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The Various Ways to Say Goodbye: Professional Awareness of Death Related Rituals

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of Death Related Rituals

by

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation for MSW students at St. Catherine
University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is
Conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research
Methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research
design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board,
implement the project, and publically present the findings of the study. This project is neither a
Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

The numerous approaches of saying goodbye to a deceased loved-one have many different perceptions and traditions attached to them. The author of this study organized a review of current, published literature on studies that contained the rituals and elements of funeral services across several geographical locations, cultures and religions. Of the original 32 articles, only 13 met the criteria of having enough detailed information and definitions of rituals. The author organized the information into six core themes of origins, rituals, purpose, outcomes (if ritual performed), decline of ritual and outcomes (if ritual not performed). The author hypothesized that most rituals originated and performed for the preservation of culture; however, the findings of the research suggest the top factors in most rituals originate from a combination of religious beliefs and cultural traditions. Communal support, preserving the afterlife and naturally building coping skills after loss are the other key findings within this study. Taking into account the limitations of studies that describe and define death rituals, research is lacking in the actual outcomes of performed rituals and rituals not performed. There are few studies indicating the results in the coping skills of bereaved individuals, bearing in mind the decline in religiosity and the decline of the traditional funeral. There is a need for research on the impacts of individuals lost in grief and in the diagnosis of complicated grief and/or depression if expected traditions are not accomplished. Awareness and education must occur for professionals working in end-of-life care to advocate and advise participation of rituals in hopes of ensuring healthy grieving and an individual's ability to move forward after loss.

Keywords: Rituals, Funerals, Death, Traditions, Community

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This is for Alexander B. and Judy K.

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It is easy to understand the possibilities in how people misinterpreted the beliefs

and practices of various cultures regarding the dying process, dying rituals and death

itself. Yet, amongst all of the differences that are forgotten is, death and dying are

biological processes that are humanly universal, across all cultures. Unfortunately, for

most, discussing death and attending funerals often produces an awkward uneasiness. In

an attempt to label the discomfort associated with death, Hoy (2013) offered the

suggestion:

> …humans are both drawn to the dead in attempt to stay connected and repulsed
>
> by the transformation that death brings the body. Funeral rites are an attempt to
>
> reconcile those two contradictory purposes, desiring to keep the relationship alive
>
> and to break the bond immediately (p.10).

In Minnesota, one can find evidence of awkwardness and discomfort in how

people react to death at funerals. A surveyed awkwardness is by listening to how others

speak or act while attending funerals, visitations, and memorial services. After much

direct observation from working at a funeral home for over six years, there appear to be

common or templated and stoic expressions of sympathy. There also is an abundance of

appropriately matched business-like behaviors to the words of sympathy. This good

intended attempt to be supportive is safe and maybe just considered "the norm" of what is

expected at a typical Minnesotan funeral.

For purposes of this paper, it is important to define "the norm." Generally, the

word norm refers to normally recognized or the expected average. Stroebe, Hansson,

Stroebe and Schut (as cited in Rosenblatt, 2012), contended that any deviance from "the

norm" or from what is acceptable could leave the atmosphere and the participants in a

state of distress. For multiple situations, this could be the interpretation, yet for the

funeral setting; it implies that templated statements are a means of vocal expectations and

predictable delivery. Safety ensures foreseeable grief reactions that meet society's

"norm."

Healthy grieving is not a new concept to the mental health profession. As

Bonaano (2009) described in his book about loss, researchers have thoroughly discussed

grief theories that have passed down through time since Freud, Deutsch, Lindemann,

Kubler-Ross, and Bowlby up until now. Within each model or philosophy, there has

lingered an assumed commonality in how humans grieve. Yet within the commonality of

grief lies much diversity in cultural differences, rituals and belief systems that direct

people in how to react to and cope with death. Assuming that the many different reactions

to death could be deviations from "the norm" and could be considered maladaptive

within contemporary psychology's concept of psychopathology.

Western mental health practitioners define unhealthy or pathological grieving

according to the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5;

American Psychiatric Association, 2013). The DSM-5 titles this as persistent complex

bereavement disorder. There are specific criteria in which a practitioner would use to

diagnose an individual as having the disorder. Keywords that are used are "intense

sorrow, preoccupation, yearning, and emotional pain" (p.789). These symptoms must

persist longer than twelve months for adults and six months for children. Consider,

though there are many different cultures that continue their mourning and rituals well into

and after a year of when the death took place and all of the symptoms mentioned could be

present (Taniyama & Becker, 2014). Now contemplate the potential for misunderstanding or misinterpretations of why different cultures practice different or outside "the norm" death related rituals and the risk of clinical misdiagnosis. An article from Psychology Today (2013) reported nearly 10 to 20% of those diagnosed in bereavement present multiple symptoms for prolonged grief and as being stuck in complicated grief. This report does not indicate the ethnicity of that percentage of people diagnosed. Gathered data such as this, notify professionals of the numbers being diagnosed and treated for one thing or another. The data does not explain recommended treatments and the outcomes of those treatments.

In continuing to examine the possibility of misdiagnosis-related to dissimilar behaviors and rituals attributed to death, Bonanno (2009), suggested a contributor to prolonged grief or persistent bereavement is thinking non-stop about a dead loved one. This can offer subconscious pleasure for one in mourning, yet untreated, this preoccupation takes away from reality and normal functioning behaviors. People of diverse cultures hold many beliefs in preserving their dead loved ones through rituals as in the example of talking to the deceased as if he or she was still alive (Nikora, Masters-Awatere, & Awekotuku, 2012) or through mummification, or keeping items of the deceased close to them for long periods of time (So & Leung, 2013). Modern psychology could mistake a cultural tradition as a symptom of prolonged grief; therefore, making an erroneous diagnosis.

If there were more support and education on death and the rich impacting rituals, instead of basing grief reactions from "the norm" and strict clinical frameworks, maybe

the possibility of misdiagnosis could be reduced and various ways of mourning could be understood and even welcomed cross-culturally.

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the various approaches and possible outcomes of death and funeral rituals across cultures. The researcher wanted to discover, if through education and exposure to death rituals, there is a way to help guide and promote those in mourning to perform and participate in said rituals; thus establishing ways of coping. In order to gain a greater understanding, diverse rituals and traditions need to be analyzed.

The first step was to review the literature in order to understand rituals and components of funerals of different cultures. The second was to compare these practices and the outcomes and also compare the same components to those in Minnesota, specifically looking at commonalities and differences. The final step was to provide education for mental health professionals to understand and consider rituals cross-culturally when assessing treatment for individuals during grief. The researcher also set as an objective to inform professionals that diverse death rituals for dying persons and their families' demonstrate that there is not one "correct" way to say goodbye to a loved one.

<div align="center">

Literature Review

</div>

The Fear and Medicalization of Death in Western Society

Fighting death is one way of dealing with death. This can be attributed to our advancements in medicine and treatments. For example, in the 1970's Nixon mandated a "new war on cancer" (Callahan, 2005, p. 155), and as this modern philosophy and concept spread, all of the medical world should want, at all costs, to save lives; death was

to be "not accepted but eliminated" (Callahan, 2005, p. 155). This even took preference in the research of treatment. Death was treated as an "accidental event" (Callahan, 2005, p. 155) that could be done away with. Society caught on to this optimistic falsity of loved ones living for a long time because medicine can save. Conversely, medicine can prolong a life and the truth lies in the notion of quality over quantity. Living a long life appears to be more important than living a full life.

Consider further, in the United States, over the last several decades, death has been taken out of the home and community and placed in the medical realm, hence the term "medicalization." Even the aftermath of death, through rituals and funerals, are now taking place in funeral homes instead of at home surrounded by the community. Western society has lost a great deal of its community support and overall acceptance of death because it is hidden and avoided (Paul, 2013). It could be speculated that a person's fear of death lies more in the manner of death, rather than in death itself. Being concealed and isolated in a sterile hospital room, hooked up to machines is the common secluded way to die and that situation likely provokes fear.

It is appropriate to also point out that with regard to free will and choices, patients' wishes and needs may not be met; because, of this newly medicalized death. Older generations are at the mercy of their doctors, and what is prescribed is what is done. This deep-rooted philosophy does not allow or promote conversations about death or after death wishes; rather it promotes the treatment and its outcomes. It takes away patient autonomy and advocacy as the following study described.

The study was conducted in 2009 in Sioux Falls, South Dakota, on the topic of knowledge related to death outside the medical framework. The purpose of the study was

threefold: 1.) Researchers wanted to start conversations about end-of-life care and dying

within the community; 2.) They wanted to find what attitudes, beliefs, and dying

preferences people had; and 3.) Researchers wanted to use the answers to promote

community change - moving from one of avoidance to making death a communal

experience once again (Schrader et al.., 2009). The results of the study indicated that

there were many gaps between what people wanted and what actually happened. Some

comparisons made included 65% of the sample wanted to die peacefully in his or her

sleep while the actual statistic is 90% of people will die of a long-term illness and what

that looks like for each individual is very different (Schrader et al.., 2009). This research

indicated that the majority of us are going to die from some form of illness.

Not much has changed in people's viewpoints of end-of-life care as demonstrated

in a literature review published in 2016. In this study, the authors sought to find what is

considered a good death. The results indicate that the top themes of a good death were

94% of people having a preference to the process of death, 81% wanted a pain-free death

and 64% had a desire of emotional well-being (Meirer et al., 2016). Among the many

other themes noted in the study were those of life completion, dignity, quality of life, and

relationship to health care provider (Meirer et al., 2016). When comparing the two studies

that took place many years apart the top concern for people is in how he or she is going to

die. This helps to conclude how medicalized we have become because the focus is on the

concrete inevitable instead of being on the spiritual and natural process of death.

The Origins of Death and Funeral Social Norms

It is through fear that society continues to avoid topics of death, even when faced with decisions about funerals. Even attending funerals of others outside of family can be disheartening as most would rather not have to contemplate his or her own mortality. Yet, here in Minnesota, at the funerals the researcher has attended, there appears to be an unwritten rule of stoicism and a lack of willingness to open a discussion about the real shared emotions of fear and what is the unknown. Researchers of Western societal roles, using critical theory to examine "social norms" (Harris, 2009, p.243) in the context of bereavement, have determined one factor that contributes to stoicism is oppression.

Oppression is defined as the use of power over a person or group of people. For purposes of this study, it refers to those in mourning or attending funerals. Disempowering can be presented in many ways such as quieting a person who is crying too loud, maintaining an appearance of stoicism, recommending to others to do the same or, simply reacting negatively to another person's outward emotions (Harris, 2009). Harris (2009) also reported that through basic rules, Western society has indirectly given guidelines on indirect oppression. Take for instance the examples of, in Minnesota, according to the Employment Law Handbook (2015), employers determine who is considered an appropriate loss and match the time away from work to the loss. Minnesota law also states that employers do not have to provide bereavement leave; it is up to each individual business (Employment Law Handbook, 2015). Disenfranchised death is another example of unwritten oppression. Disenfranchised death is a death that is not socially accepted such as suicide, execution or death that is a result of something not "socially sanctioned" (Worden, 2009, p.2). Unfortunately, any manner of death that does

not fit into the "social norms" can regulate the type of funeral chosen by the family and the number of attendees.

Societies have perceptions of what should happen at certain events. People can consciously and intentionally conform their behaviors to the ways of that shared perception, which may become "normal" over the course of time. When a mass percentage of individuals behave in the same manner, there is a natural phenomenon for the rest of individuals to follow suit, and this holds true for the current "medicalized state of affairs" in the death and dying process and funerals. Concerning death and funerals, most people behave in the way that is expected, but within the proper behavior lingers the possibility of individuals feeling oppressed, distraught and obstructed from true healing because they feel overt emotions would not be proper or accepted by the masses.

