

## Religiosity & Spirituality Through Lifelong Development

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## Religiosity & Spirituality In Childhood

Authors & Resources:

Hay, D., & Nye, R. (2006). *The spirit of the child*. London: Jessica Kingsley Pub.

Nye, R (2009). *Children's spirituality*. London: Church House Publishing.

Rebecca Nye,

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## Spirituality of Children

- Children's spirituality is an *initially natural* capacity for awareness of the sacred quality to life experiences.
- This awareness can be *conscious or unconscious*, and sometimes fluctuates between both, but in both cases can affect actions, feelings and thoughts.
- It is about being attracted towards 'being in relation', *responding to a call to relate* to more than 'just me' – i.e. to others, to God, to creation or to a deeper inner sense of Self.
- This encounter with transcendence can happen in specific experiences or moments, as well as through imaginative or reflective activity .

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## Characteristics of Religion among Children

- **Holistic** - rather than an analytic way of seeing things;
- **Awe** - a deep sense of simplistic wonder;
- **Noetic** - a spirituality of discovery and 'aha';
- **Surrender** – that flows from being spontaneous about emotions;
- **Ineffability** – in children it is the lack of vocabulary but it is also humility to accept that one's God experience is beyond words.

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## Religiosity & Spirituality In Youth

Some sources:

Elkind, D. & Elkind, S.F. (1962). *Varieties of religious experience in young adolescents*.

Goldman, R. (1964). *Religious Thinking from Childhood to Adolescence*.

Tamminen, K. (1994). Religious Experiences in Childhood and Adolescence: A viewpoint of Religious Development Between the Ages of 7 and 20. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 4(2), 61-85.

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## Evidence of Religious Experience among children and adolescents

- Klingberg (1953) analysed 630 Swedish essays by 9-13 year old, and claimed that 90% reported religious experience;
- D. Elkind & S.F. Elkind (1962) is based on a sample of 144 fifth grade students; most reported direct experience of God;
- Tamminen's study of 1969, considered 67 children (6-7 years), and out of whom 61% reported an experience where they felt the presence of God close to them.
- Greer (1981) studied 1,872 participants, 18-19 year old, from N. Ireland, out of whom 1/3 of boys & 1/2 of girls claimed having had experience of God.
- Greer (1982) again in another sample of 1,970 (12-17 year olds) reported that 35% of RC & 31% of Protestant boys and 64% RC & 40% protestant girls gave an affirmative answer to the question if they had an experience of God.

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## Tamminen: Religious Experience from childhood to adolescence - 1

- Age group of 7 to 11 years: The context of RE is in time of danger and emergency; God's closeness is felt more when they prayed. Flows from the fact that their lives are centred around immediate surrounding and marked by concrete thinking!
- Age group of 11-13 years: many aspects are similar to 7-11 year age group. The context of RE includes also solitude and loneliness. Development aspect: they begin to develop more abstract thinking, but this is not evident in RE.

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## Tamminen: Religious Experience from childhood to adolescence - 2

- Age group 13-15 years: Puberty brings clear turning point in religious development; doubts about God's existence increases; God's presence seems very remote; doubts are raised about prayers being answered. The context of RE is not much loneliness, but experiences of death of a dear one!
- Age Group 15-20 years (adolescence): Clarification & stability in Rel development is noticed. This stage is marked by a search for identity, meaning of life & death, abstract religious thinking; They perceive that God answers prayer more indirectly. The context of RE is prayer, worship, congregational activities. There is an attempt at internalization of faith, and focus on generalities. Their reports RE have been affected by their improved skills in expression.

Tamminen, K. (1994). Religious Experiences in Childhood and Adolescence: A Viewpoint of Religious Development Between the Ages of 7 and 20. *International Journal for the Psychology of Religion*, 4(3), 65-85.

## Role of Religion in Youth

Religion could provide purpose in life:

William Damon : "Another powerful long-standing source for finding purpose in life is religious belief. ... Every religious tradition advances the notion that the closer we come to God's purpose for us, the more satisfied we shall become in our daily lives." Damon, *The Path to Purpose*, 44-45.

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## Role of Religion in Youth

Religion forms character and prevents deviant behaviour:

- Jessor's Problem Behaviour Theory (1987) comprises three conceptual systems of psychosocial influence – Personality System, the Perceived Environment System, and the Behaviour System.
- Each of these systems is made up of variables that are said to instigate a problem behaviour or control against it, and together, they generate a dynamic state of proneness to the transgression of normative behaviour.
- Religiosity is one of the variables that features in personality systems. [www.sahayaseivam.org](http://www.sahayaseivam.org)

## Conversion among youth

- Conversion is studied within psychology of religion from the perspective of social psychology;
- Conversion is studied particularly in the context of young people joining New Religious Movements, or becoming serious about their own religion; some times also falling out of religion (deconversion);
- There are two types of conversions: gradual and sudden;
- Most studies have focussed on the psycho-pathological elements contributing to conversion: influence of deprivation (Stark, 1965; Brainbridge, 1992) or brain-washing (Richardson 1985; Machalek and Snow 1993);
- Several studies have suggested that most conversions do not last – unless supported by the same context.

