Master of Social Work Clinical Research Papers   School of Social Work

5-2013

Cultural Coping Strategies and their Connection to Grief Therapy Modalities for Children: An Investigation into Current Knowledge and Practice

Philip D. . Kuehn
St. Catherine University

Cultural Coping Strategies and their Connection to Grief Therapy Modalities

for Children: An Investigation into Current Knowledge and Practice

by

Philip D. Kuehn, BSW, MSW Student

MSW Clinical Research Proposal

Presented to the Faculty of the
School of Social Work
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas
St. Paul, Minnesota
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

Committee Members
Sarah Ferguson, MSW, Ph.D., (Chair)
Abdulahi Mohamed, LICSW
Diane Bauer, MSW, LICSW

The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

Abstract

Dealing with the death of a loved one can be a difficult time in the life of an individual, especially a child. In certain cases, adults and children can develop extreme grief responses as a result of this significant loss. An individual's culture can play a major role in the way they understand and respond to the death of a loved one. To find out more information regarding the interplay between culture and grief responses, it was useful to interview professional grief therapists on this topic. These interviews sought to discern whether or not there was a useful connection between the positive coping strategies that seem to exist in multiple cultures and the grief therapy models used in Western culture. Once the data from these interviews were transcribed, coded and analyzed, the researcher was able to discern several themes that related to cultural coping strategies having a useful connection with grief therapy modalities. This research provides important information for anyone attempting to use cultural coping strategies as a means to help individuals and children cope with the death of a loved one and increase their resiliency.

Acknowledgements

There are so many people to thank that have helped me succeed in this lengthy endeavor. Not only in regards to this clinical research paper but to graduate school itself.

First and foremost, I want to thank my amazing wife, Dana Kuehn, who has encouraged and supported me, (in more ways than one), throughout this entire process. Her unwavering belief in my ability to succeed gave me the self-confidence I needed to excel in this challenging program.

I also would like to thank my research chair, Sarah Ferguson, who was invaluable as she guided me through this entire research process. The feedback and support she provided helped ground and focus me during this, at times overwhelming, project.

I would like to thank my committee members for their thoughtful feedback and suggestions. My paper was significantly improved because of your insight and expertise in this area.

This research project could not have happened without the selfless individuals who volunteered to participate in this research study. This achievement rests on their substantial knowledge and their willingness to share this knowledge in the academic pursuit of social research. I am extremely thankful for their time and expertise.

I would like to thank all of my other professors in the St. Thomas/St. Kate's MSW program that had a hand in furthering my education and professional development. I would also like to thank my classmates who, without their friendship and support, I would not have had nearly the positive experience I did on this educational journey.

Last but certainly not least, I would like to thank all of my family and friends for their love and support as I progressed through my graduate school experience. Especially my parents, Tim and Judy Kuehn, for instilling in me the strength and determination to do whatever I set my mind to and believing that I am capable of great things. I also especially want to thank my parents-in-law, Bill and Mary Vierling, for all their support, especially the tangible variety, that they provided to me as I engaged in this program. Without their help, this undertaking would have been significantly more challenging.

Table of Contents

Death is a universal and common experience; it is one of two experiences that all living creatures on earth are guaranteed to share. Being born and dying, everyone and everything goes through this process; it is universally known and accepted as the normal life cycle. Based on this certainty of our eventual fate, it is interesting that such a large section of Western society has a difficult time facing the prospect of their mortality and coping with the death of a loved one. Hooyman and Kramer (2006) postulate that our [Western] society "tends to deny and fear death, we often feel uncomfortable talking about grief and loss, wanting to avoid the pain and the darkness" (p. 4). Perhaps it is the fear of the unknown, uncertainty, and change that make the thought of dying such an upsetting experience for many people (Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007). Death can directly conflict with the belief that people are in control of their own lives and reminds people of the uncertainty of their existence.

Contemplating this inevitable fate, which everyone rationally knows but do not always emotionally accept, gives rise to many questions about life, who we are, why we are here, and what we are meant to accomplish. "Everyone must deal with the issues of meaning and purpose in our lives, in our own way and in our own time" (Hooyman and Kramer, 2006, p. 1). Culture, the external environments that influence and shape us, has a major influence on the way we perceive and experience death, grief, and loss and plays a role in the answering of those existential questions.

Even though death is a common experience affecting all people from cultures all over the world, the perception of death, subsequent response, and the meaning made of that death varies strongly depending on one's particular culture, or lack thereof. Death is

seen through a cultural lens and influenced by its common beliefs, customs, and rituals (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). No two cultures experience or think about death in the same way. No two cultures express their grief in the same way or carry out the exact same bereavement rituals. Different cultures make different meanings out of death. All of these factors are shaped by the evolving beliefs and traditions of that culture. The myriad of ways that different cultures approach death and think about grief and loss could be potentially helpful when dealing with the death of a loved one (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Parkes, Laungani, & Young, 1997).

"Losses can be physical or symbolic, but they always result in a deprivation of some kind; in essence, we no longer have someone or something that we used to have" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 2). The confusion and emotional turmoil following the loss of a loved one can be a difficult experience to process, and can be particularly enhanced for a child. "The death of a parent during childhood or adolescence places considerable emotional strain on developing children, threatening the stability of their emotional well-being, family system, current and future relationships, and countless other aspects of their lives" (Dopp & Cain, 2012, p. 41). Being a child and experiencing bereavement can both be significant periods of transition, change, and uncertainty. According to Ribbens-McCarthy (2007), both experiences can "arouse fears of the unknown and the chaotic" and when both are experienced at the same time, these feelings can compound on each other and result in an extraordinary amount of anxiety (p. 286).

The chaotic feelings that can arise are especially important to consider in the context of a child experiencing the death of a parent. Because the special significance of such a loss can cause confusion and emotional turmoil, it could be beneficial to analyze

cultural factors that appear to be helpful in making sense of loss, in connection with grief therapy modalities for children. Perhaps this investigation for any useful connections could eventually yield helpful interventions to help children process loss and gain resiliency.

The focus of this research will be on investigating any potential connections between cultural coping strategies and effective grief therapy modalities for children who have experienced the death of a parent, and analyzing how cultural factors could play a positive role in ameliorating the trauma this type of loss can yield. By analyzing the fundamentals of grief, loss, culture, and cultures' role in resilience, this study will attempt to identify if and how current therapeutic models for children experiencing grief already incorporate cultural factors. It will also attempt to study any logical connections that exist between grief therapy modalities for children and cultural coping strategies not yet incorporated into them. It will consider their potential utility in helping children deal with the loss of a parent and promote their resiliency in the face of this loss.

Review of Literature

Grief, Loss, & Bereavement

There are several terms used to describe the period following the death of a loved one. Bereavement refers simply to having a loved one pass away; grief is the emotional reaction attached to this experience, and mourning is the expression of this bereavement and grief through cultural, religious, and family traditions (Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schute, 2001). When an individual experiences this loss of a loved one, they normally experience either an uncomplicated or a complicated bereavement process.

Uncomplicated bereavement can be identified by a large number of responses that have come to be seen as normal for the grieving process and assist the bereaved individuals in coping with the significant loss (Worden, 2003). During this process of uncomplicated bereavement, an individual can experience emotional symptoms such as despair, dejection, anxiety, sadness, guilt, and loneliness. Uncomplicated bereavement is also identified through behavioral symptoms like changes in sleep, appetite and difficulty concentrating (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; Stroebe et al. 2001). "Most people are able to cope with these reactions and work through the tasks of mourning on their own, thereby making an adaptation to the loss" (Worden, 2003, p. 27).