Before exploring how to strengthen the funeral rituals role in Western Society it is important to consider another source of why there are social expectations at funerals and why there is a need to avoid them. Harris (2009) mentioned a concept of a "death-denying" society (p.243). Not only is death considered a failure in the medical profession, death is feared because it is often generalized with people who are infirm or elderly. In other words, it represents those who are no longer able to function within society's expected roles and responsibilities. Being needed or affirmed by others is a part of human nature and being able to satisfy or validate one's self through various societal accepting roles, is indeed a part of the American culture. Perhaps, there is an internal battle within each of us that wants to fight growing old, battle inability, and defeat dying; therefore, stoicism or expressing lesser emotion is a reflection of our natural feelings of aging and death. Presenting oneself as brave and in control at a funeral hides true feelings of fear,

anxiety and mortality, but at the same time, it also affirms a metaphorical amount of

control within the person.

One final thought for Western Society concerning death and its rituals, is the

chronic impression that the postmodern age of entertainment has on individuals. The

ability to pacify all of the five senses is just a click away. Within the constant transactions

between entertainment, big screen, music, writings and art, death is often either

neutralized or over exemplified. Desensitization of death could become a mental health

epidemic if not supplemented by proper education and reality as shown in a study that

took place in 1986. A research study on violence as seen through television by Rule and

Ferguson (1986) already had reported "repeated exposure leads to decline in

physiological arousal and decreases in the intensity of self-reported emotions" (p.42). It

was also reported that people would either become desensitized to fear, related to

violence, or become hypersensitive to fear in the real world (Rule & Ferguson, 1986).

The article mentioned reflects the effects that were taking place when entertainment was

at a level incomparable to the level of intensity today.

In 2008, a study was conducted using a random survey targeting adolescents, 10

to 14 years of age. The purpose of the study was to evaluate the amount of exposure

adolescents in the United States had to extremely violent movies and media. The results

showed a steady increase in the amount of violence viewed by this age range.

Interestingly, other factors played a role regarding the amount actually watched.

Researchers are continually studying the short term and long-term effects of violence

exposure and have concluded that the likelihood of maladaptive psychological results

includes aggravation, aggression and desensitized emotional and behavioral effects

(Worth, Chambers, Nassau, Rakhra & Sargent, 2008). This implies that not only having continual exposure to violence can influence an adolescents' psychological development, but it could also build personal negative schemas on how these children relate to death.

Further, as expressed by Gerbner (1993), television is a means of storytelling and those who watch can learn and gain assumptions about life through the various settings. The three different types of the stories that can be interpreted through Gerbner's lens are how things work and, once that is accomplished, a determination of what things are, and finally what should be done with the information obtained. Through various venues of entertainment, people can watch as the conflict is solved through death. Will we model what we see on the big screen and accept it as reality? Television seems to tell society what to do in the simplest of terms. As mainstream beliefs, expectations and cultures collide with traditions of the past, there must be an understanding by professionals that new mainstream concepts of death and rituals may be unhealthy or even unhelpful in the Unites States.

The Psychosocial Origins and Reasons of Rituals

In 2005, an analysis of possible reasons for ritual use was completed by Walters who suggested customs form or adjust to the laws of the state where the deceased and family reside. His theory reasoned there are three ways to arrange for a funeral. The process is either by means of the "commercial, municipal, and ecclesiastical" models (Walters, 2005, p. 176). Commercially refers to the private business of funeral homes and cemeteries. Municipally refers to certain geographical locations governing organizations that have ownership over funerals; this was a result of funerals and death rituals being removed as a responsibility of the church. Ecclesiastical is the church, which

not too long ago, the church official was the one who was contacted to help when a death

occurred (Walters, 2005). This study also suggested that there are locations where a

mixed model applies. This implies that all three entities play a part in how and what

permissions families need in order to perform and complete death rituals.

When examining the concept of ecclesiastical or religious, as they are connected

to funeral choices, it was found that there has been a significant shift in religious

affiliations or a lack of religiosity in the United States. This is one reason there is a higher

rate of secularism. This was revealed by The Pew Research Center and Public Life

(PRCPL, 2012) who reported, church attendance is on the decline in the United States.

PRCPL (2012) also reported 13 million (6%) Americans classify themselves as either

Atheist or Agnostic and another 33 million (14%) Americans assert they do not belong to

any religious affiliation. In the same survey, it was reported that 88% of American's are

not looking for a religion to belong to while 2% don't know if they want a religion or not

and 10% are looking for one that is right for them. This decline, in any type of religious

affiliation poses another possible reason in how funerals and the rituals have transformed.

It also could be theorized that this change is why rituals may or may not take place.

The United States is not the only area where individualism and secularism are

mainstream; New Zealand shares in the philosophy that funeral rituals should be focused

on a celebration of the deceased life rather than focusing on the religiosity of death.

Through interviews conducted with celebrants in Aotearoa, New Zealand, researchers

examined the role of the secular funeral celebrants and the differences in comparison to

liturgical funerals. A celebrant is defined as the person facilitating the service content and

structure as well as delivering the tribute [eulogy] of the deceased. The outcomes from

the interviews described an achievement of a greater connection to the dead was felt

having attended a secular funeral, but also that the ritual was a therapeutic and societal

need that allowed grief to happen naturally (Shafer, 2011). The focus was on the

deceased and not on the religion. Within some religious funerals, sometimes the deceased

is lost in all of the ritual.

Further, Shafer also reported the researchers could speculate a drop in the demand

for funeral rituals coincided with a drastic drop in formal church attendance (2011).

Funerals for centuries have been monopolized by the church; therefore, there is an

unwritten relationship between the two events. For those who do not have any church

affiliation or understand the process of ceremony or church related rituals, it is

understandable how the funeral may be avoided and a compromise found. This study

reported the popularity of how the celebrant now has "60% of all non-Maori funerals in

New Zealand" (Shafer, 2011, p. 1), yet there are those who express concern over the loss

of "meaningful communal ritual" (Shafer, 2011, p. 1), and speculate if the celebrations of

life services are another way to deny and hide the fact that death has occurred.

Similar effects have been felt through non-believing countries such as the Czech

Republic. With cremations on the rise globally as a form of disposition, the traditional

funeral is becoming less and less common, raising a question about bereavement and

whether cremation allows for proper mourning (Nesporova, 2007). Researchers have

examined the non-believing Czech population who uses cremation with the purpose of

going beyond the economic reason for families when choosing this type of disposition

and if it changes the attitudes towards death and grief. Additionally, this study offered an

observation that the common context of death is a "medical modern death" (Nesporova,

2007, p. 1189), meaning most people die in a hospital and the elements associated with

disposition and funerals are handled by specialists and the family plays a significantly

smaller role. In these instances, the funeral directors will play a larger role than religious

officials in how funeral rites will be played out. Elements of the non-believing funeral are

adjusted to interact with religious sections and maintain some tradition.

It is plausible to compare this theory of the Czech's funeral rituals to the

possibility of a change of funerals in the United States. Because traditionally, our funerals

have always had a large association with religiosity, there is a question to consider. There

are statistics showing the decline in both church attendance and affiliation with a

particular religious denomination, will this decline have a direct impact on funerals?

Funeral Consumers in the United States

To further explain the trend of funeral rituals in the United States, the Funeral and

Memorial Information Council (FAMIC, 2015), through a nationwide on-line survey of

adults ages 40 and over, and through the Harris Poll (2015) of young adults, ages 20 -39,

asked specific questions about expectations of funeral services and cremation. It was

reported that 82% of the 40+ group claimed services were helpful, but this number is

down from 95% in 2010. The FAMIC (2015) also reported, while more adults are

seemingly choosing cremation, there still is a desire to have a memorial type service to

honor the memory of the deceased. Of those surveyed, 35% would prefer not to have the

body present at the funeral and would rather have photos present. Additionally, 27% are

satisfied by having the deceased cremains present at the memorial service and 25% want

to have the body of the deceased present.

Another growing trend is the rising number of Americans who are choosing not to have a funeral service of any type. In the same report by the FAMIC (2015), it was reported that in 2013, 8.8% of those surveyed said no to a funeral. In 2014, a reported 11.3% said no to services, and in 2015, 15.6% said there was no need for a funeral. Not only do these statistics communicate a possible decline in the desire to have bodies present, but also, the utility of funerals in general.

Interestingly, the 20-39 age group had different expectations all around. Such differences included "more likely[hood] to create or attend online/virtual memorial sites, to hear about a funeral service through social media, to use the internet to 'Crowdsource' funds for funeral expenses" (Harris Poll, 2015, p. 56).

Laws in Minnesota

As this research study took place in Minnesota, it is interesting to note that although Minnesota's population is predominantly White, there are many other ethnic groups that create its society. According to the Minnesota State Demographic Center (2015), between the years of 2010 to 2012; there was an estimated total of 190,000 "foreign-born Minnesotans" consisting of ethnic groups from Mexico, India, Laos, Somalia, Vietnam, Thailand, and China. It is important to point this out because, these numbers represent a vast number of people whose rituals and views of death could be significantly different from that of those born and raised in Minnesota.

In Minnesota, there are several laws that govern what has to happen prior to disposition and proper disposition of the body that are quite different. The researcher of this study found it useful for professionals to understand what exactly has to happen, regardless of beliefs. Information found in this section comes from the Minnesota

Department of Health Mortuary Science Section (MDHMSS, 2011). Here are some examples of laws that could be troublesome for individuals who maybe practiced other forms of rituals in other locations.

One such law is to understand that for any person who does not have a lengthy medical history or is not registered with a hospice program (hospice programs will register patients with the county coroner upon enrollment) and dies outside a medical facility, an autopsy may be performed to determine the cause of death. This is also true for those whose cause of death raises suspicion, car accidents, suicide, and if the family has requested one. A family-requested autopsy is a cost that will be covered by the family and not the medical examiner (ME). If it is deemed necessary by the ME, depending on the county where the death took place, a small fee for paperwork processing and body bag will be forwarded to the family. This fee can be placed on the funeral home bill.

Another law in Minnesota is that a licensed person is required to remove dead human bodies, and the acquiring funeral home is made completely responsible for the transport and housing of the body. Only a licensed funeral director can embalm or prepare the body for disposition (MDHSS, 2011). The regulations for disposition can be found under Minnesota Statues 149A. If a body is to be viewed publicly or be transported via public transportation, the body must be embalmed (Minnesota Statues, 149A.93). Embalming is the process of chemical preservation of the body. Although it does not completely stop the tissues from decomposing, it does postpone the process and offers a safer environment for people to view human remains. If a family chooses not to embalm or a culture or religion forbids the process of embalming, a service must take place within 72 hours. The body must be stored in some type of refrigeration or dry ice. If

not, then by law it needs to be buried or cremated within that 72-hour time frame.

Although refrigeration can slow down the natural process of decomposition, it does not

stop it from happening. Each body will decompose differently depending upon many

factors. Just as morticians try to warn families of possible outcomes, it is also important

for professionals assisting with funeral rituals to warn families of biological processes.

Immediate family members can have their own private viewing without the

embalming of the body; however, the 72-hour rule still applies and it is recommended for

families to try and view as soon as possible. Unfortunately, this can interfere with rituals

and customs of different ethnic groups. Another timeline to consider in Minnesota is that

a body must be released from Medical Examiners before a funeral home can pick it up. If

the body has been scheduled for a donation of tissues or autopsy, the funeral home must

wait until the organization performing the harvest has completed its job. If cremation is

requested and the family desires to have the cremains (the cremated remains of a human

body) present at the memorial service, the funeral home must allow the selected

crematory time to perform its process. Places of cremation are not allowed to perform

any cremations in Minnesota without a State of Minnesota Disposition Form, a

Cremation Authorization signed by the deceased primary, or physician who attended to

the deceased prior to death and the county coroner. Finally, the place of cremation will

ask for their own permission form to be read, signed and initialed by the next-of-kin

(NOK). All of these signatures and processes take time and pose their own set of

challenges.

