GOOD GRIEF: HOW FAMILIAL RELIGIOUS DIFFERENCES IMPACT THE
GRIEVING PROCESS

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Abstract

This project examines how familial religious differences impact grief and family communication among emerging adults. It assesses how religiously diverse families navigate and process their differences during the grieving process, how family communication patterns impact those differences, and what other situations make these differences salient. The study assesses the responses of 13 volunteers who participated in 20-45 minute semi-structured interviews. The interviews involved a series of questions concerning the respondent's family communication patterns, religious differences, and grief reactions, as well as their communication following the death of a loved one. The results indicated that individuals whose families were able to accommodate the emotional, behavioral, and conversational needs of its members felt more familial satisfaction and had a better time processing their grief. Individuals whose families were unable to accommodate the communicative and social needs of its members reported grief complications and feelings of anger, frustration, and disappointment. Situations of wavering certainty also made religious differences salient. It is important to recognize that circumstance, grief reactions, and family dynamics are specific to every individual. However, grief and family communication still appeared to hold a strong influence on familial turbulence that may arise from religious differences. Further research on grief accommodation should be done to collect more specific data in order to accommodate all grieving family members and their perspectives.

Good Grief: How Family Religious Differences

Impact the Grieving Process

Religion has been in existence for approximately 50,000 years. Archeological records show that it has been an important part of burials since the beginning of modern humanity. One of religion's most appealing features lies within the promise of an afterlife. Though the afterlife both encourages good deeds and alleviates many of the fears and unknowns that come with death, it is not without its challenges. It is common for parents to try to instill religious values in their households, as they adopt them from their own parents, or develop new ones in order to establish a strong sense of morality in their households. However, as these children grow to reach young adulthood, they are likely to diverge from their religious beliefs as they begin to reshape and conceptualize their own identities and as they expand their worldviews and social circles by moving away from home, joining the workforce and seeking out a higher education (Arnett, 2000).

In families, religious diversity impacts communication patterns, especially in unbalanced power dynamics between children and their parents, grandparents and older relatives (Bebiroglu, Van Der Noll, and Roskam, 2017) . An unintended consequence of this influence is that children may then feel the need to conform to their families' religious beliefs and traditions, putting them at an emotional and conversational disadvantage. Using religion as a primary tool to cope with loss may hinder empathy expressions between individuals who do not share these beliefs. Therefore, it is important to know how to bridge potential barriers to effective family communication in grief bringing situations. This study seeks to address this issue by exploring the impacts that grief and religious differences can simultaneously have on family dynamics. Through this attempt, it aims to start conversations that could bridge the gap

between religiously diverse family members as they seek to empathize with one another and come together during times of loss and uncertainty.

This study will examine religion from an academic and family communication perspective, it is not intended to critique any religious belief or perspective, instead, it seeks to better understand the role religion plays in perspectives, communication, and family environments. This study will primarily focus on family communication patterns, grief reactions, and how they are accommodated. It will explore how communication orientation, conformity orientation, and parenting styles are associated with differences in religious beliefs following the death of a loved one. It will explore the power dynamics of familial relationships and their impacts on emerging adults in emotional family gatherings. It will do so by identifying young adults' perceptions of familial expressions of religious differences, family communication, and grief.

This study is necessary and important because it recognizes that religion serves as a cognitive shortcut that reduces the feeling of terror that comes with the thought of one's own mortality (Vail et al., 2010) . This cognitive shortcut is also heightened by reminders of mortality like the death of a loved one. This may instinctively encourage many to seek solace from their belief systems. Though this is an effective coping mechanism for many, it can also unknowingly hinder family communication when its members do not all share these values. A person in an authoritarian family role, may put their children in an uncomfortable situation, discouraging healthy dialogue around the grief they may be feeling. The natural imbalance of power may unintentionally hinder the grieving process of their children and their family unit as a whole.

This study will add to existing scholarship because there is a dearth of literature regarding this grief scenario. Extant research has identified emerging trends of young adults (Arnett, 2000; Colaner, Soliz, & Nelson, 2014; Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018), or family

communication surrounding religious differences and grief reactions (Hogan, Greenfield, &

Schmidt, 2001; Petronio, 2000), however these factors have not been observed simultaneously.

Many studies have recognized that more research needs to be done to better understand grief

scenarios and navigating emerging family differences (Basinger, Wehrman, & Mcaninch, 2016;

Liew & Servaty-Seib 2018).

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Literature Review

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Religion and Family Communication

     Religious socialization. Bebiroglu et al. (2017) composed research on adolescents'

interest in parental religious socialization messages. Literature widely supports that practices

like behaviors, customs, norms and religious beliefs are passed from parental influence on their

children. Though they provide an important source of belief systems, parental encouragement

alone may not be able to sustain religious beliefs for extended periods. (Krause, 2012; Seol &

Lee, 2012)**.** Ultimately, "there is a power asymmetry between parents and children. Parents

have greater knowledge and control over resources, monitor their children and administer

discipline. Thus, they have a higher power in influencing their children" (Bebiroglu et al., 2017 p.

291)**.** As a result, these messages are a significant part of children's development with regard to

how they conceptualize religion and their religious beliefs. Bebiroglu et al. (2017) conducted

religious socialization data by examining three secondary schools, and collected a total of 498

questionnaires from primarily Catholic adolescents. They found that children can receive

socialization patterns from their parent's knowledge, customs and beliefs with their children

through religious socialization messages (Bebiroglu et al., 2017). When children feel controlled

by these messages they are less likely to explore religion. Conversely, families with an intrinsic

orientation towards their faith are less likely to interfere with how others approach their own

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respective beliefs (Bebiroglu et al., 2017). The authors also note that "these reciprocal associations between parents and adolescents suggest that both parents and their children constantly interpret and negotiate each other's perspectives" (Bebiroglu et al., 2017 p. 295).

Religious accommodation. Given that religion is among the most important factors determining individual beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors in areas such as politics, culture, and family life (Banerjee, 2008), divergent religious identities within the same family are likely infused with other divergent social identities or value orientations. Colaner et al., (2014) explain that managing differences in religious beliefs and identities do not have to be characterized as problematic or turbulent. These relationships are often defined by their approaches to communication and by creating a shared sense of identities and experiences among family members. They note that family communication is typically presented in both accommodative and nonaccommodative behaviors (Colaner et al., 2014). Accommodative behaviors are "communication behaviors that acknowledge and respect the conversational partner's perceived interpersonal and divergent group characteristics through linguistic, paralinguistic, discursive and nonlinguistic adaptation" (Gallois, Ogay, & Giles, 2005; Harwood, 2000; as cited in Colaner et al., 2014, p. 313). Accommodative behaviors offer families the opportunity to transcend their differences. On the other hand, they defined nonaccommodative behaviors as the failure, intentionally or unwittingly, to accommodate and incorporate the needs of other family members in their interactions. Nonaccommodative behaviors can include "inappropriate self-disclosure, emphasizing divergent values, and giving unwanted advice" (Colaner et al., 2014 p. 314). Colaner's et al.'s (2014) religious accommodation study used loose guidelines for degree of religiosity, and only nonaccommodative behaviors among emerging adults were observed. Participants, who had previously lived in a religious household for at least a year, identified perceived religious differences using an online questionnaire concerning relational

characteristics. Their results suggested that nonaccommodation behaviors and the emphasis on

divergent values in families may harm relational satisfaction, solidarity, and "not only highlights

differences but also makes a value judgment of the perceived superiority of one set of religious

beliefs" (Colaner et al., 2014 p. 323). Accommodative behavior offers families a way to move

past these differences with" acceptance, respect and tolerance" (p. 323).