During uncomplicated bereavement, the individual experiences a process called reconciliation in which they go through several steps in order to come to terms with the loss of a loved one (Wolfelt, 1996; as cited in Cohen & Mannarino, 2004). For reconciliation to be complete, the individual needs to work through a variety of tasks, including: accepting the loss as a real event, fully experiencing the pain of that event, adjusting to life and being able to identify themselves without that loved one, making the transition of thinking about that person as a present participant in their life to a memory, and finding some sort of meaning from their passing (Wolfelt, 1996; Worden, 1996). The ultimate goal of this process is for an individual to accept a life without that loved one and move past the loss to re-enter into normal daily life. Sometimes, when an individual experiences the loss of a loved one, they are unable to progress through the grieving process and heal, "due to separation distress and trauma symptoms related to the loss of the relationship" (Prigerson, Shear, & Jacobs, 1997; as cited in Cohen & Mannarino, 2004, p. 819).

This trauma can make it difficult for an individual to process the death and subsequently make it difficult to work through the steps or stages often seen as necessary to accept the loss of a loved one. Every time they attempt the sustained thoughts about their deceased loved one, which is regarded as necessary in most grief therapy models, these sustained thoughts contribute to re-traumatization of the individual (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004). When an individual experiences these accompanying traumatic feelings associated with the death of their loved one; it is commonly known as Complicated Bereavement (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; Farber & Sabatino, 2007). This trauma can occur due to the nature of the death or to the loss of the "security enhancing nature of the relationship" and feelings of powerlessness (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004, pg. 819).

Because of this trauma factor and because children's understanding of death may make it harder to complete the reconciliation process, it is more common for children to experience complicated bereavement. This is especially true for children when the death they experience is that of a parent (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; Farber & Sabatino, 2007). Many studies support the idea that the loss of a parent during childhood can cause intense feelings of instability, uncertainty, and insecurity (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; Dopp & Cain, 2012; Farber & Sabatino, 2007; McClatchy et al., 2009; Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007; Stroebe et al. 2001; Wolchik, Ma, Tein, Sandler, & Ayers, 2008). This experience may also cause substantial negative impacts on a child's developmental, emotional, or mental health (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004; Dopp & Cain, 2012; Farber & Sabatino, 2007; McClatchy et al., 2009; Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007; Stroebe et al. 2001; Wolchik et al., 2008). Regardless of whether the loss is sudden or expected, there are several factors that

can affect a child's ability to cope with this dramatic shift. It is important here to clarify that not all children experience complicated bereavement when experiencing the death of a parent. Many children are able to process through basic uncomplicated bereavement, experience few trauma responses, and suffer few negative impacts on their emotional development.

Parental Bereavement of Children

One significant reason losing a parent can have such an extreme effect on a child is that it can throw off a child's natural feelings of stability and gives them the sense that neither they nor anyone else has any control over what happens in their lives (Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007; Wolchek et al., 2008). Such a loss can create a loss in feelings of support, protection, responsiveness, consistency, and stability that the parent provided them (Wolchik et al., 2008). If another parent, parent figure, or primary care-giver is not able to step in to offer the child emotional support, stability, and structure it can inhibit the grieving process and cause permanent negative effects (Wolchik et al., 2008). These feelings of grief, loss, uncertainty, and helplessness may also contribute to a trauma response (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004).

When a child experiences the loss of a parent they can develop a type of complicated bereavement known as Childhood Traumatic Grief (CTG). CTG is traditionally seen in children whose parents have died in particularly sudden or graphic ways such as car accidents or suicide and when the child's response to this experience is "intense fear, helplessness, or horror" (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004, pg. 820). CTG can also develop due to the extreme feelings of loss of stability, security, and helplessness that can occur with any loss of a parent. Cohen & Mannarino (2004) suggest that CTG

does not affect a large percentage of children experiencing parental bereavement. They argue that most children who have lost a parent can process through reconciliation without the introduction of trauma therapy.

Recent research has shown that Childhood Traumatic Grief may be more prevalent in children experiencing the death of a parent than previously thought. A study by McClatchy et al. (2009) researched a sample group of children that had all experienced parental loss. This sample included children whose parents had died in both sudden and expected ways. The study found that a significant percentage of the children had experienced CTG and that there was no relationship between the unexpectedness or manner of the death and whether or not a child experienced CTG. Their research suggested that the death of a parent is traumatic for children no matter what the circumstances. There is also past research that McClatchy, et al. (2009) have built on that support this suggestion of traumatic grief being present in all children experiencing the death of a parent (Black, 1998; Krueger, 1983; Worden, 1996).

Current Grief Therapy Treatment Modalities

A typical way to approach grief therapy with children is to help the child fully accept the loss and its accompanying pain, learn to live and accept a life without the physical presence of their deceased parent, remember the good things about them, and find meaning in their death (Farber & Sabatino, 2007). To do these things, the child needs to be able to "tolerate sustained thoughts of their deceased parent, past interactions with them, regret about things unsaid or undone, and face the pain associated with the loss" (Worden, 1996, as cited in: Farber & Sabatino, 2007, pg. 387). For a child experiencing CTG, the trauma of the experience is actually superseding the loss itself and making it

impossible to process that loss. CTG keeps the child from processing through reconciliation because the reconciliation process requires sustained thoughts about the deceased parent, the fact that they died, and the manner in which they died (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004). Any sustained attempt to engage in these grief processing activities or purposeful remembrance of their parent as part of the grieving process can trigger a "trauma reminder…and further develop the trauma symptoms" (Farber & Sabatino, 2007, pg. 387). CTG often results in a cycle where the child is constantly troubled by and reminded of the death of their parent but is unable to reconcile with it and the pain and grief does not go away (Cohen & Mannarino, 2004, McClatchy et al. 2009).

Cohen & Mannarino (2004) have completed research that supports the theory of using trauma and grief focused therapy simultaneously as an effective way of treating CTG. They developed a Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Model (TF-CBT) that contains 12-16 treatment sessions that are split up into Trauma-focused components and Grief-focused components. Cohen & Mannarino (2004) found that this TF-CBT model was effective for children experiencing CTG and supports the theory that a trauma/grief model of therapy is favorable when treating CTG. However, when reflecting on the importance of this subject it seems prudent to explore additional therapeutic options in connection with current grief therapy models for children, trauma focused or not, that could potentially improve the efficacy of these important treatments.

One intervention that could be researched in connection with current grief therapy models for children is the awareness and usage of cultural coping strategies that appear to be beneficial and protective for various cultures. There may be useful connections between current grief therapy modalities for children and common factors that appear to

help individuals from multiple cultures deal with grief and loss and promote their resilience. Before this research can be accomplished, a comprehensive background on culture and its impact on grief, loss, and resiliency must be discussed.

Culture

Culture is defined, described, and understood in many different ways and the understanding of what culture means changes according to, ironically, various cultural understandings. In essence, culture plays a role in shaping how a culture understands culture. Even though cultures can vary dramatically, some general definitions fit most accepted understandings about what culture is. The Dictionary of Modern Thought defines culture as simply, "the social heritage of a community", which is apt but vague (Dictionary of Modern Thought, as cited in Parkes, et al., 1997). A more comprehensive description of culture can be understood as, "The sum total of the possessions, ways of thinking, and behavior which distinguish one group of people from another and which tend to be passed down from generation to generation" (Parkes, Laungani, and Young, 1997, p. 10). By this definition, the term culture can be applied to an almost infinite number of groups of people and cultures within cultures. However, for the purposes of this research, culture will refer to larger ethnographic groups. It should also be pointed out, that many ethnographic groups, large or small, have religious or spiritual beliefs and traditions embedded within their cultural framework. Cultures typically have a dominant religion that the culture uses to give "meaning and legitimacy" to their rites and rituals (Parkes, et al., 1997, p. 14). In many cultures, this spirituality or religiosity is so intertwined within the culture that it becomes difficult to separate the two. For this reason, various culture's religious beliefs will also be discussed and considered when examining cultural coping strategies utilized to deal with the death of a loved one.