All of the laws and rules mentioned prior are just a handful of examples that at

some point could affect the multiple cultures that live in Minnesota when preparing

funeral rituals. Cultures who have recently come to live in Minnesota and experience a death will benefit from any professional within the end-of-life and death-related fields to have the knowledge needed to help families through the process.

Most funeral homes in Minnesota will do their best to accommodate families and their needs while maintaining proper laws. This is not to say that sometimes those laws and rules may interfere with traditional rituals. The typical funeral or memorial service that takes place - at least where the researcher of this paper is employed - are planned and facilitated with laws incorporated appropriately.

Conceptual Framework

The theories that have helped guide the basis of this research on death rituals was through four separate theoretical perspectives and the ethical principles of social justice and worth of a person. The first framework is built upon Erik Erikson's model of human development as it provides a basic explanation of how people change as they near death. More importantly, it can also attempt to offer explanations as to why they make the decisions they do and how the family might be influenced. The human development framework is important to this research because it helps frame potential thought processes during the end-of-life that can include funeral choices.

The second framework is meaning making. Current studies are embedded in assumptions about death and rituals that have often forgotten to make meaning on the backgrounds of rituals and the history of diverse cultures. Meaning-making from both an individualist and culturalist lens aids in the understanding of several aspects: 1.) It helps guide the use of the appropriate rituals; 2.) Meaning making can define core beliefs and match rich traditions for supporting beliefs; 3.) It ties the events of death to the dying

person and his or her family and the world around them. Because there is potential to make rituals conform to societal "dominant norms and institutions" (Kurzman, 2008, p.6), it becomes important for individual meaning-making to take place. Those in mourning or attending funerals should consider what he or she liked or disliked, how symbolization and tradition made him or her feel. Meaning-making can also identify self and cultural differences or similarities in hopes of sharing the experience of funeral together.

The third framework is the ecological theory (Forte, 2007). Just as death is very much a part of living, there is a truth that humans and their environments are interlinked. Forte (2007), described this perspective as "the behavior of people is influenced by the symbolic, sociocultural meanings people attached to physical environments" (p.118). Many cultural death rituals can be interpreted as containing symbols from all features of their own environments. Using an ecological lens for this research helps to discover commonalities, importance, and meanings in rituals across different cultures within these paradigms.

Finally, a framework of social construction which refers to cultures and community's ability to take ideas and build upon them, thus making those perspectives the social norm or social order.

Human Development Theory

Within Erikson's psychodynamic theory of human development is the conceptualization of the themes of personal growth (Forte, 2007). According to Erikson, once the themes have been mastered, "basic strengths" (Forte, 2007, p.299) have been acquired by the individual. Conversely, if a theme failed, the result is "basic ego

weakness" (Forte, 2007, p.299) or vulnerability in a person's personality (Forte, 2007).

These themes appear across the lifespan and describe major challenges that occur at each

developmental stage. This theory implies that how a person processes and interprets

events within his or her ego (as a strength or weakness) will determine how a person

reacts to the outcomes of those events. Erikson also believed that institutions such as

religion, family, culture and even the law provide direction for the themes (Forte, 2007).

        As mentioned prior, there are challenges associated with each stage. Erikson's

themes are discussed here in the context of end-of-life decision making and applying

those decisions in order to benefit after death rituals. The first theme is trust versus

mistrust (Forte, 2007). A person who has developed a basic sense of trust in others will

carry that trust and hope in others throughout most of the life span. When an individual

(for whatever reason) is mistrusting of others, especially caregivers, they will often reject

help and possess a lack of faith. This concept may help a family understand the reasons

for a loved one's aloofness and resistance in end-of-life decisions, including the funeral

arrangements.

        Another theme is autonomy versus shame (Forte, 2007). This theme is successful

when a person possesses an ego strength of "self-regulation, freedoms of choice and self-

certainty" (Forte, 2007, p.299). When a crisis or interruption in this theme occurs, a

person doubts choices and ways of coping. The implications for end-of-life patients can

be to rely on others to make decisions for them because of the ambiguity associated with

the person's own conclusions.

        Consider the theme of initiative versus guilt (Forte, 2007). To view this theme

within the context of funeral and ritual choices is to consider if the dying person (and

maybe even the entire family, depending on culture) was successful in fulfilling their

expectations of society or if their guilt is associated with bad choices or rebellion

throughout life. The question for professionals to inquire about is whether there is any

shame or feelings of failure for not being able to accomplish tasks. And also, does the

family feel shame, maybe in the case of a disenfranchised death. Disenfranchisement

refers to a death, or cause of death, that was not socially acceptable (Worden, 2009). As

in the example of persons who are executed to death as a result of a crime. Do family

members have reservations or guilt for having an elaborate funeral in a community that is

aware of the crime?

    Intimacy versus isolation (Forte, 2007) is yet another theme to consider at the

end-of-life stage. Within this theme either the person learns an ego strength of love or if

crisis interrupted mastery, results can include isolation, resistance to others, and low self-

esteem (Forte, 2007). Herein lies a possible answer as to why some people prefer to

continue alienation even in the face of death. It can also be a reason for some people to

choose a ritual-less funeral. It has been said by the researcher's current field supervisor,

who works with people at end-of-life and with families, that people often die the way

they live. If a person lived at a distance from people, they will also die with that same

level of distance.

    Another important theme is stagnation versus generativity (Forte, 2007), which

can occur in adulthood or in later adulthood. As a person understands and contributes to

life and "resists self-absorption" (Forte, 2007, p.301), generativity can be achieved as an

ego strength. This is particularly important for meaning-making at the last stage of life.

The failing result for the person who may be egotistical is a "preoccupation with one's

own needs at the expense of the needs of others" (Forte, 2007, p.301). At the end-of-life,

guilt may surface from a realization of aloofness from family and community. Combine

the guilt with the expectation that the dying person expects to consume caregiver's

efforts, and there may be a resistance in talking about celebrations after death for the

family due to the guilt.

Finally, the theme of integrity versus despair (Forte, 2007) applies to wisdom

gained throughout life. Erikson defined "ego-integrity" (Forte, 2007, p.301) as living a

full life and being content with relationships, history, and children and thus, having

engaged in positive meaning-making of one's own life cycle. When a person has the

disgust of life choices or rejects death, the result is disrespect and disapproval of other

people and organizations (Forte, 2007). Erikson describes the person who did not

accomplish wisdom as one who wants some type of reimbursement for a life not lived as

expected. Bitterness at end-of-life towards family and decisions is a likely result. Sharing

stories and discussing faulty perceptions of life or making meaning of a person's life

offer a sense of peace for the person dying. The meaning can then be celebrated by the

family through the funeral.

Meaning Making Theory

Meaning making is based on the assumption that "humans consistently seek to

understand the world around them" (Kurzman, 2008, pp.5). For most people, death is

hard to comprehend as both subjective and objective. Another researcher has suggested

how people think about death is very subjective, when in fact, death is very objective as

in "an actual experience and not just a hypothetical construct" (Ladd, 2007, p. 463). It is

recommended that individuals conceptualize death as a part of a structure, as a part of

one's schemas. Schemas are the patterns of how we process and interpret events (Ladd, 2007).

Making a positive connection to the loss of a loved one can sometimes be hard to achieve, yet the more choices that are available for families to find meaning in the death of a loved one, a more positive result can occur. Kurzman (2008) explained from an individualistic lens that meaning making provides the understanding of cognitive truth and falsities. In the context of a funeral, this concept implies that seeing a loved one in death, and perhaps touching the remains, makes the objective meaning of death as being true and permanent (Worden, 2009). Recognizing the strong emotions held in fantasy and denial no longer blur thought processes. As Worden (2009) phrased it, "the funeral may help many bereaved people move toward acceptance" (p.43). Acceptance is making meaning and this is accomplished through the set rituals.

A culturalist lens on meaning making would occur via "established categories of understanding" (Kurzman, 2008, p.6). A funeral is a routine event for some cultures; it is expected, as are some of the feelings of expression prescribing how attendees should act and what they should say. For some, there is a sense of security in having the ritual laid out structurally. Set interpretations from past experiences make it easy to recognize how a person thinks they should think and feel.

The importance of funerals for professional clinicians is in recognizing that funerals not only offer a place for important rituals and traditions to take place, they also provide psychological and social support (Hoy, 2013). Over the years, literature on grief has educated professionals about how to support individuals and families who have lost loved ones. Most readings have failed to mention how important it is for people to have

the opportunity to grieve properly, however that is defined by the family and for the

family to have a voice in how the deceased body should be properly disposed of. And

then, how they can make meaning of these choices. Cultural rituals help support

decisions and allow for behaviors that are structured; they offer a sense of normalcy in

what "should" happen next. The funeral offers control to those who are experiencing a

large loss of control in their lives.

Ecological Theory

The present study explored how community plays a part in death and dying

decisions. When a dying patient and their family are unsure of cultural choices, the

ecological model can help decipher the social norms in death rituals. The ecological

perspective uses the practice levels of micro, mezzo and macro, which allow the

individual to be at the center of focus and places all other facets of the individual's life

around them. The ecological perspective means to consider a person in their own

environment. This includes aspects of the economy of where a person resides, the

community, interaction between the laws and the roles of the person, and what changes

are being experienced by an individual because of the whole environment surrounding

him or her (Catalano, 1979). There are a variety of aspects to place around different

people, but for the purpose of honoring a loved one in death choices of relationships,

culture and community help to build a picture of the person in his or her environment and

how contributions were made in each.

From an ecological perspective, funeral rituals can be conceptualized into the

three levels. Depending on geographical location and differences of the generations living

in a particular location, the rules and roles of funerals are built from a macro framework

of societal and global concepts such as universal disposal of remains, proper

documentation and abiding by the laws that govern measures that have to be completed.

A mezzo level of organizational and community for funerals relates to cemeteries and

funeral homes available in any given area, churches and their roles, and the professionals

that are contacted once death has occurred. Although there are differences in any

community, there is still a basic understanding of what is needed. Lastly, funerals can be

looked at from a micro level of the individual and family group. This is where the rules of

the governing state and the roles of community businesses and professionals help families

participate in the disposal and honor of a dead loved one. The purpose of using the

ecological model in studying death rituals is to consider client systems (Forte, 2007) and

"reciprocal influences of life processes and human action" (Forte, 2007, p.124), as well

as obtain an understanding of how each facet of an individual's life and the environment

around him or her can play a role in making meaning.

Social Constructivism

Social constructivism deals with the thought that sociocultural and social history

provide a context for individuals to create knowledge or as Stassen Berger (2005) states,

to take an "idea that is built more on shared perceptions of social order than on objective

reality" (p.7). Publicly shared death rituals and the patterns or beliefs surrounding them

provide a perception or way for multiple generations and others from different cultures to

learn how to deal with death and loss. It is also a way for individuals to construct their

own feelings, thoughts and ideas of how they conceptualize death.

Some may believe that social constructs are not as powerful because they are

subjective, but sociocultural theorist believes the opposite. Values tend to be a large piece

in shaping development (Stassen Berger, 2005). Rituals subjective meanings and

purposes actually help more in death-related loss than those elements that are subjective.

It could be theorized that the values and the shared feelings that are placed upon death

rituals make the process a reality, or just an overall easier way of dealing with the

extreme change death brings.

