary practices. This review only covers a few benefits that funerary practices provide the living. Due to geographic, cultural, and religious factors it is possible for more funerary benefits to exist that were not covered by this research. Future research will need to explore a plethora of geographic locations, cultural backgrounds and practices, and religious practices and beliefs in order to provide more thorough research on all benefits of the funerary ritual. Another implication for future research is the study of grief work as influenced by funerals. Some research was found that suggested that funerals impacted the grief work of mourning survivors, however this literature review did not inform the reader as to how.

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