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## What is Conversion?

For Coe (1916) conversion entails:

- Transformation of the self;
- Comes through a definite process (not same as maturation);
- Makes radical changes;
- Leads to a higher direction;
- Occurs in a context.

Coe, G. A. (1916). *The psychology of religion*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [www.sahayaseivam.org](http://www.sahayaseivam.org)

## Lofland: Types (Motifs) of conversion

- **Intellectual:** people pursue alternate theodicies, and seek personal fulfillment by reading books, watching television, attending lectures and in other impersonal ways.
- **Mystical:** sudden burst of insight such as visions, voices, or other paranormal experiences.
- **Experiential:** active exploration through trial and error of religious options.
- **Affectional:** interpersonal bonds such as the personal experience of being welcomed by members of religious groups.
- **Revivalistic:** crowd conformity to induce new behaviour and beliefs together with emotionally powerful music and preaching.
- **Coercive:** involves intense and coercive pressure on the person to participate.

Lofland, J., & Skonovd, N. (1981). Conversion motifs. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 20(4), 373-385.

## Rambo's Integrative Model of Conversion

Rambo, L. R. (1993). *Understanding religious conversion*. New Haven: CT: Yale University Press.

Process	Factors
Stage 1: Context	Factors that facilitate or hinder conversion
Stage 2: Crisis	May be personal, social, or both
Stage 3: Quest	Intentional search on part of potential convert
Stage 4: Encounter	Recognition of other R/S option
Stage 5: Interaction	Extended engagement with new R/S option
Stage 6: Commitment	Identification with new R/S reality
Stage 7: Consequences	Transformation of beliefs, behaviours, or identity as result of new commitment

## Religiosity & Spirituality In Later Years of Life

- Gerontology: It is the study of the social, psychological and biological aspects of aging.
- Geriatrics: It is the branch of medicine that studies the diseases of older adults.
- Gero-transcendence: Spiritual aspects that are peculiar to later years.

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## Gero-transcendence 9<sup>th</sup> Stage of Erikson's model of Dev.

- Joan Erikson, the wife of Erik Erikson, had worked with her husband in previous academic work.
- As she was living through her own later years as a widow, and going through the diary kept by her aged husband prior to his death, Joan Erikson (1997) proposed a ninth stage in addition to the eight proposed by her husband.
- She claimed that the psychosocial development through lifespan is completed with the achievement of gero-transcendence.

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## Gero-transcendence and Theory of Disengagement

- Cumming and Henry (1961) proposed the disengagement theory.
- Disengagement theory: "aging is an inevitable, mutual withdrawal or disengagement, resulting in decreased interaction between the aging person and others in the social system he belongs to"

Cumming, E, & Henry, W. (1961). *Growing Old*. New York: Basic.

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## Postulates of the Process of Disengagement (9 pts summarised)

- Expectation of Death leads to loosing ties with others in his or her society.
- Reduced interactions with others reduces norms imposed by interaction.
- Disengagement differs between men and women.
- The individual's life is punctuated by ego changes.
- The level of disengagement depends on how the society and the elderly individual disengage from each other.
- If individuals abandon their central roles, they drastically lose social life space.
- There are cultural variants in the way people disengage.

Cumming, E, & Henry, W. (1961): *Growing Old*. New York: Basic.

## What is Gero-transcendence?

- 'Gero' means 'old man' or 'old age' and 'transcendence' can mean 'rising above'.
- It is an attitude or a 'meta-perspective' that people in their later years attempt to build.
- This process is marked by
  - a transition from a material and rational way of looking at themselves and reality around them to a larger uplifting vision ('cosmic and transcendent').
  - a shift from an outlook on life that is concerned with mundane issues to a concern with universal values.
  - this vision is generally associated with life satisfaction.

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## Tornstam (1989): Three levels of Gero-transcendence

- **Cosmic Level:** changes in the definition of time and space, and includes, new comprehension of life and death, less interest in material things, and acceptance of the mystery dimension of life.
- **The Self:** decrease in self-centeredness; increase in self awareness and acceptance, 'body transcendence' – that is, taking care of the body but not being obsessed by it; ego-integrity – putting together the jigsaw puzzle of the self to form a wholeness.
- **Social and individual relations:** a movement towards a selective deeper relationships, a new understanding of the difference between self and roles that we were called to play in active life; an addition of innocence (freedom from malice); free and detached attitude towards wealth, and the transcendence of right-wrong duality (that we mentioned in the previous talk).