Although there are significant differences in specific ways of thinking, behaviors, and traditions between various ethnic cultures, there are also general features that all cultures tend to share. These can be thought of as core and secondary features (Parkes, et al., 1997). One essential core feature of cultures is that they have a history. Whether that history is recorded or oral, all cultures have a history that plays a role in shaping and influencing the present for that culture. As previously stated, cultures also typically have a dominant religion that the culture uses to give "meaning and legitimacy" to their rites and rituals; which includes certain rites, rituals, traditions, and ceremonies surrounding grief and loss (Parkes, et al., 1997, p. 14). Another core feature of all cultures is that they maintain their own values and traditions even though these values and traditions vary from culture to culture. The last core feature of cultures is that they are structured and maintained based on an evolving system of social norms and communication networks that set personal, familial, and social conduct standards (Parkes, et al., 1997). Secondary features of all cultures include things like "a common language or group of languages", typical housing or living arrangements, and a shared and agreed upon "moral and legislative system" (Parkes, et al., 1997, p. 15).

It can be easier to identify these core features when looking at small-scale societies around the world. When a society is small, the absence of other influential cultural factors yields a monoculturalism that makes it easier to identify and subscribe to the core features of that society. Small-scale societies exist as unique cultural oases within larger cultural groups or geographic locations and countries; they typically have a population of under 100,000 (Rosenblatt, 1997). Many small-scale societies have social norms and traditions that are well defined, deeply rooted. The members of that society are

very aware of the cultural norms and traditions, and therefore there are very clear social norms and expectations for responding to big life events, such as the death of a loved one. "Societies in which there is a clearly defined etiquette for people to follow in dealing with a bereaved person may have few problems with the feelings of being abandoned that many bereaved Americans report" (Rosenblatt, 1997, p. 47).

Largely due to economic globalization and immigration, many cultures and societies, like the United States, experience the intermingling of various cultures and their many different traditions, beliefs, and social norms, often causing acculturation. "Acculturation refers to the process that occurs when groups of individuals of different cultures come into continuous first-hand contact, which changes the original culture patterns of either or both groups" (Rothe, Tzuang, & Pumariega, 2010, p. 681). Individuals may lose many of the cultural traditions of their forbearers as they become acculturated into the larger homogenized culture. Over time, acculturation can cause individuals, families, and communities to drift away from their cultural heritage, become homogenized into the popular majority culture, and lose those clearly defined customs for responding to a grieving individual. "Today more than ever before acculturation has become a relevant concept as a result of the phenomenon of globalization, which defines the socio-cultural climate of the twenty-first century" (Rothe, Tzuang, & Pumariega, 2010, p. 681).

When these larger homogenous cultures lose these specific traditions and beliefs, especially regarding important life events such as the death of a loved one, individuals within that culture could be missing out on potentially adaptive cultural coping strategies that could provide a beneficial protective function and promote resiliency. It is important

to specify that there are individuals that are able to maintain their specific cultural heritage and traditions even while living in larger homogenized culture and therefore would theoretically retain their customs for mourning the loss of a loved one. It is towards the individuals that may have lost touch with their cultural heritage that the goal of connecting cultural coping strategies with grief therapy models is focused.

A movement away from specific cultures could make it difficult for individuals, and especially children, to draw upon these cultural protective factors when experiencing significant grief and loss. Rosenblatt (1997) discusses this idea that it could be helpful to "bring in knowledge from a culture different from one's own and from the culture of the person one hopes to help" (p. 48). Perhaps there could be valuable connections between common cultural protective factors and grief therapy models commonly used in larger homogenized cultures.

Cultural Role in Bereavement and Loss

Culture plays a significant role in the way an individual understands and responds to grief and loss and can be an influential factor in an individual's ability to cope with a loss and become resilient even in spite of that loss. Although death, and subsequently, grief and loss is an experience that everyone in the world shares, it is "culturally embedded" and understood according to that culture's norms, beliefs and traditions (Anderson, 2010, p. 134; Rosenblatt, 1997, p. 31). The way the death is perceived through a specific cultural lens has a major impact on the way that death is understood and responded to. "Whether people die according to particular religious or cultural prescriptions will shape the grieving process" (Anderson, 2010, p. 134). Every culture has a specific approach or response to grief and loss; the specific cultural beliefs, values, expressions, expectations, ceremonies, and rituals give meaning to the loss in different

12

ways (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Anderson, 2010; Marshall & Sutherland, 2008; Parkes, et al. 1997).

There is also research examining the importance of recognizing potential cultural factors when working with someone experiencing grief and loss, and to take into account the cultural lens through which they understand and cope with the loss. "Appreciation of cultural diversity and norms regarding loss, rituals, and cultural constructions of grieving is important in order for professionals to understand the meaning of loss for different groups of people across the life span" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 11). The purpose of this is to make the experience easier and more familiar for the individual and serves the purpose of not offering them support or therapy in a way that does not resonate with them culturally. To overlook this cultural piece could increase the chances of miscommunication when counseling someone regarding their grief and loss. This miscommunication could potentially lead to "unintentional disregard of or insensitivity to their cherished values, beliefs, and practices" (Lopez, 2011, p. 10). This preparation by service providers to learn about different cultures, regularly practice cultural self-assessment, and continuously change their practice to meet their client's cultural needs is known as cultural competence (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006).

Perhaps another way to think about cultural competence is to learn about other cultures, recognize their inherent strengths and apply those to universal interventions that are useful across the board with many different cultures. To take the adaptive perspectives and strengths from various cultures and create universal interventions for a homogenized population such as exists in the United States.

This new way of looking at grief and loss from a cultural strengths perspective could be especially important for individuals and children living in the United States because "death and bereavement are argued to be topics that contemporary Western societies struggle to make sense of, resulting in a public absence/private presence of death (Mellor, 1993, as cited in Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007 p. 286). There is an expectation that individuals get over a loss quickly, stay strong and move on. Because independence and individualism are so highly regarded in American culture, and because weakness is so often frowned upon, extended emotional issues, such as grieving, that interfere with daily productive life are implicitly discouraged (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006).

Many Americans would prefer an easy resolution to their feelings of grief and loss and tend to be uncomfortable around others emotional pain. "In American culture, pain is seen as something that can and should be avoided, instead of being viewed as an inescapable part of being human" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 19). Sometimes there are attempts to shield children from loss altogether, when they really need to be involved and experience the loss so they can process through it. "Adults may seek to protect children (and, perhaps, themselves) from knowledge of adult inability…to shape and protect life from pain, death, and loss" (Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007, p. 286-287).

In the United States, many people, with good intentions, attempt to shield children from a loss by not bringing them to a wake or funeral, but in many other cultures children are full participants in various death rituals (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). There are a variety of other cultures that seem to recognize the importance of discussing and experiencing the loss of a loved one among themselves and their children. This allows the

children to process through the loss with others and lets them experience potentially less

significant losses (distant relatives), before experiencing a potentially significant loss

(parent, grandparent).

Cultural Coping Strategies for Grief and Bereavement Found in a Wide Variety of

Cultures

There seem to be common themes that appear within multiple cultural groups

regarding the approaches to how grief and loss is understood and dealt with. These

similar themes and cultural coping strategies could potentially be incorporated into a

universal approach to grief therapy that could be beneficial not just for individuals that

have lost touch with their cultural heritage, but for a variety of cultural groups all over the

world. Analyzing these cultural coping strategies and current grief therapy models for

any useful connections could be an important first step in this incorporation.