Social Justice and Dignity

The ethical principles of social justice and dignity and worth of a person, even in

death and after, helped guide this research study. Within the National Association of

Social Workers (NASW, 2008), under the definition of ethical principles, each of the

principles mentioned above is described. They are a set of ideals that social workers

strive for when working and helping individuals in practice. Social Justice refers to

recognizing social injustice and oppression of individuals and groups of people.

Professionals have a responsibility to try and make social change on behalf of those who

are vulnerable. Dignity and worth refers to treating all people with respect, care, and self-

determination (NASW, 2008).

One example to consider is if funeral rituals have the potential to decline in the

United States, it is plausible that the other events surrounding the disposition of human

remains could also be affected. The concern is what new or modified measures could be

put in place in order to dispose of dead bodies. A part of social justice is advocating for

some of the changes that will benefit cultures that do not participate in similar or newly

changed traditions of disposition. As the NASW (2008) stated, "equality of opportunity

and meaningful participation in decision-making for all people" (p. 3). Meaning, all

cultures and their corresponding traditions should have an equal opportunity to sustain

rituals and mourn the loss of a loved one, even if rituals are not classified as a societal

norm or fit into the changes. Yet, the ritual must conform to rules and regulations set by

the governing entity.

Finally, this study hopes to endorse the worth of a person, even after death.

Funeral rituals and traditions of mourning encourage respect of the life that has been lost.

NASW (2008) stated that social workers "treat each person in a caring and respectful

fashion, mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity" (p.3). Worth

can be found in respect of diverse rituals and wishes of families and to provide the

resources that enable them to carry out the wishes of the deceased.

Method

This descriptive study analyzed the literature on rituals related to death. Specific

criteria or themes that were examined were the 1.) origins of funeral and death traditions;

2.) rituals and elements; 3.) purpose and/or reason of the ritual; 4.) outcomes associated

with having performed the rituals; 5.) reasons for potential decline of rituals, if

applicable; and 6.) the outcomes if the rituals are not able to be performed. A systematic

review was used to organize and combine the literature into to a table in order to define

rituals across cultures, find commonalities and differences and then compare them to the

rituals commonly performed in the United States.

Data Collection

Academic journals were screened for content specific to elements of death and

funeral rituals. To ensure the minimization of bias, the procedure is explained and can be

understood should replication of exercise take place. This was achieved by the six criteria

or themes mentioned above. The researcher looked specifically for the behaviors

associated with death rituals, such as actual service elements and the roles of family

members and community. Any articles that primarily focused on the emotional impact or

grief experienced afterward were omitted. A few articles chosen for this study had both

behaviors in mourning rituals and emotions, but the focus was on the behaviors.

To start, the search strategy used to obtain articles was conducted using the

following indices: SW Abstracts, SOCINDEX, APA PsycNET, Databases for Sociology,

EBSCOhost within Theology and Religion, Oxford Index with full text and Google

Scholar. Keywords used in journal searches include death, rituals, funerals and traditions

put in different combinations. Each keyword search produced several titles of articles.

Each title was evaluated for the potential of containing funeral behavior(s) and if the title

had sufficient evidence of ritualistic behaviors. The article's abstract and results sections

were then read. Articles that matched criteria were chosen for study.

When not enough articles met the study's requirements of having to pose the six

themes or criteria mentioned prior, the researcher made a list of possible cultures and did

searches with combinations of the following generic terms rituals, funerals, death and

traditions. Chosen cultures either came to the mind of the researcher as more identified or

presented during different searched articles. These were African-American, Native

American, Islamic, Somalian, Quaker, Amish, Hmong, Chinese, Liberian, and Karen.

To find more articles, the researcher used the same indices and the same generic

terms, but used various religions in combinations with other criteria. Chosen religions

either came to the mind of the researcher as more common in the United States or the

name of the religion was presented during different searched articles. Religions searched

were Catholic, Buddhist, Muslim, Hindu, Jewish, Protestant, Jehovah-Witness, Agnostic,

Atheist, Taoist, Unitarian – Universalist, Mormon, Scientology, Ethiopian and Church of Latter Day Saints. Upon completion, a total of thirty-two articles were found. There was also an addition of one presentation about Muslim death and rituals. This was provided through the researcher's hospice internship.

Articles were read to identify and chart the six themes or criteria mentioned prior. Key points were placed into a table and patterns identified. The six criteria mentioned prior were separately identified on a single sheet of paper and hung on a blank wall. All thirty-two article and one presentation were numbered. As the article was read, any information pertaining to the six themes or criteria were written on note cards and clearly marked with a corresponding number and placed under the correct theme. This is to maintain organization and place of origin. Tables of each of the six themes were created from the wall chart to show results.

Protection of Human

Human subject's protocol did not apply to this study. Documentation, articles, and books were open to any person for viewing. There was no need for informed consent.

Analysis Techniques

The following six themes were used to identify key areas of study.

Origin.

According to Merriam Webster's On-Line Dictionary (2015), origin is defined as "the point at which something begins or rises or from which it derives." The definition also encompasses the words "ancestry and parentage". For the purpose of this study, the researcher searched for the original author's suggestion(s) of the possible origins of said ritual mentioned in his or her article.

Ritual(s).

The researcher chose Reeves (2011) definition of ritual as it encompasses religious, societal, and cultural beliefs into the rite or symbolism. Reeves (2011) defined ritual as a "death-related ritual, a ceremony, directly involving at least one person and the symbols of the loss and, usually, directly involving others" (p.409). She further expanded on Van Gennep's (1909/1960) and Turner's (1969) theory that the ritual should be broken down into three phases or "the metaphor of a journey across the threshold" (2011, p. 409). This starts with the separation phase or the behaviors attached to the separation of the deceased person from social relations. The next phase is the "intervening liminal period (2011, p.410)" where the ritual is ambiguous as it represents a past being gone and an unclear future. The last phase is "reincorporation (2011, p.410)" where the passage or ritual is complete. A ritual phase needs to match the mourning individual's needs. Rituals should match the elements that are meaningful to them and reflect where they are in the journey of mourning. They should also include heritage and culture. This definition of ritual could imply that not all those in mourning will need rituals to help with separation or ambiguousness; rather, a ritual that honors the deceased and allows for the implementation of customs associated with the afterlife.

Elements of the ritual refer to all of the concepts and material pieces that help make this subjective experience objective. Items such as the casket or coffin. This element was found almost universal. Interestingly, in Kenya, it is not uncommon to have casket makers at village markets. It is even permissible to have a casket workshop right across the street from a major hospital (Hoy, 2013). In Minnesota, caskets can be

purchased at a funeral home or they are acquired via the internet. Although it is an easy

means to purchase, it is very much a hidden process from the community.

Purpose(s).

According to Merriam Webster's On-Line Dictionary (2015), a purpose is

defined as "the reason why something is done or used: the aim or intention of

something." Each article was researched for definitions that offered a possible and/or

definite reason a ritual is performed. Ritual purposes only come from the articles used in

this study. Certainly, variations exist throughout different geographical locations and

cultures who use said rituals.

Outcome(s) of ritual performed or not performed.

In Merriam Webster's On-Line Dictionary (2015), an outcome is defined as,

"something that happens as a result of an activity or process." Each article was researched

for specifically stated outcomes if the particular ritual or an element of the ritual was

performed or if there was an outcome if the ritual was not performed. The researcher

examined articles for the mention of prolonged grief-related problems that resulted from

a lack of not experiencing ritual(s). Some elements noted in the table were a mentioned

outcome by the author; others were the interpretation of the researcher of this study.

Reason(s) for decline of ritual.

Each article was researched specifically for the author's mention of possible

reason(s) for a decline in the ritual if applicable. Some elements noted in the table were

mentioned by the original author of the article as to why something about the ritual may

have changed or reasons for the ritual that is no longer being practiced. Others were the

interpretation of the researcher of this study.

Once the six themes were identified for each study, the researcher compared and contrasted rituals across religion, culture, and geographical location. These were charted and tables were created to show results and were subsequently analyzed to identify concepts of various funeral and death rituals and the fundamentals associated with each.

Findings

Out of the thirty-two articles, only thirteen articles and one presentation met the criteria by having enough data to extract for most of the themes. Not every study specifically addressed outcomes or possible reasons for the decline of ritual, if the decline even existed. The findings are described by themes. Commonalities and difference will be discussed as well.

Origin(s)

Ten articles and one presentation provided data to offer the researcher possible suggestions of where death rituals and/or funeral practices may have derived from. This data (see Table 1) is broken down by the author of the article. The geographical location refers to the area in which the original study took place. Religion and culture are the factors that help define who is practicing the rituals. The information in the Possible Origins and Definitions column of Table 1 was included in the original article, but the descriptions presented are the interpretation of the researcher of this study.

The findings from (Table 1) suggest many of the origins of rituals developed from beliefs, behaviors that incorporated the afterlife of a soul, individual(s), culture, and for the worship of god(s). Keywords such as predestination, rebirth, continuation of the soul, and starting of a journey were evident in several of the religions. This indicates a strong connection to spirituality that is tied into the rituals. In the simplest of terms, it is safe to

understand that the origins of rituals and traditions are a combination of people's culture,

history, religion, and beliefs. Some rituals have been passed down from generation to

generation and some have been invented as a result of multiple social constructs.

Table 1

Origin(s)

Article	Geographical location	Religion/ culture	Possible origins and definitions
Aiona, 1958	Hawaii	Hawaiian Non-affiliation to Catholic Church	- Old Hawaiian worship of akuas (nature gods).
Bayunus, 2015	Minnesota	Muslim	- Qur'an Holy Book
Gesler & Pierce, 2000	Varanasi/India	Hindu	- Sacred geological site combines with sacred routes. - Cremation starts the journey to the another life. - Many sacred symbols and markers for pilgrimage.
Gupta, 2011	India/United States Comparison	Asian Indian American Hindu	- Cultural emphasis on Karma (deeds) - Reincarnation (in permanence of human body) - Dharma (ideal behavior, duty) - Attain Nirvana (path of rebirth)
Iqbal, 2011	Kuwait	Muslim	- Qur'an Holy Book
MacConville, 2011	Dublin, Ireland		- Roman Catholic tradition of "remembering and marking where the death took place publicly. - "Markers of death," Ireland by Anglo-Normans in 12th century.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Catholic, Muslim and Hindu.	- Combination of religious beliefs, social customs, socio-historical experiences such as past wars and

			-	slavery led to a British and African custom of bereavement.
Nikora, Masters-Awatere & Awekotuku, 2012	Aotearoa/New Zealand	Maori	-	Learned ritual (tangi) through repeat engagements beginning in childhood.
			-	Encounter (another set of rituals, show a gradual process of interaction, builds amenity.
			-	Lamentation (Passionate expression of grief).
Rubin, 2014	Jewish		-	The divine plan - God as the ultimate power, judge, caretaker and arbiter of what is the immortal soul.
			-	Soul lives on and resurrection awaits.
Shuang, 1993	China	Chinese Confucianism Taoist Buddhism	-	Predestination
			-	"Loyalty to the throne" and "filial obedience"
			-	"Eternal existence" & "cultivation of immortality of physical body."
Taniyama & Becker, 2014	Japan	Japanese Buddhism	-	Developed in Medieval period.
			-	Buddhism more powerful in magical effects than indigenous Japanese Shinto Religion.
			-	Kamakura Buddhism appeared in 12-13th centuries, includes Soto Zen and Jodo Shin.
			-	Soto Zen adopted incantation, prayer & funeral rites in 14th century.
Trish, 1993		Quakers Unitarian/Universalists	-	Belief in personal God (either Christocentric to humanistic to agnostic) in range to cosmic force.