      Religious, conversation, and conformity orientation. Fife, Nelson, and Messersmith

(2014) identified the influence of family communication patterns on religious orientation among

college students. Their research explored family religiosity orientation models, conversation

orientation, and conformity orientation in order to do so. They recognized family religiosity as it

is commonly divided between intrinsic and extrinsic orientations (Fife et al., 2014). They

explained that extrinsically and intrinsically oriented people may develop different approaches

to the same faith: "the extrinsically motivated person [is] more willing to adapt that belief

system to individual needs, yet the intrinsically oriented individual is more likely to adapt

behavior to fit the established precepts of that particular faith" (Fife et al., 2014, p. 74). In times

of hardship, like the death of a loved one, an extrinsically oriented individual may find comfort

in their religion and established status and social connections within it (Fife et al., 2014). Their

research also defined conversation orientation as "the degree to which families create a climate

in which all family members are encouraged to participate in unrestrained interaction about a

wide array of topics" (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a, p. 85). Families with a high conversation

orientation "will frequently discuss a wide variety of topics, including personal and value-based

ideas, of which religion surely qualifies" (Fife et al., 2014, pp. 75-76). Children within these

families will know they have the support to talk about religion with their families and even the

freedom to disagree during those conversations. Intrinsic parents will "make time for

discussions of this nature and might even ask their children's opinions or ideas about religious

practices, particularly as children age" (Fife et al., 2014 p. 76). In contrast, families with a lower

conversation orientation are less interested in discussing issues, believing that such open

interactions are not essential for family functioning nor the education or socialization of their

children (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a). Fife et al. (2014) define family conformity orientation as

a parent's desire to pass on their own value systems; its emphasis on traditional hierarchical

family structures includes the adoption of religious faith and religious service attendance. This

orientation's communication style typically emphasizes qualities of compatibility, conflict

avoidance, and obedience (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b) and any questioning of religious beliefs

would likely be discouraged or dismissed. Their studies were conducted using questionnaires

and mailed surveys. Fife et al. (2014) surveyed 215 participants from communication courses.

They found that religious conversation and conformity orientation show that open and honest

communication within families is associated with a strengthened religious faith and is more

likely to produce religious children (Fife et al., 2014). However, conversation and conformity

orientations are not a significant predictor of religious faith.

Hughes and Dickson (2005) also recognize family religiosity types and how they impact

communication skills and conflict. They describe individuals with an intrinsic religiosity as those

who practice individually and seek to internalize their religious beliefs. People with an intrinsic

religious orientation are typically characterized as being "strongly committed to their faith. In

perms of personality, their religion is of primary importance to them and provides a central

sense of meaning in their lives" (Hughes & Dickson, 2005 p. 27). These individuals "tend to be

unprejudiced, tolerant of different viewpoints, and more mature than their counterparts" (p.

27). Intrinsically religious individuals consider religion to be unifying, important to mental

health, and they attend religious service attendance more than extrinsic individuals (Hughes &

Dickson, 2005). On the other hand, Hughes and Dickson's research defines extrinsic individuals

as those who "view their religion as a means to another end, a personal benefit or social relationships with others rather than a central personal quality" (2005, p. 27). They further note that extrinsic individuals "tend to be more prejudiced, dependent, in need of comfort and security and socially utilitarian than their counterparts, and they irregularly attend religious services" (p. 27). Their religiosity study was conducted through mailed survey packets to prospective participants, completed separately, containing Likert-type measurements for religious orientation, marital satisfaction, communication patterns, and social support (Hughes & Dickson, 2005). In addition, Hughes and Dickson found that introspection is an effective way to navigate through conflict in marriage. Whereas extrinsic oriented marriages are more susceptible to facing social challenges, less constructive communication and demand-withdrawal patterns (Hughes & Dickson, 2005). Here too, findings suggest that this difference may have less impact on general marital quality than other influences.

Grief and Family Communication

This project will seek to examine grief as its central focal point, because grief is a fundamental part of the human experience. Grief and bereavement typically occur during sudden life changes like the loss of a home, marriage, job, or loved one that radically shifts our perception of our identity or personal lives. Though many may observe grief as something inherently bad, it is inevitable. Grief presents opportunities for people to grow, change, and respond multidimensionally. When families come together during grief-bringing situations, they may have a significant influence that may ultimately help or hinder our grief perceptions. Therefore, the grief process and the rhetoric we use to discuss it should be recognized.

Family grief. Kissane et al. (1996) examined perceptions of family functioning in bereavement. They identified that "losses and an individual's reaction to them are not solely

rooted in the person visibly suffering the loss" (Lieberman & Black, 1982, p. 373; as cited in

Kissane et al., 1996). Death and bereavement impact families and their relationships, and

"nuclear and extended family's reaction to and acceptance of loss, mourning and grief can

hinder or help each individual family member" (Kissane et al., 1996 p. 650). Studies on grief and

family communication were conducted primarily in Interviews and surveys. Perceptions of

family functioning and bereavement were examined by interviewing families at 6 weeks, 6

months, and 13 months post-bereavement; results showed that cohesiveness is the key

identifier for supportive families (Kissane et al., 1996). However, the frequency of open

conversations is not as important as feelings of autonomy and agency.

Carmon, Western, Miller, Pearson, and Fowler (2010) examined family relational

schemata theory and family communication grief reactions. First, they define family relational

schemata theory (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002b) as relational schemas that are comprised of

procedural knowledge (i.e., information about how to perform tasks within the family) and

descriptive knowledge (i.e., relationship characteristics). This knowledge guides behaviors and

helps individuals interpret the behaviors of others. This knowledge helps family members make

sense of and define their familial relationships and interactions. Ritchie (1991) and Koerner and

Fitzpatrick (2002b) suggested that familial relationships and interactions are based on

conformity and conversation orientation. Second, they define bereavement and grief reactions

as a multidimensional process that includes six key grief reactions of despair, panic, personal

growth, blame-anger, detachment, and disorganization (Hogan et al., 2001). They further

explain that "most grief reactions are psychological and are, therefore, individual" (Black, 1998;

as cited in Carmon et al., 2010, p. 255). However, individuals that come from families with open

communication are better off psychologically than those without (Black, 1998). Carmon et al.'s

(2010) family communication and grief reactions survey was conducted online with a

convenience sample of 340 participants. Its findings showed that familial conversation

orientation before the death of a loved one were significantly related to feelings of growth or

detachment after. The study further showed that though there are many grief reactions,

conversation and conformity orientation only had a statistically significant correlation to

personal growth. Individuals who share their grief and families who are highly communicative

before death will continue similar patterns following it (Carmon et al., 2010).

Grief disclosures. Basinger et al. (2016) observed and defined grief communication

and privacy management. To do so, they explored the working definitions of privacy

management theory and communication privacy management theory. Privacy management

theory asserts that "people open themselves up to vulnerability by sharing with others" despite

the face-threatening risk these disclosures present (Basinger et al., 2016, p. 286). To alleviate

this risk, communication privacy management theory explains how people perceive their private

information across different contexts to reduce the risk of stigmatization that comes with these

disclosures (Basinger et al., 2016). Its privacy management processes include: (a) privacy

ownership, (b) privacy control, and (c) privacy turbulence (Petronio, 2013). Privacy ownership is

the idea that people take ownership of their private information in a similar way one would to a

personal possession. Privacy control is the concept that people can control their private

information implicitly or explicitly by creating privacy rules (Petronio, 2000, 2002) . These rules

dictate when, where, how, and with whom private information should be shared (i.e., access

rules) or withheld (i.e., protection rules; Petronio, 2002, 2007). These rules can also operate

collectively in a grieving family unit, "following the loss of a loved one, family members may

change their rules about private information" (Basinger et al., 2016 p. 287). Privacy turbulence

occurs when privacy rules and expectations are not upheld (Petronio 2002, 2010). Although

boundary turbulence is not always a negative experience (McLaren & Steuber, 2012), individuals

often perceive a sense of instability, turmoil, or unrest when boundary turbulence occurs

(Petronio, 2002). Though grief communication can encourage supportive messages, they can

still be perceived as "controlling or aggressive, rather than comforting (Breen & O'Connor, 2011;

Toller, 2011; Wilsey & Shear, 2007)" (Basinger et al., 2016, p. 288). Even if this is unintentional, it

may "prompt the bereaved to question the safety of their private information" and may

complicate the already challenging experience of grief and bereavement (Basinger et al., 2016,

p. 288).