Perceiving death as a transition. One such common cultural theme regarding

death is the manner in which the death is perceived. For example, in many cultures death

is not viewed as the end of life, but as one of many steps or transitions throughout life

(Glascock & Braden, 1981; as cited in Parkes et al., 1997). A key component of this

belief is that the next step after death is not nothingness, but some other plane of

existence (Glascock & Braden, 1981; as cited in Parkes et al., 1997).

Religion influences culture in this perception as well, and indeed, in many

cultures is so influential that it may well be considered part of the culture. The

interconnectedness of religion within culture often makes it difficult to separate the two.

Several religious beliefs regarding life after death influence individuals from a great

variety of cultures. Buddhism, for example, has been one of the most persistent in

emphasizing this idea of death being just another step along life's journey. The idea of

reincarnation, "impermanence and ceaseless transmutation of all existing beings and

forces, the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth" suggests when a person dies they are

reintroduced into the world as something or someone else and the cycle continues

(Gielen, 1997, p. 73). Christianity, Judaism, and Islam also all have their own specific

beliefs about death as a transition to another place or plane of existence (Parkes, et al.,

1997).

Maintaining bonds after death. Maintaining contact or a bond with a loved one

after their death is another common cultural perception that could be analyzed in

connection with current grief therapy models as a way to develop coping skills and

resiliency. In many cultures, there is a belief that when a loved one dies they are able to

maintain a literal communication connection (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). "People

understand that the deceased will continue to have an impact on the living and continue

to communicate with the living…the deceased can be understood as real and potentially

or actually present" (Parkes et, al., 1997, p. 31-32). It is important at this point to

differentiate between an ongoing bond with the deceased, and an unhealthy inability to let

go of the deceased person or accept that they have died. In some grief work models, this

continued bond with the deceased is seen as maladaptive, and indeed, at times even

pathological. Freud stated, "the energy invested in the deceased loved one (i.e.,

attachment to the person) needed to be "worked through" to enable it to be withdrawn

and invested in another person" (Freud, 1917/1957, as cited in Strobe, Abakoumkin,

Strobe, & Schut, 2011, p. 255). In this Freudian model, it is recommended that

individuals detach themselves from the relationship they had with the deceased, put them

out of their mind and refocus their lives on other things and other people. However, newer grief work models emphasize maintaining the memories and connection with the deceased loved one (Strobe et al., 2011; Anderson, 2009).

In many cultures, this continued bond is not necessarily an unhealthy attachment that should be invested in someone else. Various cultural beliefs differ not only in how real or strong the ongoing bond is, but also how the individual communicates with their deceased loved one. Some cultures make offerings to the deceased as a way of honoring them and reinforcing the bond. "These offerings are a mode of communication with the dead and remind the living of their continued presence in the family" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 61).

Klass, Silverman, & Nickman (1996) examined the ways in which the bereaved continue their bonds with the deceased persons, arguing that there were benefits for the bereaved in retaining connections with their deceased and drawing the general conclusion that, in contrast to previous claims, continuing bonds with the deceased during bereavement can be adaptive (Klass et al., 1996, as cited in Strobe, et al., 2011). "Stroebe and colleagues (1992) drew examples from historical and cultural perspectives to illustrate the functions that continuing bonds could serve for bereaved people, including the giving of meaning to ongoing life (e.g., through providing meaningful connection with the past) or retaining of one's identity and sense of self (e.g., by following the wishes of the deceased person; using him or her as an ongoing example)" (Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, & Stroebe, 1992, as cited in Strobe, et al., 2011, p. 256).

Experiencing grief and loss in stages. Another common cultural coping strategy is to break down the bereavement experience into concrete stages that help people

conceptualize their loss. "The obvious appeal of stages is that they order chaos and lend predictability to the uncertainty of grieving. Stages are best understood as a framework for the dynamics of dying and grieving that are always unique" (Anderson, 2010, p. 133).

This way of approaching a loss serves multiple purposes, first it reminds the grieving individual that the loss of a loved one is a process or a transition. In Jewish tradition, "death is seen as a transition from the life that is to the life that is yet to come" (Levine, 1997, p. 102). Second, it gives people permission to carry out their grieving for a significant period of time, and "allows for expression of grief at times when it is most keenly felt" (Levine, 1997, p. 112). Thirdly, this process breaks the grief up into experiences that are more manageable. A good example of this process is the traditional Jewish approach to grief and mourning.

In the Jewish tradition, when someone dies, their family participates in six graduated stages of mourning (Levine, 1997). The first stage is the time period between the death of an individual and their burial; it is known as Aninut. The second stage consists of the three days following the funeral and burial, where the family spends much of their time by themselves in the home to grieve in private.

The third stage is referred to as sitting Shiva. This seven day period of grieving and reflection is considered an important step toward slowly moving from a feeling of incapacitating grief towards a state where the individual can at least talk about the loss and accept help and support from others (Levine, 1997). The fourth stage following Shiva is known as Sheloshim and takes place for thirty days following the funeral. This is an important time when the family starts to integrate back into their normal lives. The fifth stage is the ten months following Sheloshim. During this period of time the family is still

slowly integrating back into normal life, and may go to services at their synagogue and recite the mourner's Kaddish more often. At the end of the year of mourning, the deceased's tombstone is unveiled and at that point the bereavement period is over, and there is not cultural obligation to continue mourning.

The sixth stage is fully returning to normal life, except for occasional rituals and services of remembrance. After the year of bereavement is over, continued morning is typically discouraged because the focus of the Jewish religion is on life, not on death. These stages provide a framework of rules and rituals that guide the bereaved through the grieving process according to their cultural traditions.

A well known grief processing model also employs this stage based framework, Kubler-Ross (1969, 1981) developed five distinct stages that dying individuals progress through: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Although when developed, Kubler-Ross believed one had to progress linearly through these five stages in order to heal from loss, it has since widely been understood that grief rarely moves in such a linear fashion (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). This is a good reminder that although a stage based model can be helpful to frame an individual's bereavement experience, it is important to be clear to bereaved individuals that there is no one right or normal way to progress through a grief experience (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). It is also important to remember that Kubler-Ross developed her stages as a framework for individuals coming to terms with their own impending death, and was not originally created to be a framework for individuals dealing with the death of a loved one, although it has been adopted as such by other researchers.

Death as a community event. Another common way that death is experienced in many other cultures is to treat it as a social or public event. This integration of the entire community into the grief process provides support and mutual sharing for the immediate family of the deceased. In Hispanic culture, an individual sharing their loss with their extended family and community are encouraged (Walker & Wilken, 2001). This is providing support but also taking some of the grief off of the family and given to the community, in essence sharing the grief load with them, rather than leaving them to deal with the grief in private. For example Jewish traditions regarding death and bereavement are focused on providing support for the individual dying as well as the bereaved in an attempt to "dispel the loneliness that comes with death and bereavement, and to embrace the dying and bereaved within the Jewish community" (Levine, 1997, p. 102).

Death as a celebration of life. In some cultures, they approach a death as a celebration rather than a loss. This small shift in the perception of the loss could potentially be helpful for those individuals most affected by the loss. In Mexican culture honoring and celebrating deceased loved ones is the impetus for a yearly ritual called Dia de los Muertos, or Day of the Dead. "This is a time when families and communities exchange memories and commune with the souls of their loved ones" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 79). Even with such grim overtones, Dia de los Muertos is a time of levity and celebration, with feasting and reveling (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). "Music, jokes, storytelling, and laughter, all are part of the celebration of life" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 79). The deeper themes of this celebration are intense spiritual beliefs about maintaining an absence of fear towards death. "Instead, relatives typically embrace

death by celebrating their connection with their deceased loved ones" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 79).