Rituals(s)

Thirteen articles and one presentation provided information of either piece of practiced death rituals or full detail of funeral services (see Table 2). The criteria for the author, geographical location and religion and culture are defined in the same as mentioned prior.

The research in Table 2 suggested there is a very diverse spectrum of rituals and traditions practiced by many different people. There is the cross over with some rituals such as prayer, containers, burial and cremation, yet each religion or culture may have tweaked said ritual to make it their own representation of social custom and history. Take for example Catholic services in the Caribbean Islands (Marshall & Sutherland, 2008) compared to Catholic services in North America (Davis, 2008). Not only are the services the same, they also are comprised of the same elements and the purpose for the elements reflect each other.

Applying the phases of rituals from the Reeves (2011) article offers readers a map of where the elements of the ritual could be placed. It then offers insight into what piece is important, effective and emphasized. Take the example of a funeral held by those who practice Hindu. The emphasis of the rituals is not within the actual service, but rather before the burial and then after burial or cremation. One could theorize the family wants to concentrate on the liminal period of the ritual to ensure the safety of their loved one's soul getting to where it needs to be. Compare this to a funeral mass held in the Catholic tradition. The emphasis of the service and rituals surrounds the worship of the Christian God. The rituals follow all phases, but also a need to complete said tasks within the worship service.

Table 2

Ritual(s)

Article	Geographical Location	Religion/ Culture	Rituals and Elements
Aiona, 1958	Hawaii	Hawaiian Non-affiliation to Catholic Church	- Inexpensive casket - Wake night before - Few flowers, Leis draped on casket - No cross - Family dressed in black or white - Sobbing, wailing accepted. - Elder woman greets guests and offers hugs and kisses. - Guests pass by casket and kiss deceased. - Guests wear street clothes. - Funeral service held in mortuary chapel. - Singing of regular hymns. - Scripture readings - No set structure of funeral. - Use of Hawaiian language, English used for young. - Short service at graveside. - Hawaiian, English hymn sung at grave. - Casket lowered - Family waits until grave filled.
Bayunus, 2015	Minnesota	Muslim	- Right after death eyes are shut. - Cover deceased with clean sheet. - No wailing or screaming or thrashing. - Try to avoid embalming. - Family washes body with clean scented water. - Note Martyr- buried in clothes died in. - Wrap body in clean sheets of white cloth (kafan). - Moved to site of funeral with prayers (salat-l-janazah) outdoors. - Moved to site of burial (al-dafin),

			- only men can attend graveside. - Burial occurs in same location of death. - Burial without coffin, on right side, facing Mecca - No tombstones, no cremations.
Davis, 2008	North America	Catholic	- Casket starts in back of church, holy water sprinkled on casket and Pall (white gold cloth) laid over casket. - Casket wheeled to front of church. - Responsorial readings - Liturgy - Eulogy - Eucharist and incense- waved at alter and casket. - Acclamation - Communion Rite - Lord's Prayer - Commendation Hymn - Casket exits sanctuary
Gesler & Pierce, 2000	Varanasi/India	Hindu	- Rituals of Hindu on Ganges River. - Place body in Ganges River to be cremated on floating sticks or bury cremains in river bottom.
Gupta, 2011	India	Parsis Hindus/Zoroastrianism	- Body washed - Special prayers - Body taken to tower for birds to feed.
Gupta, 2011	India/United States Comparison	Asian Indian American Hindu	- After death: basil leaf (tulsi), clarified butter (ghee) and piece of gold placed in mouth. - Body washed, covered in red clothing for married woman, white for others. - Cremation with no cover within 24hours, family follows body to crematory chanting (Ram nam satya hai) "The Gods name is the truth." Prayers and last rites

before body goes in retort.
- Burial
- Eldest son performs funeral rites also acts as pallbearer. (kandha dena) carry deceased wooden platform on shoulders to cremation site.
- All (family members) expected to cry and wail loudly.
- 12 days of mourning- family not cook in home. Family holds group prayers (satsung) w/offerings to God.
- 13 day (atman) soul of dead, (pind dan) feast.
- Family makes balls of rice cooked in milk. Birds feed, then call soul if not eaten creates anxiety for family because soul tells them they are taken care of or not.
- Year anniversary - family, priest, group of impoverished people invited to lunch and gifts given.
- Family not expected to be at weddings, parties, social events for 1st year.
- Women wear white.
- Sons shave entire head and beard before cremation, they cannot shave for 10-13 days of sutak.
- Child under 1-1/2, body is set afloat in holy river or buried in ground.
- Baby placed on tathari-bamboo grass float w/coconuts on sides. Placed on river. Older children are cremated.

MacConville, 2011	Dublin, Ireland		- Placing cards, flowers, pictures, crosses, mementos, planting tree where death of person occurred. - Locker shrines.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Catholic,	- Wake at home of deceased. - 3rd day prayers offered for soul to

			continue on.
			- Burial takes place any time after 3rd day.
			- Mass in church.
			- Cemetery rituals.
			- Sometimes memorial service after disposition.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Muslim	- No cremation.
			- Burial 24 hours after death.
			- Same sex family member wash body.
			- Body wrapped in shroud, turned slightly to Mecca before burial.
			- Silence at grave- those present add three handfuls of dirt to grave.
			- Tears are accepted, no other emotions.
			- Mourning for three days then back to grave to recite Qur'an.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Hindu	- Cremation within 24 hours.
			- Mourning is social and communal.
			- Family to be in mourning for 12-15 days.
			- The offering of condolences.
			- Wailing and sobbing and crying accepted.
			- Mourning ends with eldest son performing funeral rites.
Nikora, Masters-Awatere & Awekotuku, 2012	Aotearoa/New Zealand	Maori	- Deceased and immediate family return to Marae (community meeting place), can mourn at home or both places.
			- Rituals are performed over few hours or few days.
			- Display significant artifacts in casket.
			- Pictures of ancestors and relatives all displayed.
			- Deceased is never left alone.
			- Deceased is talked to as if still alive.

			- Closing of casket happens before final church or memorial service - burial.
			- After service, deceased house is cleaned and a feast is served.
			- Cathartic Mourning (Open expression of emotions that leads to crying).
			- Oratory (Public Speaking)
			- Dirges (Somber song for deceased)
			- Recitation of genealogy (speaking about list of ancestors)
			- Prayer and speeches of farewell.
Reimers, 1999	Sweden	Swedish Catholic	- Announce death in local paper.
			- Catholic funeral liturgy.
			- No open coffin or embalming.
			- No public wakes.
			- Mourners wait outside sanctuary until funeral starts, everyone remain seated throughout service.
			- Funerals are private.
			- 3 hymns, 1 or 2 solos, prelude and postlude.
Reimers, 1999	Sweden	Swedish Chilean	- Announcement of death on Spanish speaking local radio.
			- Catholic funeral liturgy with difference of ringing bells at transubstantiation.
			- Bread and wine/ celebrate sacrament of Eucharist.
			- Vestments of golden brocade - priest.
			- Open wooden coffin.
			- Embalming allowed.
			- Wake 45 minutes prior to service.
			- Immediate next of kin kneel at open coffin, cry and touch body.
			- Others then can view body and talk to bereaved; coffin then closes.
			- Mourners put flowers at foot of coffin.
			- Mourners are allowed to come

			and go as please during entire service.
			- Public funeral.
			- End of funeral mourners make individual farewells and leave coffin in sanctuary.
Rubin, 2014		Jewish	- (Aninut), "prior to burial, preferably a day or less," requirement to bury quickly.
			- (Kaddish prayer).
			- (Kriah), ritual tear activity, tear made to wear on upper front shirt.
			- (Seudat Havraah) meal of comfort, meals of consolation.
			- (Shiva) 7 days of mourning.
			- (Shloshim) 1st month.
			- (Shanah) 1st year of ritual mourning.
			- Candle lit in home, recite prayers, and Kaddish to grave, charity donated in memory.
Shuang, 1993	China	Chinese Confucianism Taoist Buddhism	- Will not be buried until rest in home for 3 days, after brings dead another life.
			- Unnecessary for kin to display grief vocally, instead beat their chests, stamp feet for long time.
			- (Cerement) Shroud, wanted hand-loomed cloth for good luck, any color except black.
			- Cloth from sheep, oxen, horses not allowed, fear reincarnated to cattle.
			- Long sleeves a must to cover fingers, if too short descendants live in poverty.
			- If person dies suddenly, pay 2x amount for shroud to ensure good luck
			- (Shas Yu). Clothes of long lived persons.
			- (Guan Cai) means official and wealth.
			- Coffin, made of wood, cubical

shaped and costly.
- Coffin makers treated well by family.
- Pieces of lumber kept by owner to make small things, asking for longevity and bring family luck.
- When complete, people carry to village, shouting to bring attention to it.
- Coffin will lay in corner of reception hall, not moved until the death otherwise bring bad luck.
- Graveyard, one by river, mountain, or pretty view will bring family luck.
- Upon death, family will make everyone aware by firecrackers, letters, dressing exotically "declaring death."
- Dead body cleaned w/fresh water "bathing of body."
- Body put in reception hall of home, red/white streamers hung.
- Candles lit and incense plant -oil lamp lit at feet of corpse to light the way for the dead.
- Crying over death, for three days until end of burial.
- Family will hire others to wail as a sign of wealth and hopes folklore king will hear and send back dead.
- Casketing, paper goats, horses burnt in ceremony so dead have meat in other Netherworld.
- Carry body out of home door, if good weather or snow, good luck, rain will delay procession.
- Next of kin carry cane called "crying over death stick" to grief stricken to walk steadily.
- Firecrackers lit and trumpet blown to encourage soul to Netherworld.
- Before coffin lowered, bottom of grave warmed from straw lit on

			fire prior.
			- After burial, large dinner served.
Taniyama & Becker, 2014	Japan	Japanese Buddhism	- Monk chants sutras and prays for deceased to attain Buddhahood.
			- After funeral - 7th day Mourning service (nanoka-mairi) on same date every month.
			- 100th day & first anniversary, 3rd, 7th, 13th, 17th, 33rd and sometimes the 50th anniversary of date of death.
			- Bon Sutra chanting service- performed in summer when ancestor's souls come back to the world.
Trish, 1993		Quakers Unitarian/Univ ersalists	- "Memorial services"
			- Body cremated or donated to science.
			- Funeral home or family provides direct transport to crematory.
			- No body prep, casket, no typical funeral.

Purpose

Twelve articles provided enough information for the purposes of rituals (see

Table 3). Either the author of each article specifically noted it in the research or the

researcher of this study interpreted it as a possible reason for why a specific ritual was

performed. Some studies had considerably more explanations of purposes while others

only mentioned a reason for one main element of ritual. The researcher wanted to keep all

information, although limited in the study, to allow for more comparisons and exposure

to the differences and/or commonalities. The criteria for the author, geographical location

and religion and culture did not change.

Many purposes were related to reincarnation, worship, passages of the soul,

respecting the dead and honoring ancestors. The purposes tie into the origins and it would

appear many traditions and rituals have maintained the core reason for executing it. Many

different families may be partaking in similar rituals; however, why they are performing

them may be completely different. Take for example funerals surrounding the Jewish,

Muslim or Christian faiths. All of the services incorporate prayer, but the focus of the

prayer might be different for each of the faiths. An individual who practices the Muslim

faith and attends a funeral of a deceased person from the Jewish faith may or may not

participate during certain pieces of the ritual because it would interfere with his or her

own beliefs and customs. It is not a sign of improper grieving.

Table 3

Purpose(s)

Article	Geographical Location	Religion/ Culture	Purpose and/or reason for Ritual and elements
Aiona, 1958	Hawaii	Hawaiian Non-affiliation to Catholic Church	- Inexpensive casket - cost. - Wake night before. - Few flowers - Money used better elsewhere and to family. - Leis draped on casket - used as floral tributes. - No cross - symbolic religious objects promotes Catholicism and idolatry. - Elder woman greets guess and offers hugs and kisses - express respect and love. - Guests wear street clothes - more important to express respect by being present at funeral, crying, than how one looks. - Funeral service held in mortuary chapel- church funeral is taboo. - Singing of regular hymns - follow

			congregational format of worship. - Scripture readings -these are chosen randomly.
Davis, 2008	North America	Catholic	- Holy Water- in memory of baptism. - Pall- symbol of white garment received at baptism, died and rose in Jesus Christ. - Liturgy- Heaven comes and meets earth. - Eulogy - Telling of dead life and connection to faith. - Eucharist and incense- waved at alter and casket - spirit to Heaven. - Acclamation- Jesus Christ died, rose and will come again. - Communion Rite -eating and drinking bread and wine as receiving the body and blood of Jesus Christ. - Lord's Prayer - Bridging gap between loss and community. - Commendation Hymn - bridge divine and human.
Gesler & Pierce, 2000	Varanasi/India	Hindu	- Baby float - cheaper than cremation
Gupta, 2011	India	Parsis Hindus/Zoroastrianism	- Ecologically friendly
Gupta, 2011	India/United States Comparison	Asian Indian American Hindu	- Rituals lessen anxiety at death. - Basil, butter and gold. - Desire of wealth and food satisfied. - Cremation with no cover - against Hindu religion to cover box of deceased. - Pallbearers "kandha dena" - carry last leg of deceased life. "punyaa karam" – good deed. - Wailing considered healthy, good to have strong emotions, if not shown considered pathological.

Iqbal, 2011	Kuwait	Muslim	- Death is sacred, it is Allah's will. - Death of a person transforms from physical to spiritual, and it leads to God and eternal life. - It is positive because death is good, no prolonging grief. - Religious Rite to return the person to God.
MacConville, 2011	Dublin, Ireland		- To remember ordinary men, women and children. - Tradition of erecting. - Study mentions in Japan they make claims about identity and history. - Creates bond between living and dead. - Memories of dead preserved.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Catholic	- 3rd day represents rising again from death, soul will continue on journey after resurrection.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Muslim	- Life is a journey in the physical world, death journey in spiritual world.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Hindu	- Reincarnation behavior in this earthly life has implications for next life.
Nikora, Masters-Awatere & Awekotuku, 2012	Aotearoa/New Zealand	Maori	- Paying respect to dead. - Sharing in grief. - If family is not present it is considered rude and negligent in the community. - Promotes kinship. - Buried in tribal homeland with ancestors is a continued connectedness with deceased. - Recitation of genealogy (speaking about list of ancestors). - Prayer and speeches of farewell.
Reimers, 1999	Sweden	Swedish Catholic	- Religious affiliation at rites of transitions is symbolic and ritual

			of Lutheran State Church.
			- Only for immediate family.
			- In accordance with Code of Common Law.
Reimers, 1999	Sweden	Swedish Chilean	- Spanish speaking community only have access to info on radio.
			- Main religion of majority.
			- Community affair.
Rubin, 2014		Jewish	- (Aninut), - return body to earth, no container or use pine container free of metal, Jewish Law.
			- Ritual purification.
			- At funeral Rabbi recite Psalms, scripture reading, eulogy
			- (Kaddish) prayer - stresses redemption and revival of dead.
			- (Kriah), ritual tear activity, tear socially signifies loss.
			- (Seudat Havraah) meal of comfort, meals of consolation and condolences.
			- (Shiva) 7 days of mourning - opportunity for bereaved to experience impact of loss. Focus on loss and not daily responsibilities. Interplay with community.
			- (Shloshim) 1st month - reminder of the 1st's and a mode of change.
Shuang, 1993	China	Chinese	- "The Netherworld" – another world.
		Confucianism Taoist Buddhism	- Won't be buried until rest in home for 3 days, - family to return to see deceased or considered not devoted to family.
			- Shroud - person to pass into "Netherworld" comfortably.
			- Lamp lit at feet is to lite road to Netherworld, without light, soul can get lost.
			- 3-day burial helps prevent survivor shock and allows time to make grand funeral.

			- Funeral to display power and wealth. - Employment of wailers to satisfy folk belief of King Yianluo.
Taniyama & Becker, 2014	Japan	Japanese Buddhism	- Chants, sutra and prayers are for: salvation of ancestors, tranquility of family, reduction of suffering. - Jointly commemorates life of dead and living. - Allows departed to go to next stage. - Allows bereaved to go on with life.
Trish, 1993		Quakers	- Belief in simple, economical ways of disposing the body. - Silence has own eloquence, keep messages short.
Trish, 1993		Unitarian/Univ ersalists	- Ashes can be disposed, scattered or buried.

Outcome(s)

Only nine articles stated specific outcomes as a result of the rituals that took place (see Table 4). This particular theme produced a variety of results. Each article had mention of a few outcomes that were similar, but most pointed out outcomes that were significantly different. As a whole, Table 4 provided important concepts for encouraging the use of death rituals and for providing evidence-based reasons why. Not only do rituals help with the deceased and the afterlife; they help the surviving family and community by offering time to break from daily activities. Rituals bring an awareness of the death and help people respond; that is a natural progression of healing. Funerals are a transitional spot. The service brings closure in such a way that the family knows what to expect and then moves forward in working with grief. Death rituals can strengthen families and the

community and through participation, the rituals bring all together as a whole. They also

provide a pathway to carrying on or introducing cultural heritage to the next generation.

All of the key points addressed in this section are results that happen naturally, almost

without an awareness from the people partaking in the ritual.

Table 4

Outcome(s)

Article	Geographical Location	Religion/ Culture	Possible outcomes if ritual performed
Aiona, 1958	Hawaii	Hawaiian Non-affiliation to Catholic Church	- Maintaining ancient Hawaiian ideas. - Preserve Hawaiian heritage. - Provides strength to family and social gathering of group.
Davis, 2008	North America	Catholic	- Rituals offer closure and a transition place to new state of change for survivors. - Peace as deceased now with God.
Gupta, 2011	India/United States Comparison	Asian Indian American Hindu	- After 1yr of rituals (atman) soul can move to next realm. It transfers to another body. If person did not die a good death and a piece of the ritual was forgotten deceased lingers on and causes pain.
Iqbal, 2011	Kuwait	Muslim	- Participation of funeral rituals are appreciated in Islam. - Rewards are given - even to those not family, but participate for both living and dead.
MacConville, 2011	Dublin, Ireland		- The maintenance of and construction of road side memorials provides rituals and coping. - Approved spaces of memorial away from designated sites of

				disposal or place of death (death denying).
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Catholic	-	Offers a time of somber reflection.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Muslim	-	Gives mourners a break from day to day activity.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Hindu	-	A point of moving forward to where survivors are now headed in change.
Nikora, Masters-Awatere & Awekotuku, 2012	Aotearoa/New Zealand	Maori	- - -	When deceased arrives at communal Marae the death is shared with community. Provides a way to respond to the death and death in general. Customs offer security, comfort, actions for what is expected or correct within culture and what to do next.
Rubin, 2014		Jewish	- - - -	Offers an awareness of loss and provides a way of coping. Religious activities that honor the dead. Sharpening relationship to deceased. Opportunities to share stories of life and death of deceased.
Taniyama & Becker, 2014	Japan	Japanese Buddhism	- -	Some families reported healing by natural process of rituals without the need of counseling. Can help alleviate the impact of grief and next of kin accept death of loved one.

Reason for Decline

Only eight of the articles stated possible reasons for the decline in rituals (see

Table 5). The writer of this study was unable to determine if these reasons for the decline

were interpretations of the author of the article or specifically researched. There were

common reasons that emerged out of the data, such as a growth in a secular population,

younger generations having control in decision making and a decline in religion. It could

be theorized that the immigration of multiple cultures into areas already saturated by

other cultures contributes to the loss of rituals or at least elements of rituals. This was

evident in the Aiona (1958) article. Both multiple cultures and religions played a role in

the changes to traditional rituals. Also, the replacement of traditional burials with

cremations could be a factor when it comes to rituals from the past declining. The

research shows that people are still participating in services after cremation, yet some of

the complexity and length for rituals has been removed because of not having a body

present and a need for cemetery traditions. In a couple articles, donating the body to

science was alluded to. For some cultures, this is a very new concept. In Minnesota, this

is called the anatomical bequest program. This can be arranged preferably before death

occurs, but many families who choose to donate, tend to celebrate the life or have a

service once the body has been cremated and returned. Different spans of time can pass

for the donated body to return. When a loved one is grieved over this time period, there

may not be a need for an elaborate service upon the return of the deceased.

Table 5

Reason for decline

Article	Geographical Location	Religion/ Culture	Possible reasons of ritual decline
Aiona, 1958	Hawaii	Hawaiian Non-affiliation to Catholic Church	- Cost - Mixture of many foreign cultures. - Younger Generations.
Davis, 2008	North America	Catholic	- Secular movement
Gupta, 2011	India/United States Comparison	Asian Indian American	- In America, eulogy is given, embalming okay, 1-2 days of

		Hindu	mourning instead of 13.
			- Body can be donated to science.
			- Socioeconomic status
			- Geographical location
			- Wearing of white because of work.
			- Young adults and acculturation.
			- Recommendation from priests not family.
			- Limited experience to perform ritual because funeral home or professionals do everything.
Iqbal, 2011	Kuwait	Muslim	- Fast streaming funeral industry.
			- Cost effectiveness
			- Standardization of funerals
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Catholic	- Traditional customs vs. contemporary values.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Muslim	- Disenfranchised death
Nikora, Masters-Awatere & Awekotuku, 2012	Aotearoa/New Zealand	Maori	- Burial in urban areas
			- Cremation
			- Donation to science
			- Various dispositions becoming popular.
Taniyama & Becker, 2014	Japan	Japanese Buddhism	- Lack of belief in Buddhahood
			- Spiritual and cultural beliefs in the souls of the dead.

Outcome if Not Performed

Only eight of the articles stated a possible outcome if the death ritual was not

performed (see Table 6). Outcomes were interpretations of the researcher of this study,

but the interpretations resulted from specific ideas presented from original articles author.

The criteria for article and author, geographical location, and religion and culture did not

change.

There were several negative outcomes that have the possibility of leading to pathological or unhealthy grieving. Isolation, lack of community support and lack of togetherness were outcomes from many of the researched articles. Interestingly these negative results appeared more humanly universal instead of compartmentalized into one culture or religion. This alone stresses the significance of individuals and communities having safe places to grieve and perform grief--related tasks together. When speaking of community, other results dealt with the grieving family and how lack of ritual could result in loss of comfort for the family, not publicly fulfilling roles and/or duties within the family unit, as well as missed opportunities for family and community bonding. In some cultures, the outcomes or a lack of them could interfere with the deceased such as afterlife preservation. A lack of respect for the deceased as well as making bonds with the deceased might be missed. The psychological concerns of missed reality making, death denial, fearing end-of-life and isolation in crisis were all possible results of a lack of rituals.

Table 6

Outcomes Not Performed

Article	Geographical Location	Religion/ Culture	Possible outcomes if ritual not performed
Davis, 2008	North America	Catholic	- Loss of community for bereaved.
Gupta, 2011		Asian Indian American Hindu	- Distress and fear at end of life. - Soul not being reborn.
Iqbal, 2011	Kuwait	Muslim	- Possible lack of respect for deceased. - Satisfaction comfort of family.

