



Spirituality and Regret: How Does Spirituality Affect the Amount of Regret Experienced?

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Abstract

There has been a controversy whether (failed) actions versus (failed) inactions elicit greater amount of regret following decisions. Current study explores the role of spirituality in understanding these seemingly conflicting findings in an effort to explain why the amount of regret experienced varies in those situations. Results replicate the action effect in the literature.

Keywords: Emotions; Regret; Spirituality

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When faced with a choice that will impact the future, we try to make decisions that result in a desirable outcome. However, there are times when decisions result in a negative outcome, thus increasing the desire to have acted differently [1]. When this occurs, one might experience negative emotions such as regret [1]. Regret can be defined as the negative emotion we feel when we think an outcome could be better based on making a different decision [2]. Regret typically results in self-blame or a sense of responsibility for the action [3]. Thus, making regret different from other negative emotions such as anger or disappointment. There has been a lot of interest in what interacts with the amount of regret experienced in decision making [1,4,5], however the role of spirituality with regards to experience of regret has not been explored fully. Spirituality is an important construct in research, because spiritual orientation can help people cope with negative life events [6,7]. Thus, the goal of this study is to determine if there is a significant relationship between spirituality and the experience of regret following a

negative outcome.

It is a widely-replicated finding that people report experiencing more regret with negative outcomes when the outcomes stem from an action compared to when they stem from an inaction—Action effect [8-11] is considered to be one of the strongest effects in the regret literature. Kahneman and Miller, et al. [12] used “norm theory” to offer an explanation to this robust finding. In the light of their theoretical framework, regret is stronger when behavior leading to the outcome is abnormal and mutable, because it is easier to think of normal alternatives that could have prevented the unfortunate outcome. Accordingly, in the context of action effect, actions would trigger more regret compared to inactions, presumably because inaction is the norm and it is therefore easier to think of inaction alternatives to action than of action alternatives to inaction [12].

In what way is an inaction more normal? Is it because we all are generally more inclined to inactions? Can it be due to spiritual orientation we have? The present study aims to explore the normality with regards to one’s spiritual orientation to examine their impact on regret over actions versus inactions.

Spirituality can be defined as self-actualization and the way that a person understands, perceives, and transcends life-experiences [13] such as looking for self-growth and meaning in life [14-16]. It is the way individuals seek and express meaning, purpose and experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred [17]. Spiritual people tend to have a positive attitude towards life [13] and that spirituality has a positive impact on health and mental wellbeing [18-20].

According to this implication, spirituality might have a mitigating effect with regards to negative outcomes, differentiating the intensity of the regret experienced stemming from actions and inactions. A recent pilot study reveals promising results in that direction.

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