These cultural coping strategies are common across a variety of cultures, and it seems that they could serve some adaptive purpose to provide the individuals from that culture with some inherent coping mechanism. If these general adaptive themes are helpful and appropriate for individuals across cultures then could they be effective when integrated into Western models of coping with grief and loss? Perhaps these common cultural perceptions and practices regarding death, grief, and loss could be studied in relation to current grief therapy modalities for children to assess their connection and utility as positive coping strategies used to counteract the feelings of confusion, helplessness, fear, and uncertainty that can create trauma responses in children experiencing the death of a parent. Is there a useful connection between cultural coping strategies and current grief therapy modalities for children? What role might they play in reducing a trauma response and increasing resiliency?

Conceptual Framework

Resilience is defined "as the behavioral patterns, functional competence, and cultural capacities, that individuals, families, and communities use under adverse circumstances and the ability to make adversity a catalyst for growth and development" (Fredriksen-Goldsen 2006; Fredriksen-Goldsen & Hooyman, 2003; as cited in: Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 66).

The conceptual framework for this research focuses on resiliency. It is important to understand the formulation of resiliency factors in children, specifically in relation to culture and bereavement.

The themes of grief and loss, and the cultural factors that impact a child's response to it are often viewed through a lens of resiliency. In this case, culture is identified and discussed as the major influential factor in promoting resiliency as well as identifying ways these cultural capacities can be brought to the forefront, encouraging this "constant and adaptive trait" even in the face of such adverse circumstances as in the death of a parent (Boss, 2006, p. 27).

What cultural factors promote resiliency in children experiencing a significant loss? What cultural factors decrease resiliency in children experiencing a significant loss? How can we identify these cultural protective factors that provide an adaptive ability to children and incorporate them into effective grief therapy methods while excluding the cultural factors that may inhibit resiliency?

It will be important to discover whether there are any useful connections between cultural copings strategies and grief therapy models used with individuals from a more homogenous culture, in an effort to develop their resiliency. Resiliency is more than just getting along or coping with hardships, instead it means to actually thrive under adverse circumstances, not just getting through (Boss, 2006). It is important to remember that we cannot always completely rid individuals, and especially children of the painful feelings associated with a significant loss, but by promoting the development of resiliency we can raise an individual's tolerance of those painful feelings and to think about and connect to them in a different way (Boss, 2006).

Methodology

Research Design

The research that exists in the area of grief and loss has utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods alike. To examine any potential connections between cultural

coping strategies and grief therapy models for children and understand what role they might play in reducing a trauma response and increasing resiliency, a qualitative approach had to be taken. This necessary qualitative approach was due to the information seeking nature of the research question. At the time, hypothesis testing could not be done on the specific subject of cultural coping strategies reducing trauma and increasing resiliency for children experiencing the death of a parent. More qualitative background data and research first needed to be gathered before moving into quantitative research to find empirical support and evidence for the assertion that cultural coping strategies could be integrated into current grief therapy modalities for children to reduce trauma responses and increase resiliency.

Sample

The respondents who provided the information for this research were professionally licensed grief therapists, licensed clinical social workers who have experience providing therapy around grief and loss, and other professional counselors, therapists, and clinical social workers that have specialized clinical practice knowledge working with individuals from other cultures. These licensed professionals were chosen for participation through a combination of Expertise and Snowball sampling. "A sampling procedure may be defined as snowball sampling when the researcher accesses informants through contact information that is provided by other informants" (Noy, 2008, p. 330). This research used expertise sampling because the research attempted to answer questions that only those licensed professionals with a specialized knowledge of grief therapy and clinical work with foreign cultures were in a position to provide.

Snowball sampling was also employed in this research because grief therapy and therapy with diverse populations are very specialized areas of counseling and social work. Therefore, grief therapists, counselors, and social workers with specialized knowledge in these areas were likely to know of and suggest others in their field that were also able to provide valuable data for this research.

Beginning the initial recruitment plan involved using my professional contacts to identify these licensed professionals that practice within the same general area in the Midwest. Once I had identified appropriate candidates for the research, those candidates were contacted by phone and email, to inquire as to their availability and interest in providing information for this research through an interview. After these individuals participated in this interview data gathering process, they were given the opportunity to offer suggestions of others in their field that may have been interested or knowledgeable in the specific area of this research. When suggestions were made, contact information was gathered from the respondents so these suggested individuals could be contacted regarding their interest in participating in this research by being interviewed.

Protection of Human Subjects

All respondents were provided with a consent form that detailed the background, procedures, risks, benefits, confidentiality, and voluntary nature of the study (See attachment A). The consent form used was approved by the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board (IRB), and met their guidelines for protection of human subjects. The respondents were not personally named in the research and their identity was kept confidential. No information about their names or any other identifiable characteristics were included in the research that could link the respondents to the data

they provided. The respondents were required to read, agree to, and sign the consent form

that had been developed and approved for this research.

Data Collection

The data for this research was collected in a step by step process that consisted of:

contacting the respondent to attain their initial agreement to participate in the research,

briefly explaining the background, purpose, and methods of the research, obtaining a

signed consent form, and conducting a semi-structured interview with each individual

respondent. Each interview consisted of 13 questions and took approximately 45 to 70

minutes. Each interview followed a semi-structured interview style, meaning the

researcher had a set number of questions, in this case 13, but also asked impromptu

follow up questions. These 13 questions were largely informed by the literature review

and guided by the research questions that the researcher was asking regarding potential

useful connections between cultural coping strategies and current grief therapy modalities

for children and what role they might play in reducing a trauma response and increasing

resiliency.

The questions followed the same pattern as the literature review, starting out

broadly by asking questions about grief in general with the questions becoming more and

more specific eventually focusing on childhood grief, the role of culture in influencing

grief, and the protective cultural factors that could be effective in grief therapy. The

questions were sequenced in this manner in an attempt to discern answers about the

research questions by using the knowledge and experience of these individuals (See

Appendix B for full list of interview questions). The interview questions asked were not

harmful or inappropriate and were approved by the St. Catherine University Institutional

Review Board. Each interview was recorded with an audio recorder and transcribed onto paper. The audio recordings made of each subject's responses were destroyed by June. 1ˢᵗ, 2013 when this research had been completed.

Analysis Technique

This research employed content analysis when analyzing the data gathered through the interviewing process. Content analysis is "a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts (or other meaningful matter) to the contexts of their use" (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). This approach attempts to analyze potential themes and categories out of raw conversational or textual data to see if they connect with the original research question in any logical way and "emphasizes making inferences based on quantified analysis of recurring, easily identifiable aspects of text content" (White & Marsh, 2006, p. 22-23).

The first step in the analysis technique was to transcribe the audio recording of every interview that was carried out. Once the interviews were transcribed onto paper they were coded and then those codes were analyzed. This coding process consisted of picking specific words and phrases to summarize or represent the main idea of the sentence or paragraph. This allowed for a clearer and easier process of analyzing the data; linking together independent pieces of data to form patterns. Once patterns emerged from this analysis of the raw data they were grouped together into themes that explained why or how something happened in a certain way. The transcription was coded to decipher, gather, and group valuable information, trends, and themes within the data that specifically relate to the potential connections between cultural coping strategies and grief therapy modalities.

Strengths/Limitations:

There was an inherent limitation within this research methodology by virtue of the limited geographic scope available to the researcher because of time and monetary restrictions. The sampling involved in this research was not representative of all the grief therapists, counselors, and clinical social workers around the country, but only a select few in the Midwest. To address this limitation, suggestions were included in the discussion section of this research to duplicate this study in other areas of the country to see if the same findings hold true.

A strength of this study was that it attempted to identify a new way of viewing cultural competency and the utilization of cultural strengths as a way to address issues that can arise within a homogenized culture. This could potentially provide practitioners in this area with a new way of thinking about the way culture positively influences issues such as grief and loss.

Findings

During the analysis of this qualitative data, the themes that emerged generally fit into four major theme categories. The first category, cultural influence on grief responses, perceptions, and practices, will detail all ways in which this research data supports the already established premise that culture has a major influence on the way in which individuals perceive and respond to death. The second theme category, parameters and expectations regarding grief, provides supportive data for the idea that some cultures have very rigid expectations on how individuals ought to grieve according to prescribed societal norms and the sometimes negative impact this can have, especially on children. The third category, support for cross-cultural coping strategies in Western grief therapy

modalities, explains the various ways in which the research data supported the assertion that there are cross-cultural coping strategies that could be used to benefit a child, (or adult), from any culture, even a child raised with little connection to any particular cultural heritage. The fourth and final theme category, important non-cultural coping strategies, details several important coping strategies that the research respondents identified as extremely important to the grieving process for children, but ones that are not necessarily culturally informed. These four major theme categories will be explained separately to provide clarity and cohesiveness to the information within.

Cultural Influence on Grief Responses

An Individual's culture can influence their grief response. This was a theme that regularly surfaced in the analyzed data. Statements from many of the individuals interviewed for this research indicated a causal relationship between an individual's culture and the way that individual perceives, feels about and responds to death. Statements such as the following have supported this line of reasoning:

There are obviously differences in feelings and perceptions around death depending on where you come from.

Depending on the cultural group I'm working with at any given point they might be more comfortable [with death] because it's part of their process, their religious backgrounds, and their family traditions.

It seems logical to infer based on the data, that one's culture influences and shapes one's grief responses, and in turn, over time, the grief responses of generations of individuals are simultaneously shaping and re-shaping the cultural norms of any given society. Several codes and quotes were discernible within the data that highlighted this reciprocally influential relationship between individuals and their cultures and they led to the establishment of this theme.

Individuals can be influenced by multiple cultures. Closely connected to the previous theme is the idea that individuals can be, and are, influenced not just by their larger ethnic or societal culture, but by several smaller subcultures as well. An individual's family, group of friends, neighborhood, school, church community, religion, society, and culture all have a hand in creating someone's unique grief response.

Individuals may have some ideas around [death] that may be informed by their culture, their religion, their family.

[How children feel about death] is often very much defined by the adults in their life, or the family that they're born into, or religion, or culture.

It could be family, it could be culture, it could be religion, it could be geographical area.

This theme was based on several codes and quotes from respondents that identified the likely possibility that an individual's grief response is the result of various cultural influences all combining to create subtly unique perceptions, understandings and responses toward death.

Individuals, especially children, can be caught between major cultural influences. Another important theme in this area that regularly emerged from the data is the unfortunate phenomenon of individuals, especially young adults and children, becoming torn between two major cultural influences in their lives that have conflicting views on the proper way to understand and respond to death and bereavement. According to the data, this often happens with second-generation immigrants who have one foot in the new culture and one foot in their traditional culture. It can also happen however, if a child or young adult receives one grief response message from their family, and another from their school. The following example highlights this idea of being caught between two different cultures when trying to deal with the death of a loved one.

I have a high school student I'm working with from India, but she was raised here. Much of her extended family is still in India and their faith is Hindi. When her grandmother died she came to join our grief group but her family said "oh my gosh we don't talk about that! What are you doing?" In their culture it was wrong to talk about such matters outside of the family and her parent put a lot of pressure on her to quit the group, but she was really struggling with the loss and the grief group was helpful for her. I feel like that really complicated her grieving process because she was kind of caught between two worlds.

They have to find the balance between paying their honors to their cultural roots and living in the modern Western world.

A variety of codes and examples were available within the data that illustrated this phenomenon of being caught between two opposing cultural understandings and responses. Therefore, it seems clear that these multiple cultural influences can cause conflict within the grieving child/young adult especially when these influences are contradictory to each other.

Cultural Parameters and Expectations Regarding Grief

  Cultures' varying comfort levels with death. It was well established within the data of this research paper that different cultures have varying levels of comfort with the concept of death. The interview respondents that provided information for this research were all from the Midwestern United States and all worked primarily with individuals and children from that area. As such, their knowledge and experience regarding grief reactions was largely informed by Western culture. Every respondent felt that culture influences an individual's comfort level with the concept of death. Similarly, every respondent felt that Western culture, as a whole, was not comfortable with death and often treated it as a taboo subject.

I don't think Western culture is comfortable with the topic of death.

I think it's still very much one of those taboo topics.

Being that we all live in Minnesota, I think there's still the cultural fear of death and avoidance of death and not wanting to talk about death.

I would say in the mainstream culture, which is where I have most of my experience, I think people fear it and don't like to talk about it.

This concept was established as a theme because many codes were identified by the researcher that supported the idea that a significant number of individuals within the western culture seem to be uncomfortable with the concept of death.

Cultural expectations regarding an individual's response to death. Not only does the comfort level with the concept of death vary from culture to culture, but so too do the cultural expectations and parameters that are established regarding the grief process. When a grief response goes beyond these cultural parameters, there can be discomfort both for others and for the grieving individual, as they perceive they are going beyond these parameters and feel a cultural pressure to rein their grief in, even if they are still inwardly struggling with it.

In Western culture the response to death is very prescribed on how we perceive people "should grieve" in terms of: the amount of time, how it should look, and how it is packaged.

In our [Western] society everyone's like, "oh, take all the time that you need", and then you have the funeral and they're like, "ok, are you coming back?".

In the Latino culture there is a true expression when faced with death in that there is a great deal of sadness and a whole host of feelings that are exhibited. In comparison perhaps to Caucasians where there tends to be more reservation as if not allowed to truly express how you feel.

It is notable that the data shows that in some cases younger children are not as affected by these cultural expectations, likely because their developmental level inhibits them from wholly understanding the full reality of death and the subsequent cultural parameters around grief expression. However, as they get older and gain a greater understanding of grief and loss they are increasingly influenced by these cultural parameters.

Kids at that young age aren't developmentally able to understand all of those complexities of death.

I actually feel that children respond differently; I don't think they have these prescriptions about how death 'should' look.

[Children] perceive death in a very direct, matter of fact way and as they grow older they learn, 'how it's supposed to be' and how one is 'supposed to react' to death, but I don't think they come like that.

The data appears to show that these cultural expectations and parameters do have an influence on the grief response of an individual from that culture in addition to showing that different cultures have different cultural expectations and parameters regarding acceptable grief and bereavement responses.

　　　　Importance of the acceptance of multiple grief reactions. One potentially helpful theme that may be useful in counteracting these parameters and expectations around grief responses was discovered in the research data. When discussing the topic of cultural parameters and expectations regarding grief responses, many respondents discussed encouraging the acceptance of multiple grief reactions as a way to lessen the cultural pressures that many feel when trying to conform to specific grief parameters. Many of the respondents discussed their beliefs that children and adults from cultures with less discomfort with death and fewer parameters around grief responses tend to have an easier time dealing with their grief.

When a culture is open to receiving that [response], all the emotions, having a celebration of life, feeling really happy, feeling really sad, and being able to express all those feelings without judgment, it's healthy.

One reaction isn't better than another, it's about listening to people's stories, accepting where they're at.

Having that discussion and awareness in a group, how we can all respond to death in a different way, it doesn't make one right and one wrong.

Multiple codes discussed this idea of being open to multiple grief responses so as not to perpetuate certain cultural parameters and expectations that could impede one's ability to

cope with death. The codes that illustrated this concept were combined together to create this important sub-theme.

Support for Cross-Cultural Coping Strategies in Western Grief Therapy Modalities

Connections between cross-cultural coping strategies and grief therapy modalities for children. Throughout the data that was analyzed for this clinical research, the respondents gave support to the belief that logical, useful connections did exist between various cultures' coping strategies and grief therapy models for children. Moreover, the major theme that emerged in this area not only supported the assertion that some of these cultural coping strategies exist within existing grief therapy modalities for children, but that it could prove useful to build them into the modalities even more than they already are. In an effort to provide children, (and adults), with the maximum potential to find a coping strategy that works for them.

So we're assuming that perhaps a child is not connected with a specific culture, or that they've lost their culture? Could practices and beliefs from various cultural groups resonate with this child? Yes, absolutely…I think it's allowing there to be space of possibility and that while they don't feel that they're currently holding a specific culture, or they've lost that, then it's our job as the adults and the clinicians to help bring something to them that might resonate. It might, it might not, but I think it's important to try it out.

I definitely think you could take any one culture and take bits and pieces from their traditions and educate and use it in other practices.

I think you can take the knowledge from any culture and make it so it's general and so it fits a wide variety of people.

This is certainly a very broad theme and merely suggests the possibility that there are certain nebulous cultural coping strategies that might prove useful in grief therapy, and indeed, this concept was typically discussed during the research interviews in a very broad unspecific sense in order to not lead the respondents toward specific cultural coping strategies. However, specific sub-themes did emerge from the data that defined

several specific cultural coping strategies that were analyzable directly, regarding their connection and usefulness to current grief therapy modalities.

   Encouragement of discussion regarding different cultures' beliefs, perceptions, and traditions regarding death and bereavement. One theme that was clearly identifiable within the data was a belief by the respondents that learning about and discussing other cultures' perceptions, understandings, and beliefs regarding death and their rituals and practices around grief and bereavement could potentially be helpful for children and adults not of that same culture. In some cases, it could resonate with those individuals and provide them with coping strategies with which they may not have been familiar.

In all my groups where I have culturally diverse students I really encourage them to speak to the group about what their cultural traditions are. They can talk about their cultural rituals, perspectives, or practices regarding grief and bereavement. Almost always they're all like, 'oh, that's really neat, that's really interesting, I wish we did that", or 'that gives me a new point of view to look at things and that gives me more optimism about how this is going to turn out'.

It gives you an opportunity to take on other people's cultural responses, learn more, see what might fit for you.

Overall, it seemed that this concept of discussion and education emerged strongly from the data and it is worth noting that the respondents did not advocate pushing cultural beliefs and grief responses on others. Rather, they discussed the merits of simply discussing and sharing cultural beliefs and reactions around death as a vehicle by which to give others additional ways of making sense out of and dealing with death; if they so choose. This concept was established as a theme because it was supported by many codes and interwoven throughout the interview data.

   Potentially effective cross-cultural coping strategies. While coding and analyzing the data for this research, as previously mentioned, a theme emerged that

supported the concept that useful connections did exist between various cultures' coping strategies and grief therapy models for children. In addition, other themes emerged from the data that provided very specific concrete cultural coping mechanisms and strategies that could be and already are being utilized in grief therapy modalities.

Maintaining bonds with the deceased/experiencing death as a transition. One specific cultural coping strategy that came up in the data quite often was the concept of maintaining bonds with the deceased and the idea of believing that death is a transition, not an end. This concept can occur on a spectrum depending on one's cultural or religious background. Anything from the bereaved individual feeling that they have a literal physical connection with their deceased loved one, to feeling that they have a spiritual connection, to simply believing that their loved one has gone on to some other place; that they exist on some other plane even after death and they would be with them again someday. The respondents described this belief as a coping mechanism that usually provided more comfort to the grieving individual. The bereaved individuals that did not have a sense of a connection with their deceased loved one or did not believe they were continuing their life in another plane of existence and would not see them again generally had a more difficult time coping with the death.

Individuals seem to find peace in knowing that they will see their loved one again.

If they have a sense of the afterlife…if they have that belief system, it is often very comforting to them because they believe that their loved one is ok and that they will be joining them again someday. If they do not have that belief system sometimes it's very difficult.

When I think about families who come from a belief of reincarnation, I believe that what I see different in their feelings and perceptions is perhaps there's an easier time accepting what has happened, in that they often feel comforted to know that this is not the end of their life, that this is part of a journey, that this is the end of a portion of their life here on earth in their physical relation to them, but they feel comforted to know that this soul is going to carry on and they might come across this soul at another point in their life.

Importance of meaning making. The importance of meaning making was also identified as a sub-theme within the larger theme of potentially effective cross-cultural coping strategies. The importance of meaning making is very closely connected with the sub-theme of maintaining bonds with the deceased. The perception and belief of how one remains connected with their deceased loved one is in itself one particular way of making meaning out of their death. The sub-theme of meaning making came up several times during the data analysis and showed that the individuals that were able to see some meaning within the death of their loved ones were more likely to maintain positive coping strategies. This is a cultural factor as well because different cultures and religions have different views on what the death of a loved one means. Whatever the meaning happens to be, it tends to be better than not attributing any meaning to it and having a confused sense of unresolvement around the experience.

One of the things that is important to know is what meaning the death represents in either a religion, a family, a culture.

Meaning making has to do with the story, what is the story?

What is the meaning, is there a meaning to the death? Do they get their questions answered? And if they don't can they just live with the questions?

Someone doesn't have to have a belief in heaven to make sense of the death, there are some religions that don't believe in the afterlife and it can still make sense to them.

It was clear within the data that the respondents did not advocate that one ascribe a certain meaning to be made of the death over another. In fact, some of the respondents explained that meaning making does not even have to be connected a certain religious belief or a belief in the afterlife. The point of this sub-theme was simply that making some meaning of the loved ones death will likely make the death easier to cope with.

Experiencing grief in stages. The sub-theme of experiencing grief in stages emerged from the data, emphasizing that some cultures and religions have very

specific stages in which to progress through the grief process. This was identified as a positive cultural coping mechanism in some instances because it gives the bereaved child or adult some stability and control during a time where they may feel very vulnerable and lost.

When you think about the Jewish tradition and how prescriptive it is; there's something very comforting about that.

You know what it is you're going to do, there's no unknown, so it feels like you kind of have some control and doesn't feel so chaotic and overwhelming.

Importance of rituals. The importance of rituals was an important sub-theme that was very prevalent within the data. There was an overall belief from the respondents that rituals around the death of a loved one plays an important role in honoring the deceased and helping the bereaved cope with the death. The respondents advocated children and adults engage in rituals related to the death of loved ones by either using existing cultural and religious rituals or even creating their own generic rituals.

I think ritual, doing some kind of generic ritual can be a great process, regardless of their cultural backgrounds or family traditions.

I think it's important for children to have a ritual modeled for them.

If you think about the elements…earth, fire, water, air…we always try to incorporate that with the kids in the weekend. So things like rocks for comfort, they get a rock to hold onto for the weekend, they would write a message to the person that died and put it in the fire and the smoke will go up. All these rituals that return us to those ancient times that are part of our human ancestry, can be really comforting and wonderful.