Grief and privacy rules were examined using individual interviews with 21 college

students from basic communication courses who lost a parent or sibling, which were then

analyzed using grounded theory (Basinger et al., 2016). Bereaved individuals were shown to take

ownership of their private information and grief using selectivity rules, avoidance rules, and

positivity rules (Basinger et al., 2016). The study found that selectivity rules imply that people

want to disclose some private information and avoidance rules concern when they choose not

to disclose it (Basinger et al., 2016). Positivity rules regulate conversational tone, where people

choose not to want to talk about the negative characteristics or unhappy memories of their

loved one (Basinger et al, 2016). Lastly, they found that when rules are violated, there are

negative repercussions that reduce sharing (Basinger et al., 2016). Eventually, participants

became more open to talk about their grief as time passed (Basinger et al., 2016).

Cohen and Samp (2018) reported that youth and young adults disclose, avoid, and

oscillate when coping with the death of a close other concerning themes of stigmatic death,

religiosity, social support, and role model enactment. They explain that topic avoidance, like

anything else has costs and benefits to relational health. Death in particular can leave many

feeling vulnerable (Cohen & Samp, 2018). This "metaphorical communication boundary" helps

"combat the risks associated with intimate disclosures and allows individuals to decide how or if

they will reveal or avoid certain topics" in order to "protect both the self and the family unit

(Guerrero & Afifi, 1995), adhere to family standards (Caughlin, Mikucki-Enyart, Middleton,

Stone, & Brown, 2011), and promote hope and optimism (Brashers, 2001)" (Cohen & Samp,

2018, p. 240). Social penetration theory (Altman & Taylor, 1973) suggests that the degree of

intimacy between communicative partners can dictate both the amount and depth of

disclosures. Disclosures are often met with reciprocation to strengthen relational familiarity and

community, However, disclosure can also promote rumination, depending on the severity of

their focus on death (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2006). Cohen and Samp (2018) studied

disclosure and avoidance using in-depth semi-structured interviews, conducted with eight

children (average age of 9 years old) and 36 young adults (average age of 20 years old). The

study showed that religious beliefs help both disclosure and avoidance, social support and

satisfaction greatly impact how likely a person is to disclose, and that mirroring the behavior of

others appeared to result in positive and negative coping depending on the child's interactions

(Cohen & Samp, 2018).

   Liew and Servaty-Seib (2018) explored college student grief differences, grief patterns,

the dual-process model, and emerging adulthood. They explain that differential grief occurs

when a parent places emphasis on divergent values and religious views, both highlighting their

differences and setting a precedent of their perception of superiority (Liew & Servaty-Seib,

2018). Furthermore, "bereaved individuals can express, experience, and cope with their grief in

different patterns along a continuum from instrumental to intuitive grief " (Martin & Doka,

2010; as cited in Liew & Servaty-Sieb, 2018, p. 228). Patterns of grief are typically presented

through instrumental and intuitive means. Those who grieve primarily through instrumental

means "experience grief as thoughts, express grief through emotional control, actions, and

anger, and adapt to loss by problem-solving and engaging in activities" (Liew & Servaty-Seib,

2018, p. 228). Those who grieve primarily through intuitive means "experience grief as feelings, express grief through tears, low mood, and anxiety, and adapt to loss by expressing feelings and sharing grief" (Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018, p. 229). However, both instrumental and intuitive grief patterns operate on a continuum and experiences, expressions, and coping methods can vary from person to person.

Additionally, the dual process model (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) explains that "bereaved individuals may cope by confronting or avoiding either type of stressor to varying degrees" (Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018, p. 229). The dual process model asserts that while grieving, people oscillate between "coping with loss-oriented stressors (e.g., crying, experiencing grief by thinking about the deceased family member) and coping with restoration-oriented stressors (e.g., fulfilling the household responsibilities left by the deceased individual" (Stroebe & Schut, 1999; as cited in Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018, p. 229). Unlike a grief pattern continuum, dual process model argues that grief operates on an oscillation. This makes it possible for family members to focus on restoration and loss orientation at different times, possibly complicating family grief communication (Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018). Liew and Servaty-Seib's (2018) communication about grief differences study was conducted using Likert-type scales for closeness, family communication, family satisfaction, and bereavement. They used snowball sampling to contact Midwestern university students who had experienced a death in the last five years. Liew and Servaty-Seib (2018) found that family satisfaction and grief reactions were strongly associated with family communication and satisfaction. Specifically, they noted that family communication about grief differences had a positive impact on family satisfaction. Despite students viewing communicating about their grieving experiences as helpful, they still had a tendency to avoid these conversations due to the discomfort associated with discussing death-related concerns (Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018).

Emerging adults are likely to experience the misunderstandings of grief management and expectations of their school, work and family lives. Arnett (2000) describes emerging adults as individuals who are 18-25 years old; a distinct transitional period between adolescence and young adulthood. This group is notable for being in an experimental phase of exploring their "identities related to love, work, and worldviews" (Arnett, 2000, p. 469). In this developmental phase, it is common for emerging adults to live transitionary lifestyles as they begin living independently and move away from home, attending college, and gaining employment (Arnett, 2000). Emerging adults try to attain self-sufficiency, autonomy and relatedness; those who choose to attend college "face additional interpersonal challenges, especially in communicating about their grief" (Arnett, 2000; as cited in Liew & Servaty-Seib, 2018, p. 230).

Research Questions

The relationship that religion shares with death and grief can best be understood by terror management theory (Vail et al., 2010). It identifies that modern-day humans have highly developed frontal lobes that allow them to imagine the future and recognize that no matter what, sooner or later death will come. It further explains that when there is an active reminder of death, or death thought access (DTA), feelings of terror can be reduced when a person increases their self-esteem or immerses themselves into their worldviews (Vail et al., 2010). The inverse scenario is also true; when a person's worldview or self-esteem is threatened, their DTA increases (Vail et al., 2010).

Biologically, terror management helps humans gear themselves towards survival. The cognitive dissonance created by wanting to survive while knowing you could die encourages people to increase their locus of control by working out, eating right, making responsible decisions, choices, and most effectively by practicing Religion. Religion "provides a uniquely

powerful form of existential security" (Vail et al., 2010, p. 85), so much so that religion is

arguably one of the best means by which to alleviate this discomfort, in two key ways. First,

religion acknowledges the existence of a supernatural entity (or entities) that can control the

natural world, life, and death. This belief in a higher power gives people personal significance,

greater internal locus of control, and it gives them social contracts aimed towards the best

interests of society. Second, it provides people with the promise of an afterlife, or consciousness

after death. After all, the idea of ceasing to exist is both hard to face and against our survival

instincts. Therefore, religion gives many a sense of purpose and relieves the inescapable burden

of existence.

Though religion can decrease DTA stressors, it can become a hindrance when applied to

family communication. Due to the unbalanced nature of family roles, parents and authoritative

figures risk projecting these feelings onto their children without considering the discomfort they

may be imposing on them. Though religion may help alleviate a person's personal grieving

process, projecting this coping mechanism onto others who do not share these views has the

potential to reduce relational satisfaction and grief disclosures.

