Death anxiety as a function of belief in an afterlife.
A comparison between a questionnaire measure and a Stroop measure of death anxiety
Lars-Gunnar Lundh*, Vidka Radon
Department of Psychology, Stockholm University, S-10691 Stockholm, Sweden
Received 20 October 1997

Abstract

Three groups with different kinds of beliefs about life after death (religious believers, atheists, and agnostics) were compared on a questionnaire measure of death anxiety and a Stroop task with death-related words. Although the religious believers reported less death anxiety than the atheists and the agnostics on the questionnaire measure, they did not differ from the other two groups on the Stroop measure. On the other hand, there was a significant interference effect of the death-related words among all subjects, and this effect correlated with age. The results are discussed in terms of the validity of self-report measures and Stroop interference measures of death anxiety. © 1998 Elsevier Science Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Is there a relationship between religious belief and death anxiety, such that religiously involved people experience less fear of death? Several studies (Aday, 1984; Alvarado, Templer, Bresler, and Thomas-Dobson, 1995; Minean and Brush, 1980; Gibbs and Achterberg-Lewis, 1978; Templer, 1972; Wittkowski and Baumgartner, 1977; Young and Daniels, 1980) have shown that persons who score high on religious attitudes tend to score lower on measures of death anxiety. One of the religious variables which have been found to correlate with death anxiety is belief in an afterlife (e.g. Alvarado et al., 1995; Minean and Brush, 1980). These studies, however, have all relied on self-report measures of religious attitudes and death anxiety, and it is possible that the results are influenced by self-presentation concerns. For example, if a religious person harbours a belief that

*Corresponding author. Tel.: +46-8-163916; Fax: +46-8-166236; E-mail: llh@psychology.su.se
religious persons should not be afraid of death, and wants to present him- or herself as such a
person, then this might affect his or her way of answering self-report questionnaires about death
anxiety.

In order to test the hypothesis of a negative relationship between religious attitudes and death
anxiety in a more objective way, therefore, we need a measure of death anxiety that does not rely
on self-report. One such possible instrument is the emotional Stroop task. One of the most robust
findings in cognitive research on anxiety is that patients with anxiety disorders and subjects with
high trait anxiety show Stroop interference for threat words, i.e. they take longer to name the
colour of threat words than neutral control words (for a review, see Williams, Mathews and
MacLeod, 1996). Moreover, this effect seems to be relatively specific to words referring to the
particular kind of anxiety that the person experiences. Social phobics, for example, have been
shown to exhibit Stroop interference for social threat words, although not for physical threat
words (Hope, Rapee, Heimberg and Dombeck, 1990; Lundh and Öst, 1996; Mattia, Heimberg
and Hope, 1993).

If Stroop interference is a reliable index of anxiety, it may therefore be expected that individuals
with anxiety about death will show more Stroop interference for death-related words, and that the
index of Stroop interference for death-related words may be used as a measure of death anxiety.
The purpose of the present study was to compare subjects with different kinds of beliefs about life
after death with regard to their death anxiety, as measured both by a self-report questionnaire and
by a Stroop task with death-related words.

In an earlier correlational study, Saboonchi and Lundh (1997) used a Stroop task which involved
a category of death-related words together with a Swedish translation of Templer’s (1970) Death
Anxiety Scale (DAS). The DAS is a 15 items questionnaire with statements like “I am very much
afraid to die” and “The sight of a dead body is horrifying to me”. The results showed a significantly
prolonged colour naming latency on the death-related words among the 70 subjects. The degree
of Stroop interference for death-related words did not, however, correlate with the subjects’ scores
on the Death Anxiety Scale (r = -0.09). The fact that the death-related words did interfere with
the colour-naming task among the subjects does suggest that the Stroop interference index for
death-related words measures some kind of emotional response to death-related information. The
lack of correlation between the Stroop measure and the self-report DAS measure may either mean
that these two measures capture different aspects of death anxiety, or that one or both of these
measures are impure measures of death anxiety since they are influenced by other processes. The
DAS self-report measure may, for example, be influenced by self-presentation concerns, and the
Stroop measure may be influenced by conscious coping strategies for dealing with anxiety-related
information.

As a self-report measure, the present study made use of Templer, Lavoie, Chalguban and
Thomas-Dobson’s (1990) 17-item Death Depression Scale (DDS). Templer et al. found that the
DDS had good internal consistency, and correlated $r = 0.67$ with the Death Anxiety Scale (DAS).
Although the DDS was constructed with the purpose of providing an instrument for assessing
depression, rather than anxiety, associated with the topic of death, Templer et al.’s study indicated
that there were no significant differences between the DDS and the DAS in their pattern of
correlations with general anxiety and general depression. Both the DDS and the DAS did, in fact,
correlate more highly with anxiety than with depression, which makes it appropriate to use the
DDS as an instrument for assessing death anxiety.
دریافت فوری متن کامل مقاله

امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
امکان دانلود رایگان ۳ صفحه اول هر مقاله
امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات