

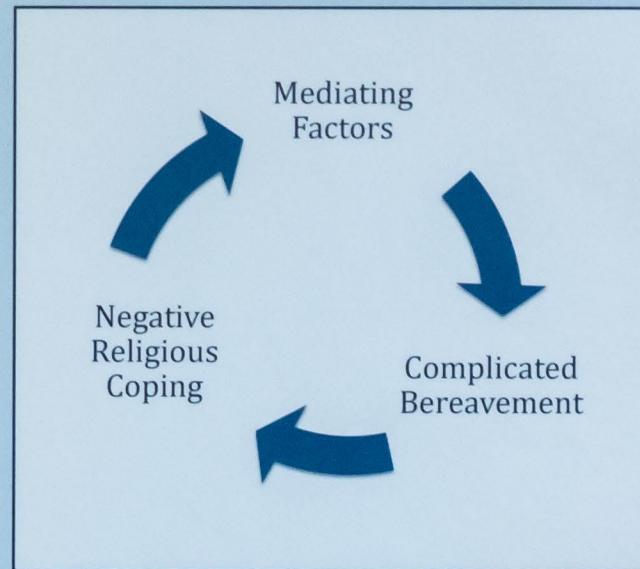
Grief and Religious Coping: Unveiling the Relationship

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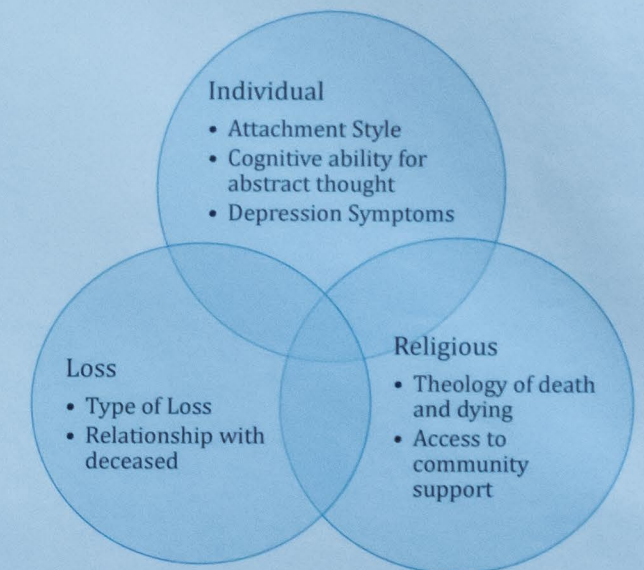
Introduction

Grief is one of the most common human experiences. While many people find resiliency in their grief, others struggle to make meaning of their loss and labor to find peace moving forward. In their search for comfort and consolation, people often lean on their faith as a resource for hope and healing.

Current research trends point to a **bi-directional or cyclical relationship** between complicated bereavement and religious coping, wherein complicated bereavement can lead to negative religious coping and negative religious coping can lead to complicated bereavement. Researchers are also looking into the potential mediating factors of this relationship that would allow us to understand this phenomenon more completely. As clinicians, it is important to be aware of this relationship and its mediating factors in order to better support and serve grieving clients in a spiritual context. The objectives for this poster presentation are to define positive and negative religious coping, provide a framework for understanding the relationship between grief and religious coping, and offer insight for future research on this topic.



Potential Mediating Factors



Understanding the Relationship

Negative Religious Coping and Complicated Bereavement

Burke and Neimeyer (2014, 2017) have found that complicated bereavement significantly correlates with **increased negative religious coping**. However, negative religious coping is not directly associated with increased bereavement distress.

Rather, potential mediating factors such as depression symptoms, maladaptive emotion patterns and ability to make meaning are better predictors of prolonged and distressing bereavement (Neimeyer and Burke, 2017). Negative religious coping can influence these factors though, and, therefore, could **indirectly increase bereavement distress** (Lee, et al., 2013). Creating a story of loss that encourages constructive and positive self-image and relationship with the deceased has been shown to lessen the distress of bereavement and, as a result, also lessens negative religious coping.

Positive Religious Coping and Complicated Bereavement

A repeated result found in the literature is that **positive religious coping does not significantly decrease bereavement distress** (Burke and Neimeyer, 2017). More research is needed to understand this relationship and its potential mediating factors.

Researchers suggest that it would be helpful to test specific factors associated with positive religious coping as separate variables. For example, tangible social support or physical assistance is a benefit to involvement in a religious community and is associated with improvement in bereavement distress as opposed to more emotional social support which, when unsolicited, is associated with greater distress (Bottomly, et al., 2015; Burke, et al., 2010). On a self-report basis however, individuals that do seek out religious support for their grief do report a greater sense of meaning and growth from their loss experience (Burke and Neimeyer, 2014).

Defining and Measuring Religious Coping

Resilience research has widely embraced the benefits of religious coping. However, more recently, researchers have discovered that not all religious coping leads to positive outcomes, and actually some religious coping can be more harmful than helpful (Lee et al., 2013; Pargament et al., 2011).

The RCOPE is one of the most widely used measures for religious coping. Its developers define and measure religious coping based on the active role of the individual in relationship with the sacred (God) and his/her faith community (the Church) (Pargament, et al., 2011). Positive religious coping is associated with increased resilience to major life stressors and events, while negative religious coping is associated with more negative outcomes (Lee, et al., 2013; Pargament, et al., 2011).

Positive Religious Coping

- Connectedness to the sacred
- Secure relationship with God
- Life has benevolent meaning

Negative Religious Coping

- Negative reappraisals of God's power
- Demonic reappraisals
- Spiritual doubting
- Interpersonal religious discontent

Future Research Suggestions

Populations

- Age groups (children, teens, young adults, middle age, elderly)
- Monotheistic Religions (Protestant, Catholic, Judaism, Islam)
- Other Religions (Buddhism, Hinduism)
- Years since loss (5 years vs. 1 year)

Variables

- Type of loss (violent, non-violent, sudden, prolonged)
- Prior history of mental illness before loss
- Attachment style (Secure, Preoccupied, Dismissive, Disorganized)
- Relationship with deceased (parent, child, sibling, grandparent, friend, spouse, etc.)
- Specific Positive Religious Coping factors (relationship with God, community involvement, etc.)

Measures

- Brief RCOPE
- ICSG: Inventory of Complicated Spiritual Grief
- RCA Scale: Religious Coping Activities Scale

Research Designs

- Longitudinal

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