This tends to lead people into what Crowe and McDowell (2017) describe as the

projection of unbridled optimism intended to comfort others producing comments like: "This is

God's plan" and "God doesn't give us more than we can handle" (pp. 204-207). However, these

"optimists" should put things into perspective of others. Otherwise, expressions of religious

optimism risk inhibiting the ability to show empathy and connect with others who do not share

these views. Previous research suggests this tendency risks nonaccommodative behaviors,

which create feelings of minimization, turbulence, and isolation of those around them (Colaner

et al., 2014).

Therefore, grief communication is important because it provides people with the tools to break down the barriers surrounding death's stigma. It also allows people to recognize differences and the impact they can have on others and their social realities. Few (if any) studies have explored the characteristics of grief communication in this context. It's important that this area is researched further to better understand the perspectives of those who grieve in religiously diverse families. As this type of communication improves, so should our ability to cope with grief among diverse groups.

Additional research is required to observe religious differences in family grief patterns. Though many of the studies identify either family religion or family grief, none observe both. More research should be done utilizing interviews to identify the more personal and nuanced aspects of grief communication. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do family religious differences impact the grieving process?

RQ2: How do differences in religiosity, conversation orientation, and conformity orientation impact family communication after the loss of a loved one?

RQ3: In what other ways are these differences (e.g., religious differences, conversation orientation, conformity orientation) salient for family members?

Method

Participants

Interviewees for this study were people ages 18-30 (average age = 22) in the central Texas area. These individuals reported having religious differences from their parents and having had a personally impactful loss in their family. The definition of "religious differences" and the importance of their loss was up to the participant to define. After IRB approval was obtained, participants were chosen using convenience and snowball sampling through referrals,

email, social media recruitment, and word of mouth. Participants volunteered to participate in this research study and did not receive any incentives. This study aimed to collect the information of approximately 8-12 people. This number is sufficient because this study is exploratory in nature and aimed at identifying emerging trends in an understudied population.

The final sample (N = 13; 10 men and 3 women) contained ten university students (76.92%). Six participants self-identified as Hispanic or Latino (45.15%), five as White (38.46%), and two as Black (15.38%). In this way, the study sample was largely representative of the geographical area. The sample was fairly diverse with respect to religious orientation (atheist, n = 4 ; agnostic, n = 4 ; Christian, n = 2; Catholic, n = 1; Wiccan, n = 1; New Age, n = 1). All participants reported that their parents were Christian (n = 11) or Catholic (n = 3) with the exception of one interviewee who reported a mixed, loosely Christian and agnostic household. With regard to the person who had passed away, interviewees reported on a variety of close relationships (grandparent or great grandparent, n = 5; cousin, n = 3; father, n = 2; aunt, n = 2; close family friend, n = 2). Additionally, the time since the loss was an average of four years prior to the interview (range = 2 weeks to 18 years).

Interviews

The semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix A) were written to elicit information about simple demographic data, family communication norms and behaviors, and the experience of grief after the recent loss.

The simple demographic data was used to establish what kinds of cultural and social influences impact the situation. For example, Black and Hispanic families typically have an authoritarian parenting style and influences. Additionally, age helps identify the impacts of familial relationships and parental influence since leaving home. Occupation and education demonstrate the diversity of social circles and spaces and external influences that may help

identify how perceptions around religion. This study will primarily but not exclusively observe student perceptions in collegiate and educational spaces because they are a large contributing factor to divergence from parental religious values.

The family section was chosen in order to identify family communication patterns. Extant literature emphasizes that family communication not only influences the likelihood of a child's religiosity but it also preemptively sets up the stage to what a family environment looks like before and after they experience grief. This before and after analysis helps us explore grief reactions and their effects.

The grief section was structured and intended to be broad to draw out personal experiences that interviewees felt highlighted their grief experiences. These questions were meant to examine the interviewee's relationship with their lost loved one, how their death impacted their family communication patterns, and to observe if religious differences created turbulences as families restructure their identities as they restructure their family dynamics.

Procedures

Each participant in the study had to confirm that they had reviewed the informed consent documentation and agreed that by participating in the interview they agree to the terms to the study. After they confirmed, they received a short briefing on the interview process and procedures. It explained the interview approximately 30-45 minute length, the role of the principal investigator, and asked if the study could be recorded and notes may be taken during the interview for fluidity and accuracy. After the initial briefing, the interview began. Each interview consisted of simple demographic data, four primary questions about family data, five questions about grief, and four short answer debriefing and concluding questions. Participants were also asked additional questions within the family data and grief questions for probing and clarity.

When the interviews were completed, the audio files collected were transcribed and read through twice for familiarity purposes. Then, interview responses were color-coded according to the research question they addressed. First, statements concerning the interviewee's feelings about their experiences answered research question one. Second, statements about the interviewee's religious and family communication answered question two. Finally, statements about alternative experiences that brought up religious messages and religious differences answered question three. This distinction was made in order to develop a clear distinction between respondent thoughts and feelings, communication and family interactions, and external events and influences. After all the responses were given their respective codes, they were printed, cut, and categorized by the research question belonged in and by the subcategory that defined it, and sorted into themes (See Appendix B for a copy of the codebook).

Results

Impact of Religious Differences on the Grieving Process (RQ1)

Participants reported six recurring themes when asked about the impacts of their familial religious differences on their grieving process: religious differences had no significance ($n = 7$), feelings of anger and frustration ($n = 6$), feelings of inclusion and acceptance ($n = 5$), feeling that their religious differences were overshadowed by another turbulent concern ($n = 5$), feeling unsure of how to process their grief ($n = 4$), and feelings of disappointment ($n = 4$). Descriptions and exemplars of each of these themes follow.

No significance. Participants in this category did not feel that their familial religious differences impacted their grief. However, these feelings were reported for a variety of reasons -- including but not limited to transcending religious differences, and indifference of family differences.

First, some respondents used language that expressed that their parents' religious beliefs did not impact their grieving process. For example, Danny stated that he was able to focus on family unity during their mourning period:

> I think if anything it kind of brought us closer together for a time… When do you try to appreciate the ones that you still have, all the more and when you lose a parent, you just kind of grow. And maybe that happened for me and maybe one of the things I got out of that is not to try to fight over the petty severs.

Other respondents communicated feelings of neutrality; that they didn't feel any particular way about their religious differences. For example, when asked about how she felt about the situation after some time had passed, Emma replied:

> …nothing really phases me at this point anymore. I just, because I kind of brushed their top off as just the thing that makes them feel better, which it's totally valid for them to find solace in that. But I just kind of ignore it.

When asked about her perspective on her family's religious differences, Giselle responded that her experience "just kind of made me realize [it's] just different. That's all. It's not bad either. I mean, I might be religious, super religious. One day I may not be -- like, it's just whatever."

Anger and frustration. Feelings of anger and frustration were also a common response among participants, especially over issues of language barriers and self-expression. These feelings were reported for nonaccommodative language and religious expressions. Non-accommodative messages resulted in participant frustration because they either did not agree with what was said, or because what was said lacked empathetic accommodation and consideration.

When asked how the religious ceremony impacted her grief surrounding the untimely death of her cousin, Giselle stated, "I was more just angry… like at my parents, I'm just like, I just didn't, I didn't get why they thought… this is something that should have happened. I was like, this wasn't supposed to happen." Giselle continued, "I don't even want to say 'better place' because like that, she was, she had so much going for her." When asked about the religious messages he received, Aidan explained "everywhere I turned it was just some ridiculous like religious message, just like that didn't even belong in the conversation, just shoehorned in because it made everyone else feel comfortable, but they never realized. It made me feel uncomfortable."

Inclusion and acceptance. Some participants reported feelings of inclusion and acceptance, despite their family's religious differences. This was accomplished either by the child accepting their family's religious messages or by their families accommodating their behaviors to the participant.

First, some interviewees said that they chose to take the messages they received for the sentiment they were intended. For example, when asked about her grief experience with religion, Emma said, "it helped, I'm not going to lie, just because what I can respect from the religion is like positive messages from it." Nash also explained that he tried to consider the meaning of his parents' messages:

> I kind of had to keep in mind, like, this is their religion. They're not trying to do any
> harm. If anything, I should be grateful because that just means that they love me so
> much that they'll allow me into their religion. And that's how I just kept seeing it.

Similarly, Abby expressed:

...it's like a, it's a, it's a sentiment, you know, like you don't understand it, but you know, they mean well by it. So I take it more as like a thank you for caring, but not as a, I don't dismiss it completely... I'm more taken for the fact that they're trying.

Second, participants noted that sometimes familial messages can demonstrate that parents and family members care about them, and use their beliefs as a means to communicate that, without putting any religious pressures on the participant. Danny mentioned that he appreciated that his family didn't try to "force some kind of weird view on me or try to put things in a context that I wouldn't appreciate... I appreciated that." He also appreciated that his family included him in a part of the funeral ceremony:

...writing that eulogy was, was a very cathartic experience and kind of helped me come to terms and stuff. And I remember trying to get it all down on paper and crying…. you know, I, I don't know what makes a good speech or whatever, but there was none that I was more proud of.

Overshadowed by other concerns. Some respondents felt that the loss of their loved one created a turbulent situation that overshadowed their family's religious differences. For Mitch, his immigration status prevented him from seeing his dying grandmother. He stated:

I still couldn't kind of help but like think of the politics behind it my immigration status basically makes it to where like, I can be in the States, but I can't go back...And if I do, I need to get permission and it needs to be like something huge and the time it would've taken to do the paperwork, they wouldn't let me go.

Unsure of how to process grief. Some participants questioned themselves because they were unable to express their grief like the people around them. Aidan elaborated on this feeling by describing how his mother "just goes to sleep every night begging God to like give her

another chance... I feel like I don't give as much as they're giving, and that makes me feel like

I'm not trying enough in a way."

Disappointment. Lastly, some respondents reported feelings of disappointment when

trying to find solace in their family's religion. Antonio mentioned a realization that he had after

trying to resort to religion in desperation. He explained:

> because I was at that point where nothing was working, I prayed. But eventually I was,
>
> uh, disappointed because it was the only thing I know how to do. I mean, science
>
> couldn't help at that moment and I learned that, uh, neither can religion if we're being
>
> honest.

Abby expressed that she too was unable to find solace in the religious practices going on around

her: "I didn't find a peace in the prayer, I didn't find peace in the candles, any of that, um, didn't

[do] too much for me at that time."

Aidan also mentioned similar feelings, but instead of stemming from religion, his

disappointment stemmed from the fact that their religious differences hindered his family's

ability to talk about grief beyond the scope of religion:

> I still feel really sad because I want to talk to my family about... the way that I would get
>
> catharsis, but I can't because I know the way that they handle the situation, is not the
>
> way I handled the situation. And so the reconcilable like difference that we just can't
>
> come to terms with and it's just something we don't talk about. So I'm surrounded by all
>
> these people that have no idea how I feel like here at where I work, where I live, where I
>
> go to school, and I can't talk about how I feel because the people back at home, my
>
> family who know exactly how I feel, we just, we can't have that conversation.

As a whole, respondents' grief reactions are impacted their family's religious beliefs and by how they perceive and color the situation as well. Respondents were able to observe these differences in a family perceptions positively, negatively, or with a bit of objectivity.

Communication and Religious Differences (RQ2)

Participants reported five recurring themes when asked about the impact of these differences on their family's communication: receiving simple or blanket religious statements (*n* = 7), having multiple coping strategies (*n* = 6), religious language accommodation (*n* = 5), open communication (*n* = 2), and avoidance (*n* = 2). Descriptions and exemplars of each of these themes follow.

Blanket religious statements. Many participants reported receiving "blanket" (e.g., overly simple or clichéd) religious statements and condolences. These statements include but are not limited to: saying their lost loved one was in a better place, references to being with God in the afterlife, or any religious message that's the depth fits in a sentence and can be applied to any death or grief-bringing situation. Participants typically viewed these messages as shallow and unhelpful. Nash mentioned that he received frequent religious messages from his maternal grandmother:

> ...it was always just like, she's in heaven now. Like we just know that she's in a better
> place. And like to a certain extent, I agree to some things like, yes, she's in a better place
> if she's not in the pain anymore.

When he was asked how often he received messages like these, he replied, "It was actually like every 45 to 50 minutes. Like in like a realistic term. It was so often… the more weird part about that [is] like the frequency of it, it wasn't the content that really bothered me." Aidan also

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mentioned receiving similar messages:

> Every time I was on the verge of breaking down... I always found that there was
>
> someone driving my shoulders saying, "it's okay, she's in heaven." Or "it's okay, God is
>
> with her right now." Or "it's okay, she's an angel looking down right now."

Multiple coping strategies. Fortunately, several respondents were also able to point to alternative behaviors for accommodative coping, bonding, and self-soothing, in spite of their differences.

As previous literature suggests, religion and religious differences do not have to bring turbulence (Colaner et al., 2014). Accommodative religious involvement was reported positively by both Emma and Danny. In her interview, Emma explained that though she received religious messages about her grief, they weren't directly from her parents. Instead, she described an experience when her family put her in a church bereavement center for kids who experience trauma and loss -- Emma's uncle was responsible for the death of her aunt and her cousin. When asked if the center had been a sense of comfort for her, Emma replied:

> They had like a rec center, and there was like a punching bag in there… my mom told me
>
> that I got pretty much everyone else to help me beat up the punching bag, and it was
>
> supposed to be my uncle.

Additionally, Danny reported that even though he is an atheist, he did appreciate being involved with the religious funeral proceedings. He stated:

> ...giving the eulogy was cathartic too because you kind of think about all this stuff and
>
> it's kind of stream consciousness and it goes everywhere. But then you like sit down and
>
> try to actually write a speech about somebody that you love so much.

Additionally, nonreligious familial bonding was a positive experience for some participants. Nash spoke fondly of two experiences that he held onto while grieving. First, he recalled that before his great grandmother passed, they checked her out of her assisted living home and took her to an ice cream shop to share a cup of chocolate ice cream, and that was how he liked to remember her. Now, anytime he and his family are anywhere near the shop:

> ...we all go […] and for the first few times after she passed away, we would get a chocolate cup and just sit it in the middle. it was really sweet. It was like, um, like a Dia de Los Muertos, but like, like the middle of April.

He also mentioned that after she died he felt that he and his mother shared an important moment together. He explained:

> ...we have a food that brings us together, especially whenever it's just her and I… where we get like sausage, cheese, and crackers… I asked her, she was like kind of snacky. She's like, yeah. So we just sat down and I just remember her... kind of... breaking down.

Though it has not been determined if this is to compensate for a lack of (or absence of) family communication, interviewees reported independently using self-soothing behaviors to cope with their grief. Abby explained that in her grief to remember her dad she got a tattoo, started driving his truck, and cherished the smell of his old raincoat:

> I came home and I got a tattoo like the day after… as my homage to him, and, uh, I drive his truck still, uh, his first truck that he bought with my mom and my dad got together and uh, for others I guess going to church, you know, you feel close to God and for me to feel close to my God.

Abby then added:

When I was little, he, I was so small that I could fit underneath the rain coat with him

wearing it… And uh, for those first couple of weeks, sometimes I'd sit in the closet, I'd

have that rain coat on and it smells like him.

Christian immersed himself in his schoolwork and campus organizations after losing his

grandmother. He explained:

I guess I just find comfort in myself… it's really just like the dedication I really have to

my cause. I was going to college at the time and like I really just felt dedicated to what I

wanted to do… I felt like that really just comforted me…. every time, every time

something bad happens, I just, I just kind of like deal with it, [...] in house and with

myself.

Religious language accommodation. Some participants noted the use of religious

language accommodation as being relatively beneficial. This accommodation was accomplished

by either the interviewee or by their family members altering their messages while speaking to

the other. For example, Mitch altered his language when speaking with his parents by using the

words of their faith. He reported being the one giving religious messages, rather than receiving

them:

I think I wanted to show them that I did care because I wasn't crying like them… but I

would be like, she's in a better place because now she's not suffering and framing it in a

way… I think put them a little bit more at ease again, because it was like not only am I

like being there with them, I'm showing them that like I empathize in a way that they

very much understand.

Conversely, Danny reported receiving messages from his family that had been altered to suit

him:

...they were still willing to say stuff like, I hope, I think he's in a better place, whatever...

his pain is over and those kinds of things. So they, they've tried to express their own

view without it becoming in conflict... I think they saw it more about me.

Open communication. Some families were able to have open dialogues about grief and

were able to comfort the respondent. For example, James felt that he had a very good

understanding of the grief he was experiencing. He stated, "my mom... she's been talking to us

about death or she does hospice, so she's around that all the time, you know, so, you know, I

understand that this transitioning, everything like that."

Avoidance. Lastly, some participants mentioned that their families avoided talking

about managing their grief. Giselle expressed her frustrations with this by stating, "So they

never told me exactly what happened. Like I have to learn through a news article and looking at

my grandparents' Facebook."

Here, most respondents demonstrated that their natural family communication pattern

continued during the grieving process. Accommodative and communicative issues that were

present beforehand are likely to persist or worsen after losing a loved one.

Additional Contexts Where Differences are Salient (RQ3)

Participants were asked about other situations where they noticed similar messages

that highlighted their religious differences. Participants noted that they seemed to crop up in a

number of situations: general misfortune ($n = 6$), school and work stressors ($n = 5$), physical and

mental illness ($n = 5$), and birth and childbearing ($n = 2$). Descriptions and exemplars for each of

these themes follow.

General misfortune. Though this question was asked with the intent of receiving reports

of larger events and grief-bringing situations, many respondents reported that their families

resorted to similar religious messages when respondents were faced with general bad days, hardships, and misfortunes. When asked about situations where he received similar religious messages, Christian responded:

> ...whenever there's like a hardship I guess going on, like she does bring up.... how like it's important to believe in God… God has a path for you and stuff like that..., she's not really passionate about it. She just kinda just puts a one-liner in there.

Antonio responded similarly, hinting at the fact that he prefers more constructive approaches to these types of situations. He stated:

> ...whenever [anticipating] the future or if something doesn't look like it's going to go well, my parents will say "it will get better because God can make it better." However, I believe that unless I make it better, or find the right ways to make it better, it won't.

School and work. Stressors at school and work have the potential to take up large portions of our time and typically are a strong part of our identities. Mitch shared:

> So, um, well this last year everything was just going terribly, right. Whether it was stuff with my immigration status or I'm trying to figure out what the whole grad school situation was going to be like when I was applying, jobs that I was trying to get right. There's all kinds of stuff that was happening. And on the inside, I guess internally I was freaking out more than I was showing it until it like got to the point where I was showing it. But before that my parents were like, why aren't you like moving?

He then explained that he used the same language accommodation pattern to soothe his parents that he used while they were grieving. He stated:

I always have my go-to like scriptures and I go to stories and stuff like that. Like Jonah in

the whale, that's a huge, huge one I use on them. Right. Cause it's like, look, if I'm not

going the right way, I'm going to be devoured by the whale. Do you want me to be

eaten, do you want me to be in the belly of the beast, mom? Is that what you want?

That just let the Lord do his thing. Right. I guess I've articulated well enough for them to

kind of leave me alone after that.

Conversely, Nash brought up his father's hardships with work, rather than his own. He

explained:

...my dad lost his job that he had like 25 years, um, that was something that very

seriously affected us. And our family sent us a lot of like very encouraging, but religious

messages… honestly that was like the point where my mom started being like extremely

religious again.

Illness. Physical and mental illness also prompted familial religious messages. Giselle

explained her experiences and frustrations with these messages were "neck and neck" with the

messages she received while grieving. She elaborated by describing a conversation she had with

her mother while was hospitalized as an inpatient for depression:

...she was like...maybe you should try like the Bible or whatever, connecting with God. I

was like, look, mom, I already tried that. I'm not gonna do it again. This is like my third

time being hospitalized. You would think that after, you know… it would've stuck.

Aidan also mentioned some of the religious messages he received while struggling with his

mental health. He explained:

I had a really bad bout of mental health, depression, bipolar disorder, and it was always

just this idea of, No, just pray to God before you go to sleep and you'll feel better. Just like anytime anything went wrong, the answer was always just pray.

Birth and childbearing. The last, and probably least expected place that people reported receiving similar religious messages is during the emotional rollercoaster of pregnancy and childbirth. Though this question initially sought out grief bringing scenarios, this situation presents some interesting parallels.

In her interview, Abby described her experience with pregnancy and childbirth and the variety of messages she received during this process. She explained, "when I was pregnant, uh, toward the end, I was really scared about having my baby just because, um, I mean, people will tell you all day labor hurts, but you won't know until you're actually in labor." Here she reported receiving messages from her sister, saying "I'll pray for you. I'll pray for you, I'll pray for you. And, uh, you know, people say that, and again, it does, it really does nothing for me." Then, while in labor, Abby hemorrhaged and risked bleeding out. She said that afterwards, her mom told her that:

> God was watching over me because, uh, thank God that I was at the hospital because if I had been at home and had her, I would have died, ...she finds solace in the fact that… if somebody was watching, then you're always going to be safe.

Lastly, Abby reflected back on some of the financial stressors of when she first found out she was pregnant:

> When I found out I was pregnant, we did not have money. We were really, really scared. Um, and my mom just kept saying it's gonna work out, you know, it's a plan this was meant to happen, you know, God's plan.

Abby added that she did not feel reassured by her mother's messages: "that did not do anything for my anxiety, not do anything for my worrying, you know. Um, I was not convinced that God was going to come down and pay my bills."

These findings suggest that religious differences can present themselves for a variety of situations and severities. Grief, in other words, is not the only cause for religious messages. Situations of weariness and uncertainty also appear to highlight religious differences.

Additional Findings

Above and beyond addressing the research questions, a close reading of the interviews also produced additional insight about religious differences and family communication. First, respondents reported hearing negative, exclusionary language about the LGBT+ community as a result of their religious differences with their family. Second, many participants reacted positively to taking part in these interviews, as they saw it as a space to talk about their grief experiences after their initial grieving period.

Messages about the LGBT+ community. It was a frequent theme among interviewees to bring up LGBT+ considerations. Six participants felt that the religious messages they received regarding beliefs about the LGBT+ community were exclusionary, and one of their preliminary reasons for religious differentiation. Though not all of these interviewees identified as LGBT+ themselves, everyone reported perceiving these messages negatively. For example, when Mitch talked about family turbulence he stated:

When we start to talk about LGBT and the church it ends in a fight, immediate fight, because I think there were three things. The first is in their eyes, again, it's just wrong and it's not, it's not right… The other reason I think is because there is always this fear that I am gay. Right. And like defending them as defending myself in a way … And, uh, I

can't pretend- like they aren't- like that they don't exist.

When Aidan was asked when he noticed his familial religious differences, he replied:

...coming to terms with like, my sexuality… but just like other individuals that my

grandma would approach, how like they were, they were morally wrong and they were

going to hell because of the way they were. And it made me feel really uncomfortable,

but also kind of amazed at how people could think like that because I knew something in

me just said that that was not true, but that, that, that in no way could be true. So I just

kind of started shaping my own beliefs after that because I didn't want to believe that I

was going to hell.

Paul, too, mentioned receiving negative messages and attitudes from both his mom and his best

friend about the LGBT+ community. He explained:

I am gay. Um, back then my mom was not necessarily homophobic, but she would, uh,

express some, just resentment towards the gay community due to her own issues. So

that made it really difficult for me growing up. Um, but she's like, apologized for that

now.

He later added that these negative attitudes marked the beginning of his divergence from his

religion, and illustrated this by describing an experience he had in the 8th grade: "...my best

friend was tormenting a gay kid on the bus, ...saying that he was an abomination, that nobody

will ever love him. He's going straight to hell. So that's kinda what changed my beliefs to more

atheist."

These findings are in line with literature concerning biblical literalism and religious

fundamentalism. Gabourel (2015) explored this concept in his research on social maintenance of

oppressive structures, explaining that "fundamentalism is the belief that there is a single

religious philosophy which clearly lays out the essential truths about the relationship between

humanity and God" (Hunsberger, 1996; as cited in Gabourel, 2015, p. 10). Furthermore, the need to uphold these religious doctrines may lead fundamentalists to "discriminate against those with very different beliefs and behaviors from their own" (Gabourel, 2015, p.10).

      Talking about grief. Understanding more about grief communication was a secondary goal of this project. This was achieved by allowing participants to talk about sensitive, difficult, and sometimes stigmatized disclosures. These interviews provided students with a safe space to talk about their religious beliefs, family grievances, and general experiences with grief and loss. The traditional demands of school and work typically do not provide people the time or conversational spaces to talk about bereavement after the initial grieving has passed. However, grief is often experienced in nonlinear and can be long-lasting (Carmon et al., 2010). Safe spaces to talk about grief are cathartic because they allow people to ruminate on their grief, the memories of their lost loved one, and it reaffirms that death and grief are a natural and consistent part of the human experience.

      At least half of all respondents mentioned in their interviews or in a follow-up conversation that they appreciated being able to talk about their experiences, or that they hadn't previously talked about it as much as they had for their interview. When asked where she stood in her grieving process, Abby responded, "it's easier to talk about…. I mean, I say that as I cry talking about it… you relive that day when you have to talk about it and those feelings are there, but they're not nearly as bad." When asked the same question, Joel replied, "I can- like obviously I can talk about it, and so yeah, before [...] I would be able to talk about it, but I couldn't talk in much detail." Lastly, Tristan admitted that following the loss of a close friend, he didn't want to talk about it, but mentioned after scheduling the interview that he looked forward to talking about some of his experiences in his interview. During the interview, he

stated, "Um, I did not talk about it. I've actually never talked about it at all. This is the most I ever have, like to anyone."

Discussion

Impact of Religious Differences on the Grieving Process (RQ1)

Religious differences appeared to affect the grieving process for many (although not all) participants in this study. Specifically, six themes were identified: no significance, feelings of anger and frustration, feelings of inclusion and acceptance, feelings of disappointment, being overshadowed by another turbulent situation, or being uncertain about appropriate grief expressions.

Ultimately, research suggests that family religious differences can impact the grieving process on a case by case basis. There are several factors that come into play while managing grief reactions. For example, a parent may respond differently if they lose their own parents than if they were to lose a cousin or family friend. Just as interviewees reported different grief responses and grief scenarios, parents in their own respect may react in a variety of ways themselves. Even still, the death of a loved one may bring sudden or turbulent changes to a family structure that may not have room for religious differences to come to the forefront of familial focus. However, when these differences do impact interviewees' perceptions of the grieving process they are often manifested in negative emotions like anger, frustration, and disappointment. Fortunately, the research also suggested that in some cases interviewees can take it upon themselves to accept familial differences and manage their grief multidimensionally.

Communication and Religious Differences (RQ2)

Religious and grief communication generally reflected natural family dynamics. Specifically, 5 recurring themes were identified: blanket empathy limitations, multiple coping channels, Religious language accommodation, open communication, and avoidance.

Family communication patterns that were in place before the death of a loved one are likely to continue during the grieving process. If personal and religious disclosures are turbulent or avoidant before the loss of a loved one, these behaviors are likely to continue. Turbulent, authoritarian, and avoidant family communication patterns are likely to complicate the grieving process. In this sample, communication patterns and family dynamics impacted interviewee perceptions more than belief systems themselves. Though religion can be a catalyst, it was not at the forefront of issues that were reported. Findings show that negative and nonaccommodative perceptions included avoidance and blanket religious statements. If there is no turbulence present in a communicative and accommodative family environment it is unlikely to change. Accommodative behaviors and positive perceptions included language accommodation, accommodative behaviors, and family bonding. Still, not all interviewees have the same expectations or desires from familial interactions, therefore the expectation for what these behaviors and language may look like vary from person to person.

Additional Contexts Where Differences are Salient (RQ3)

Research uncovered that ultimately, many uncertainties in life typically bring about religious messages. Though it was initially assumed that only grief-bringing situations created a need for terror management and religious messages, general familial uncertainty has shown to do the same. General misfortune, school and work stressors, illness, and childbirth all prompted religious messages from these participants' families. As with grief, people of differing religious beliefs may perceive these religious messages as lacking in emotional and constructive support.

Implications

The results of this study present three main implications. First, grief and family

communication are individual and must be considered on a case by case basis. Second,

approaches to family communication and religious differences are more important than the

differences themselves. Finally, blanket religious statements are generally not encouraged.

First, grief and family communication are individual for the people and circumstances

they concern (Lieberman & Black, 1982; Kissane et al.,1996). Respondents all reported different

grief reactions, even when they presented situational similarities. Conversely, respondents all

reported navigating their family grief communication, among families with similar

conversational styles. There is no one size fits all solution to every individual's pre-established

family rules, norms, and expectations (Kissane et al., 1996; Carmon et al., 2010). The same can

be said for each person within a family unit as well. Therefore, the best way to interpersonally

accommodate others is through open communication and empathetic consideration (Colaner et

al., 2014).

Second, grief and family communication appeared to have more importance to the

respondent than religious differences themselves. In most cases, the religion of the

respondent's family had little impact on the participants' feelings and family turbulence. This

may be why several people said that their religious differences did not impact their grief (RQ1)

but still reported communicative grievances (RQ2). Instead, many negative grief reactions

seemed to stem from a lack of coping models that fit the needs of the participant, or the

family's inability to accommodate their religious perspectives. Therefore, in order to maintain

relational satisfaction, families should aim to establish a shared sense of identity to

accommodate and transcend religious differences (Colaner et al., 2014).

Finally, as these findings affirm, religious one-liners such as "God has a plan" and "just have faith" should be avoided (Crowe & McDowell, 2017). Over half of all participants reported receiving blanket religious statements, and none of them received these messages positively, even in families with minimal denomination differences. Respondents alluded to the fact that these statements were neither unique nor specific to the different feelings and circumstances that they were going through. These messages communicate that the receiver is expected to share the same values as the speaker, and their surface-level nature can be received as useless, and hinder any further disclosures from occurring. Grief communication is important, and supportive messages should keep the grieving person's needs and perspectives front and center (Crowe & McDowell, 2017).

Theoretically speaking, this research implies familial relationships are defined by their interactions rather than their belief systems. Both the data in this investigation and extant literature suggest that accommodative behaviors and approaches are preferable to nonaccommodative ones (Colaner et al., 2014). In fact, this factor may have the most significant impact on grief reactions. Conversely, perceptions of messages that encourage religious conformity were viewed negatively by respondents. This may be a result of emerging adults' need for autonomy and agency (Arnett, 2000). Lastly, conversation orientation appeared to have a positive correlation with interviewee disclosures. Though not all respondents have the same desires to talk about their grief, more communicative families (confrontational or not) appeared to reflect that in their grief data. This may be due to the aforementioned grief communication and family rules (Basinger et al., 2016) and familial procedural knowledge (Koerner & Fitzpatrick, 2002a) that would generally reflect communicating these kinds of disclosures.

Limitations and Future Directions

This study presented limitations of scale, social desirability, and representation. This project's exploratory nature also necessitates a limited scope, but still acknowledges that there is a wide variety of grief scenarios and grief reactions to be examined. Therefore, expanding the scale of this research may also present a more expansive and more accurate dataset. Family variables and classifications were self-reported by participants and risk social desirability responses. For instance, some individuals may have modified their disclosures to withhold sharing stigmatized information, or they may have phrased information to help the study in a way they may not have otherwise. Lastly, the interviews conducted only observed grief scenarios and reactions from one family member's perspective. Interviewing multiple members from the same family may allow for a more holistic interpretation of the events and the family communication being experienced.

To continue gaining insight about these issues, future scholars should identify participants who report grief experiences coming from authoritarian families, individuals who left home and later moved back in with their families, and 18-year-olds on the cusp of emerging adulthood. Studies should focus on authoritarian families in order observe households with firm religious values. They should focus on 18 year olds because they will likely be in closest to their families while in the beginning stages of divergence. It should also focus on individuals that have have experienced independent living and moved back in with their families because they may have found their personal identity while being closer to their families than they have been accustomed to. Future scholars may also want to seek out participants' family functioning after the loss of a specific familial role (e.g., siblings, parents, cousins, aunts, grandparents) with a similar degree of parent-child religious differences. There is a wide variety of more refined in-

depth research projects within the umbrella of this one. Research can be further developed on

accommodative grief rhetoric from family, friends, and in funeral ceremonies.

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Appendix A

Interview Questions

Family Communication Items (with optional probing questions)

1. Tell me a bit about your family (relationships).

    -- Would you call your family talkative and open or quiet and more kept to

    themselves?

    -- Would you consider your parent(s) to be more authoritative or laid back?

2. Can you tell me more about the differences you've noticed between your religious beliefs and

your parent(s)? How do you feel about these differences?

3. Please describe with a bit of depth your parent's relationship with their religion.

    -- Are they private or frequent church goers, are they spiritual, do they find

    social support within that community?

    -- When did you begin to notice these differences?

4. Have you openly expressed that you do not share the same religious views as your parents?

Are they aware of these differences?

    -- Can you think of an experience you have surrounding these religious

    differences? Is this typical for your family?

    -- Please elaborate (more) on your religious beliefs

Grief Items (wth optional probing questions)

5. Tell me about the loss (in your family/ of your _____).

6. Tell me about your experience with your family during this period.

7. Did your parent(s) offer any religious messages to comfort you? How did that make you feel?

(what was your response?)

       -- Did you feel the need to comfort them?

       -- Did they try to accommodate your religious beliefs?

       -- Did ever feel like they used religion to cope with their loss?

       -- How comforting was your family during this process?

8. Was there any turbulence in the family surrounding religion, coping, or losing this person

moving forward?

9. Have you noticed any similar feelings or patterns we've discussed during any other times of

hardship? (losing a job, illness, natural disasters, lost relationship, etc.)

Codebook

RQ1: Grief and Religious differences

No Significance

Participant felt that their family's religious differences did not impact their grief

"I kind of brushed their top off as just the thing that makes them feel better, which it's totally valid for them to find solace in that." (3)

Anger and Frustration

Feelings of frustration with their family's lack of accommodation

"I was more just angry... like at my parents... I didn't get why they thought it should- this is something that should have happened...this wasn't supposed to happen." (6)

Inclusion and acceptance

When the participant or their family, tries to accept the other person's perspective

" I kind of had to keep in mind like this is their religion. They're not trying to do any harm. If anything, I should be grateful because that just means that they love me so much that they'll allow me into their religion." (7)

Overshadowed

Religious differences were overshadowed by another turbulent situation going on at the time

"I still couldn't kind of help but like think of the politics behind it, right...It made it less politicized cause like, cause the angriness came like I was mad at somebody else from... my grandma dying. You know what I mean? It could be mad at like this country for taking her away from me...It's like that's something that you can get behind that like that God didn't take her away. It was this country took her away, if that makes any sense." (1)

Absence of Grief Model

The participant questioned if they were grieving correctly if it was not expressed like their family members

"I feel like I don't give as much as they're giving and that makes me feel like I'm not trying enough in a way." (11)

Disappointment

Feeling let down from the inability to find solace in their family's religion

"there was still some part of me that hoped that things were going to get better ...because I wasn't at that point where nothing was working, I prayed, but eventually I was, uh, disappointed because it was the only thing I know how to do. I mean, science couldn't help at that moment and I learned that, uh, neither can religion if we're being honest." (4)

RQ2: Grief and Religious Communication

Blanket statements

Grief is met with simple religious statements

"Every time I was on the verge of breaking down or anytime I felt like I just needed something. I always found that there was someone driving my shoulders saying, it's okay, she's in heaven, or it's okay, God is with her right now or it's okay. She's an angel looking down right now." (11)

Multiple coping channels

Alternative ways to cope and bond

"we have a food that brings us together, especially whenever it's just her and I, um, where we get like sausage, cheese and crackers. Um, so I was, I asked her, she was like kind of snacky. She's like, yeah. So we just sat down and I just remember her like kind of like breaking down." (7)

Religious language accommodation

Messages that try to accommodate other family members perspectives

"I kind of did just play along with the whole religious thing like, you know, saying grandma's in heaven you know she's fine, she had a great life" (2)

Open communication

Family openly talked and confided in each other

"You know, my mom, and she's been talking to us about death or she does hospice, so she's around that all the time, you know, so, you know, I understand that this transitioning, everything like that, so." (12)

Aviodant

Families that avoid talking about a topic, even if the participant wants to talk about it

"So they never told me exactly what happened. Like I have to learn through a news article and looking at my grandparents' Facebook." (6)

Additional Contexts Where Differences are Salient (RQ3)

Generalized misfortunes

General misfortunes and hardships in life

"Every time that anything negative comes, my mom just tells me to pray to God, it will get better or, uh, pray to God for my health and all of that." (8)

School and work

Uncertainty and stressors in academic and professional spaces

"When my dad lost his job that he had like 25 years, um, that was something that very seriously affected us. And our family sent us a lot of like very encouraging, but religious messages,

everything is very religious in our family. So anything encouraging or anything like that, it's

always really combined it. So, um, I remember that and honestly that was like the point where

my mom started being like extremely religious again." (7)

Illness

Physical and mental illnesses experienced by the participant

"I felt tired cause everything I had really bad bout of mental health, depression, bipolar disorder,

and it was always just this idea of. No, just pray to God before you go to sleep and you'll feel

better. Just like anytime anything went wrong, the answer was always just pray." (11)

Pregnancy and Childbirth

The uncertainties of pregnancy, and childbirth, and a newborn baby

"Oh my God, I was so scared...And, uh, my sister just kept saying, I'll pray for you. I'll pray for

you, ill pray for you. And, uh, you know, people say that, and again, it does, it really does

nothing for me." (9)

None

The participant did not receive religious messages from their family

"Um, not really." (12)