			- Loss of traditional role in dealing with loss.
			- Depending if done at home or at funeral home.
			- Lack of reading Qur'an for soul comfort.
			- Deceased never leaving body
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008	Caribbean Islands	Catholic	- Isolated grief - Lack of coming together makes it hard for marginalized groups to find strength of purpose and outlook by coming together.
Marshall & Sutherland, 2008		Hindu	- Non-grief tolerant societies negative health and psychological problems of survivors. - Lack of community building.
Nikora, Masters-Awatere & Awekotuku, 2012	Aotearoa/New Zealand	Maori	- Lack of opportunity for members and community to get together. - One less place to practice culture. - Isolation in crisis. - Lack of opportunity to bring culture to life. - Need of burial in tribal homeland and with kin. - Redefines "home" as a significant spiritual place for future generations.
Rubin, 2014		Jewish	- Lack of reality. - What is role of mourner? - Continuation of relationship with deceased. - Lack of opportunity for communal support and honor of God.

Commonalities and Differences

There were specific commonalities and differences that became obvious while extracting information out of the data. Two identified themes or patterns in how to compare and contrast rituals emerged. The researcher classified them in either religion or in community and social characteristics. Grief related to death was also a theme; however, this will be examined later in this study.

Commonalities in context of religion.

An important finding to make note of is that the researcher of this study had intentions at the beginning of the study to look at death rituals cross-culturally or as culturally derived. Instead, the information provided through this systematic review that religion, in any context, is more of a driving force in what, how and why certain cultures choose their death related rituals. According to Merriam Webster's On-Line Dictionary (2015), religion is defined as "An interest, a belief, or an activity that is very important to a person or group." This implies that religion does not have to be a specific set of traditions, with perhaps a certain god in mind. Rather, it involves the devotion or piety to anything that could be classified as a god or having a higher power.

Many studies referred to religion as the groundwork of a ritual, but over time and perhaps because of the geographical relocation of a culture who practiced those religious beliefs, the ritual turned into something different. It had to transform to accommodate either its limitations or its new environment. Take for example the Marshall and Sutherland (2008), study about the rituals performed by the people of the Caribbean Islands. There is a wide variety of cultural as well as death rituals that take place amongst the people. This can be attributed to the history of the territories. Slavery brought together

people who possessed their own cultural practices and religions and forced a combination with the other cultures living in the same area. New rituals morphed to allow for proper identification of said religions. Social constructionists would define this subjective recreation of social norms as an interchange of multiple social and historical forces creating new knowledge and new ways for individuals to view themselves.

Further, of the studies examined were full funeral or death rituals were broken down element by element, religion in the sense of worship or praise to a higher power was the main reason said ritual took place. Within the Muslim, Jewish, and Christian religions or faiths, particular components may have taken place within certain time frames, but each took place in order to honor the religion, practice the religion, complete the will of the worshiped God and to transition both the deceased and survivors mind to accept movement of the soul into the afterlife; this was common regardless of geographical location.

Within the Hindu and Buddhist religions, the same can be said for reasons why rituals took place, but there was also a lot of discussion about the good luck, prosperity and well-being of the families left behind if said ritual took place in the proper time line. Again, geographical location did not impede any of the beliefs or the rituals.

Within the Quaker, Universalist and Maori cultures, the tie to the ritual was more about communal acceptance of death and cultural tradition. The rituals performed allowed for proper respect of the dead, yet offered many ways in which the family and community took part in that death and fulfilled customary obligations to family and community. Not that other religions and rituals lacked the importance of community, but the focus was slightly different.

Commonalities in context of community and social characteristics.

The second identified theme or pattern that was revealed in this study was about the connectedness of funeral/death rituals to the community. There was repetition about how communities could come together to acknowledge the death of a community member and show grief together. Within this coming together, there was a shared belief in the importance of being able to publicly practice private and personal rituals. During a funeral service the mourners shared the ability to express the feelings of sadness and create unity.

At the same time, the community's social norms and customs were exposed and differentiated outside of geographical locations or the dominant religions or customs. Socially, the rituals at some funerals publicly show moral support and genuine empathy to family members. This is healthy for the entire community as they too are experiencing a loss and need to make the proper transition of change.

A more prominent feature funeral rituals offer is the natural ability to provide those in mourning some type of predictability. This was a common feature of all religions and cultures. Knowing what to expect during a time of emotional confusion is something that helps regulate transitions during a loss. Some of the articles referenced how upon the death of a family member, other family members could focus on what they already knew and that was the catalyst in getting together the proper elements of the funeral. Planning takes away from obsessing over the loss. Rituals provide tasks for family and community members to partake in. The feeling of being needed and helpful also gives those performing those tasks a sense of control in the situation that is completely out their

control. The Gupta, (2011) article alluded to this in stating that rituals and social culture give direction when the people involved are in crisis.

Of the social aspects that emerged from this study, support from communal activities of ritual and from providing help to families maintains safe predictability. It is quite common for individuals to express or share with someone in any social situation that he or she is attending a funeral or that the death of someone close has occurred. The individual telling the news has an expectation that the receiver of the news will react with sympathy and understanding. Social sympathy allows for everyone to focus on a loss and often reminds people of their own personal losses and that change in life is consistent.

Funeral rituals also give us permission and reason enough to leave our daily routines and focus on the loss. Coming together socially as a community allows people to participate and practice culture, worship within religious beliefs and offer a stable foundation. Such social events offer others a place to learn from others who have dealt with a loss. The social gathering also provides individuals a self-interpretation of the support that can be given in times of crisis. This is positive and comforting for anyone from any ethnic background. Socially, funerals remind all of us that change can happen very fast and take us off guard. Rituals allow for focus and reflection in a safe common area with others who are generally feeling the same emotions.

Finally, not only do funerals offer social support for those grieving, but it can also strengthen families and bring material goods for the family in need. Communities and supporters of families have access to understanding the needs of mourning families. It is not uncommon for many communities that neighbors provide food and sometimes services like cleaning for families while grieving. Funerals also offer a way for the family

to ask for help financially. Childcare and help with daily activities are among other supports that can be offered. These experiences lead to a positive social interaction that allows all involved the opportunity to grow and learn about self and share in a life-changing event.

Differences

Some of the main differences were associated with the physical disposition of the body. For example, it is a law in Minnesota that a licensed mortician must be present to make the removal of a dead body and must perform any body preparation. It is also required that a body be removed as fast as possible. Understandably, most facilities where a death took place will allow time for family members to see the body; however, there becomes a problem with some cultures who need time to make plans prior to removal, because the removal is a part of the ritual, as articulated in the study about the Maori's in New Zealand (Nikora, Masters-Awatere, & Awekotuku, 2012). The researcher of this paper wondered how that may interfere with the rituals and outcomes of cultures from other geographical locations. In some cultures, not having the ability to help take care of or even transport the deceased from one location to another could remove honor or a possible rite of a family member. This became very apparent in studying the rituals of those who believe in the Hindu religion. Family has full permission and control regarding the disposition of the body of a loved one. In fact, they can prepare, and choose to either cremate a loved one right on the Ganges River or have the body weighted down and sunk into the river. Varanasi and the Ganges River has many ancient and sacred places in which a soul must travel in order to reach the afterlife (Gesler & Pierce, 2000). Carrying a dead body through the streets is not uncommon or

shunned upon in any way by those living in this location. The age of the deceased and the

finances of the family also played a considerable role in how the disposition of the body

would take place. The argument ostensibly comes when a family who grew up practicing

this Hindu ritual for the dead is now living in Minnesota and a loved one dies. Minnesota

law does not allow several of the normal rituals of the Hindu funeral practice.

Another difference found in this research included the relevance of certain

cultures beliefs that it is bad luck, or it attempts fate, to speak of death, especially before

death has occurred. In some cultures, it is good to talk about death, both before and after;

and with some cultures, it is acceptable to talk to the deceased as if he or she was still

alive such as with the Maori people (Nikora, et. al, 2012).

Some cultures prefer silence as in the Muslim and Unitarian faiths, while other

cultures, such as the Asian Indian American Hindu, will pay for groups of non-family

members to wail loudly after the death has occurred and during the funeral procession

(Gupta, 2011). This is done to demonstrate strong healthy emotions. It is actually

considered pathological if family members do not show a substantial amount of emotion.

Yet another difference that was found is in some cultures and religions it is

customary to remember or hold a particular service or ritual continually after death. This

happens especially during the year that follows the death, but some even into years

beyond. This is an important coping skill, as well as a means to keep memories of the

deceased loved one intact. Bonanno (2009), described that although pathways to

memories stay, there are interruptions that convolute the original memory. Performing

little rituals or memorializing the deceased offers a safe place for loved ones to keep

loved ones close and to also keep memories alive. It is not uncommon for loved ones who

are still alive to forget perhaps the voice or sometimes even appearance of a deceased loved one. The longer people are able to keep positive memories, the stronger the pathway to other memories will stay (Bonanno, 2009).

There are also ways in which living loved ones can attempt to maintain a status quo or attempt to keep feelings of the deceased very much alive, this is called mummification. It is a term used for individuals who keep the belongings of the deceased as if they were alive and in some cases, try and hold on to the actual body of the deceased. An article researched for this study observed an individual who made a three-dimensional object made to represent a late spouse. The mourning spouse slept with the object and talked to it during his mourning process, but eventually was able to permanently separate from it. This concept to some might be considered pathological, but So and Leung (2013) reported in this study about the importance of mummification and, if done correctly, can help those grieving cope with the loss. Little research has been done on mummification and its outcomes and if it is universal and not particular to one culture.

Discussion

The purpose of this descriptive study was to examine the various approaches and possible outcomes of death and funeral rituals across cultures. The researcher wanted to discover if, through education and exposure to death rituals, there is a way to help guide and promote those in mourning to perform and participate in said rituals; thus establishing ways of coping. If there were more support and education on death and the impacting rituals, instead of basing grief reactions from "the norm" and strict clinical

frameworks, maybe the possibility of misdiagnosis could be reduced and various ways of mourning could be understood and even welcomed cross-culturally.

Through breaking apart elements and purposes of death related rituals, this study filled in a gap for professionals about death and funerals. It provided exposure to supportive education regarding diverse traditions and beliefs. It allowed for a broader view, outside of the clinical framework in observing how many different people mourn and relate to death.

Religion's Role in Rituals

In the articles researched, all alluded to a form of religion as a source of origin. Religion also played an immense role in the actual action and meaning of the rituals performed for those dying and/or already deceased, as well as for the living. Interestingly, the purpose(s) of the ritual aided to the afterlife of the deceased in many religions. This implies that rituals are not only objective and physical; they are also subjective and spiritual.

Learning that religion has strong bonds to rituals and traditions is not surprising. But, as discussed earlier, practiced religion or a sense of religiosity has been on the decline in the United States and that is concerning when considering death rituals. With more people turning away from worship and its personal meaning for each individual, it is easy to conceptualize how this will affect death rituals, funerals and perhaps the natural process of building coping skills during a loss. The research contains many theories and interventions for how to treat grief reactions and participating in the funeral process is one such way; however, research is lacking in how rituals can offer meaning and/or a sense of control from the loss of a loved one and the significance of performing them.

These results indicate for professionals working with individuals, families and communities surrounding death that there is potential for ambiguousness for choosing or participating in rituals, or maybe it could be suggested, religious rituals. As this study found that there are bonds between religion and rituals, it can be said there is also a bond between those two entities and grief reactions. Only more research can examine if one entity affects the other either positively or negatively.

Intrusion on Rituals

In addition to the religion having a substantial role in death related rituals, other factors for professionals to consider include a family's ability to cope when needed rituals cannot take place or are altered. Take the example of the required procedures of embalming. Certain religious practices do not allow for the body to be altered in any way after death, yet if the family needs to transport the remains via some mode, they will have no choice but to comply.

When thinking about procedures or processes completed in Minnesota, the researcher of this study wonders why there is a need to make the dead "pretty" and "appear alive and asleep." Embalming not only helps slow down the decomposing process, but it also helps in the appearance. The use of certain chemicals can actually add pigment to skin. Obvious thoughts such as restoring a dead loved-one's appearance due to physical altering circumstances makes good sense and actually allows for individuals to view; this is therapeutic and allows reality to be faced, but it is questionable why others, who perhaps died of natural causes, would need to have makeup applied in death. It could be pondered that this part of the process helps with grief reaction.

Another example of a possible interference of making a body presentable and/or applying makeup to the dead is when considering cultures, such as those from certain parts of Hawaii (Aiona,1958) and those from Chile, living in Sweden (Reimers,1999) where it is custom to touch and kiss the deceased as a sign of farewell and respect. It has been the experience of this researcher at funerals in Minnesota that it is recommended by funeral professionals not to touch a loved one who is made up in the casket. This seems to obstruct the natural process of wanting to say goodbye. In the United States, it is custom to hug and shake hands as it is associated with saying hello and goodbye. Touching and saying goodbye properly is healing and therapeutic. Perhaps family members would prefer to have their deceased loved one look a certain way or maybe their own culture or religious beliefs have provided a tradition that should be carried out. This research study was limited in finding more data on the outcomes of examples like the ones mentioned. The current research is lacking. There have not been many studies conducted on the outcomes of groups of people who are not allowed or physically cannot perform the needed rituals to gain closure, as well as provide peace of mind for a loved one's soul. More research is needed, as well as a possible review of current laws and policies on the care of dead loved ones. By the continual pushing of these tasks and sometimes unwanted procedures, having to be performed by professionals, it further pushes the natural comfortableness in dealing with death and allows for more awkwardness and potential fear.

Clearly, there are understandable and logical purposes why laws and rules have been put in place for the disposition of human remains. Those who carry out those laws are the funeral professionals. Not only is the role of safety a large duty the profession

performs, but also in protecting families and the public, by properly and respectfully taking care of the deceased. This is a profession not many signs up for because the entire occupation is encompassed by death. Yet, it is a very much needed occupation and professionals from all practices should respect the hard and emotional work that goes into handling death daily.

Rituals and Planning as Coping Mechanisms

Whether it is funeral directors or mental health professionals who work with individuals or groups who are experiencing a crisis, it is understood that there is not one particular behavior or reaction to crisis or trauma, but there may be detectable responses that need intervention. One of the strategies involved is getting the individual in crisis an intervention they can become involved in. Having multiple options and positive activities can help restructure the thinking patterns. The hope would be to give the person some confidence and control and this may lead to positive coping mechanisms. Funeral planning and the comforting rituals and customs involved can be a positive coping mechanism for people experiencing loss.

Through this one particular coping mechanism, there is hope to help individuals have proper closure. This was discussed earlier in this paper as an identifiable outcome that presented itself in several ways. From personal experience at the funeral home, more often than not and depending on the type of death, most family members or loved ones are in a daze. They appear to be going through the motions because the disposition of a body must happen one way or another. There are so many emotions happening at once that a real focus on how to feel is sometimes hard to find for individuals. In talking with families in the weeks or months after the funeral, there is a difference in the individual's

clarity and ability to recognize what they are actually going through. The researcher of this study has been told several times after the funeral has taken place, that individuals feel less anxious once the funeral has taken place and more often than not they are glad that is over with. Since that part of the separation from a loved one is over, the focus on one's self and grief can take place. In their books about grief and loss, both Worden (2009) and Bonanno (2009), discussed a dual process model of grieving or "oscillation" (p.39). This happens as people move along with their own grief process. They are able to allow periods of time to be sad and mournful and then they allow themselves time for "restoration-oriented" (Worden, 2009, p. 53) or time made changes that reflect a new life and self after a loss. Rituals provide a point in time where change can start to take place and bonds to the deceased can be made. Bonanno (2009), emphasized in his books for help with grief, a healthy outcome through grief is to have a resolution. Individuals who have the opportunity to make the death a reality and can move forward, have better chances of healthy grieving than those individuals that deny the death and do not participate in behaviors to express sadness and/or anger. Without the closure or transition of a loved one from a physical to spiritual being and finding a place to put the memory of a deceased loved one, the ability to oscillate back and forth becomes disrupted and can lead to complicated or prolonged grief.

Early grief theorists such as Sigmund Freud, Eric Lindemann, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross and John Bowlby have taught professionals over the years, that there are many possible stages or processes of dealing with grief and loss, yet there are patterns that have emerged over time that are identifiable to professionals. Many components in a person's life can lead to an abnormal grief reaction, but typically there are stages or phases or

tasks of grief a bereaved person must work through in order to deal or cope with a loss. Rituals are a natural part of our tasks and a catalyst for moving through stages. It appears as s natural way of building individuals coping skills, much like people who are believers in Buddhism believe that the tasks they perform for the deceased before and after death ensure family luck and security. These too are coping skills or transition skills that allow forward movement with grief.

Professionals are trying to offer therapeutic interventions in order to give individuals tools to help build coping skills and allow for natural grief reactions to occur. As a part of the tools professionals present to individuals must be an awareness and acceptance of the multiple ways in which people may achieve this. A social worker or any professional that is helping a client and his or her family understand death and dying through this lens will need to wear many hats because of the vast array of therapies that can be applied, i.e. family work, group work, counseling, eco-mapping and being able to identify many resources are all a part of this framework.

Not only is it important to consider cultural or ethnic groups, professionals must educate themselves and have an awareness of the differences in religiosity, considering those who practice religions less researched. Such groups include Wiccans, Pagans, Satanists, Humanism, and Atheists. All of which have particular rituals revolving around the death of loved ones.

Defining Normal

As discussed prior in this paper, the definition of "the norm" (Rosenblatt, 2012), refers to average or what is normally recognized. Is it not "the norm" to be stoic at a funeral? It could be if the individual attending the funeral was brought up that way and

learned that showing emotion was proper and helpful for an appropriate reaction to the loss. Is it "the norm" for a professional to hear that an individual in mourning is constantly speaking to the dead in the present tense? A person would if he or she was a descendant of the Maori people. Would it be normal to ask funeral professionals to aid in building coping skills? When considering the basic differences in beliefs it would be. It is emphasized how rituals can be important to perform, even when acknowledging the use of the ritual is for other reasons. For instance, different cultures do not use therapy; therefore, rituals and traditions are extremely significant for coping with loss. It is highly important to advocate for and allow a culturally rich funeral that ensures emotional needs can be met. If satisfaction can be achieved through such an event, the mourning has the potential for a natural process of grief in hopes of avoiding complicated grief and depression.

Societal Changes

As society's views on death and funerals change, it is important to recognize the many different cultural variations and behaviors that are present in the United States. In order to obtain a perspective on the growth of ethnicity in North America, it was reported in 2014 by the United States Census Bureau, under the category of Population Projections, a steady increase of 1% every five years from 2015 to 2060 of foreign born and native born people of all races living in the United States -- with exception of non-Hispanic whites, as it shows a less than 1% decrease in this population. The growth clearly illustrates a needed shift in the majority population's definition of what is considered "normal" for mourning rituals and grieving, because professionals have greater potential in the future for serving more ethnically diverse clients. Professionals

must possess self-awareness and recognize what they consider a deviation from the norm or what behavior could be a healthy way of functioning, particularly for someone with a different ethnic background. This is important because, as stated above, the numbers of diverse ethnic groups will continue to grow in the United States.

This review suggested a concern for funeral rituals in the United States. Because the statistics show a decline in both church attendance and affiliation with a particular religious denomination, and this study has shown how much religion is a part of rituals and cultural traditions, without it all, what happens to the natural process of building coping skills and healing after loss? Keeping in mind, traditionally our funerals have always had a large association with religiosity - will this decline have a direct impact on funerals and the positive results normally associated with rituals in the United States? It is important to note that in the literature written thus far, most researchers find a commonality that religion plays a significant role in many traditions and in most cases it is the main concept surrounding the reason cultures perform certain rituals.

Strengths and Limitations

The writer can conclude that more research needs to take place in finding out how individuals or communities react to death and how they cope with the loss when they are not able to perform certain pieces of the ritual or in the benefits when ritual is completed. More research needs to take place on the outcomes of the bereaved as rituals change. The researcher of this study recognizes that this study was an accumulation of elements, ideas, perceptions and personal experience. This limits the view and experiences of others. It also is limited to the numerous amounts of rituals and the differences in how each ritual is performed. The research would have benefited from focusing perhaps on

one particular religion and then analyze the diverse rituals within the one religion. The researcher would recommend future research to include real life experience and interviews from those participating in funerals. Also, the researcher would want to interview professionals who work with grief related death; to record actual outcomes and find how much or little death rituals were a part of the mourning process of an individual seeking treatment.

A strength this research provided is in finding how important religion and religious beliefs shape individuals' views and participation in death and the rituals related to it. As mentioned prior, with the decline of religiosity in the United States it is worrisome for future generations dealing with death-related loss as well as the building of coping skills during loss. Another area of strength is in the vast elements of rituals that were identified. The study uncovered many rich traditions and the natural process of healing that is associated with performing them.

Implication for Social Workers Working in End-of-Life Care

Death-related rituals help individuals' start the mourning process; give interventions during a crisis, and provide a starting point for change and life without the deceased. Without rituals, where will the bereaved end up? It could be postulated that there will be a further diagnosis of persistent complex bereavement disorder and less holistic ways of processing grief and increasing coping skills.

Social workers and their supporting agencies can bring an awareness to patients and clients on the topic of death. We should be the safe person to bring up and talk about end-of-life and what it means for patients and clients. The only way to prepare professionals to overcome the awkwardness and fear of talking about end-of-life subjects

is to educate through training programs and to conduct more research regarding death and

dying. Once there is an established confidence within the medical profession regarding

these end-of-life talks, social workers can advocate for more culturally rich death-related

rituals at places of death and through funerals that help ensure biopsychosocial needs can

be met. This process can start at the bedside by having open discussions about funeral

planning and perhaps speaking about the importance of having a service, whatever that

looks like for the individual and family. As the research indicated, it is becoming a trend

to just choose cremation and be done. The benefits of death rituals are completely being

missed by dismissing the importance of the funeral or memorial service.

Not only is it important to talk about funeral planning before the death has

occurred, but it is equally important to ask about funeral rituals in session while working

with grieving individuals. There is an abundance of information that can be obtained

from an individual, family relations, supports in the community, connection to the

deceased while he or she was alive and if the bond was made after death. The direction of

answer seeking questions is endless by inquiring how an individual memorialized or

disposed of a loved one.

As stated earlier in this study, social workers also ensure an implementation of

ethics through the principles of social justice and the dignity of a person. Social justice

might require social workers to advocate for new or modified laws surrounding

dispositions of dead bodies. Social workers also have a responsibility to try and make

social change on behalf of those who do not understand how to make the changes. There

is also dignity and worth for the deceased as well. The worth can be found in respect to

diverse rituals and wishes of families and to provide the resources that enable them to carry out the wishes of the deceased.

Professionals who work with patients of clients within some end-of-life context need to advance their own knowledge of diverse cultural views and rituals in death and dying. Compare those with universal human reaction and consider why people do what they do in new and altering perspectives. Unawareness of diverse traditions and rituals could flag the professional of maladaptive coping skills, rather than it being a normal part of the tradition in saying goodbye.

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