Death as a celebration of life. This subtheme was mentioned several times within the research data as an important cultural coping strategy that has appeared beneficial for many individuals. The premise of this subtheme is that treating death as a

celebration of the individual's life rather than mourning their death is a far more positive

way to perceive and understand the experience of the death of a loved one and could

potentially play a role in helping children and adults cope with their loss.

I think that in other cultures, when I've worked with families from Africa, there is a real celebration around death. It becomes a celebration of their life and a recognition of what this person has brought in the time that they were physically present, and it seems that they have an easier time perhaps.

In those celebrations for this loved one, there's lots of storytelling that goes on and talk around who this loved one was and what they experienced in their life. Those narratives and stories are so important for children; it's what they internalize and carry with them.

I've heard from a lot more families opting to say, 'we're doing a celebration of life! We're having a party! We're celebrating the person and all that they were in this world, instead of just sitting in a chapel and crying and wearing black'.

Community support vs. isolation. Community support was an

identifiable subtheme within the data, based on multiple codes that described its

importance. The data showed that in some cultures it is the norm to wrap around the

bereaved child, individual or family and provide them with as much emotional and

physical support as necessary, and in some cultures it is more common for the

community to leave the family in peace to grieve privately. The respondents typically

leaned toward the belief that when a bereaved child, individual or family receives a

significant amount of community support their likelihood of coping with the death

increases compared to a bereaved child, individual or family that needs to navigate this

grief process alone. Community support can be important in providing emotional and

spiritual assistance as well as support with meeting the demands of everyday life;

providing them with things like money, food and childcare.

I think it helps them cope if they have a sense of family and community.

It allows them to not feel so alone and isolated in their experience and to feel the support from others around them.

Certain communities, they are more used to wrapping around that family who is indicated for a longer period of time.

I think it helps when you do have that support system…the more ties they have to their families, to their culture, strengthens their foundation.

I definitely think the more resources one has, period, and that's connections with their culture, the more they get to draw on. They have more people to hold them up.

Important Non-Cultural Coping Strategies for Children

Routines and structure. This sub-theme was very common within the analyzed data and centers around the importance of children (and adults) getting back into a structured routine as a way to help cope with the death of their loved one. This does not mean the death is forgotten or that the bereaved children are not mourning their loved one any longer. The concept is simply that returning to a structured day or routine can help combat some of the feelings of confusion and chaos that a death can bring to an individual, especially a child.

I think having a routine and a plan is very helpful for kids.

School, for children, is very comforting, because if there's a death in the family, everything may be disrupted, the schedules, the people taking care of them, bed times, meal times, all get thrown to the wind, but school doesn't. They start at the same time, they have the same teacher, the same desk, the same schoolmates; it's very structured and that's very comforting for children. Sometimes parents think they should keep their children out for awhile but it's actually really comforting for them to be back in school and back to some kind of schedule and routine.

[Children] need stability, and if they don't have stability that's not going to be helpful to their grief at all.

Play and Happiness. This theme was identified in the respondent data as the seemingly innate ability, or necessity, of children from all cultures to grieve in bits and pieces, and continue to have fun and play in-between their grieving. They can be sad on minute, and be happy and playing the next, and all the emotions in-between. They do not, or cannot continuously dwell on the loss and contemplate what it means for their life.

39

[Kids] are really good role models for adults around grieving because I think they give themselves permission to have all the emotions. So they can laugh and enjoy life and be engaged in it, and then later on in the evening, time to go to bed and they miss dad.

It has to do with their developmental stage, they grieve in shorter spurts but over a longer period of time.

I think that what helps kids cope is play, I think kids really heal through playing.

I believe that no matter what culture you come from, you work through things through your play.

       Modeling healthy coping for children. This sub-theme that was indentified

within the data is based on the premise that children are only going to cope as well as

their parents or primary care-givers are coping, so it is important for the parent to model

healthy coping behaviors. If the adults in a child's life are not progressing through their

own grief process it can negatively affect their child's ability to do so as well.

I think it's really important for the child to see what the adults do at the time of death. I think it's important for children to see a variance of affect and emotion.

I think kids are only going to do as well as their parents, so if their parents aren't doing well it's highly likely that they're not going to be doing well. I really urge the parents that they need to take care of themselves and take care of their grief so they can take care of their children.

A parent not dealing with their grief could be a major hindrance to their children's ability to cope.

We feel that parents are role models in everything, including their grief, and if they don't work on their grief how are their kids going to work on theirs.

       Being transparent and honest with children. This sub-theme was identified over

and over within the data and stresses the importance of being open and honest with

children about the death and not to lie or mislead them in an attempt to shield them from

the grief.

We try to be clear and concise with a child about what has happened, we don't make up stories, we are honest, but we also share what's developmentally appropriate.

There can be fear around [death], especially if it's not something that's talked about. Generally if a family feels comfortable with the idea of death then children feel comfortable around that.

I think it's based largely on what their family and the adults around them believe, so if the adults around them are comfortable with talking about death and making it part of the everyday conversation then the kids aren't alarmed or scared by it because they understand that it's ok in their family. That people do die and its part of the life process. If it's something that's avoided in their home or feared then there's more superstition around it; they'll have more fear.

I think the more open, honest conversation that happens, the healthier the child ends up being in their own process.

Space, platform and opportunity to discuss emotions and normalize experience.

This sub-theme was also very prominent in the literature and clearly defines the

importance of providing a child, or adult, with a space or platform in which they can

express their grief and normalize their experience. People, especially children, need to

have an opportunity to talk about or write about their grief and loss in a setting where

they feel like they have permission to do so.

There has to be a willingness on the part of the parent to allow their child to grieve.

My philosophy is that it's important for children to connect with people their own age who know what it's like.

I think it's important for children to have a safe place to talk about what's happened.

I think coping is just having and taking advantage of an outlet to be able to just get those thoughts and feelings outside of yourself.

I'm hoping that it can become more of a mainstream thing that is acceptable to talk about. If we could just talk about people that died in everyday conversation like it was normal, then perhaps it wouldn't be so hard.

Discussion

Interpretation of Findings

The four major theme categories found in the research data were considered to be

the most important relevant concepts to be used for advancing the discussion on

connections between cultural coping strategies and grief therapy modalities for children.

Being that this qualitative research was aimed at analyzing the relationship between

culture and grief therapy in a relatively radical new way, it was necessary to use a very

broad lens. This encouraged a wide variety of responses and ideas on the subject to rise

organically out of the research data without a significant amount of direction or bias.

Using a broad lens allowed this initial research project to start to lay a foundation upon

which future research can build upon in more detail. This broad lens also helps explain

why much of the research data and discussion have been expanded to encompass not only

children, but all individuals that are experiencing a significant loss. Indeed, most of the

themes found in the data are applicable to adults as well as children.

The idea of culture influencing grief responses, perceptions, and practices was so

prevalent within the research data because the whole idea of cultural coping strategies

providing useful interventions for grief therapy modalities is based on the premise that

different people from different areas and different walks of life have different ways of

understanding and responding to death and that there is a potential to learn about these

differences and use them in a positive way. If people's grief reactions were not

influenced by their cultural background and all humans responded exactly the same to

death, this research would be less than useful. It may seem pointless to some to discuss a

concept that appears so seemingly obvious, but it is important to provide concrete support

for this idea, as the basis for all other research in this area rests on this basic tenet.

Even though this theme was expected to emerge from the research data, several

sub-themes accompanied it that were not expected but proved to be valuable additions.

The idea of individuals being influenced by multiple cultures adds an important

component to this theme category because it begins to give greater understanding of how

complex this seemingly simple concept can become. An individual belongs to many interconnecting cultures that all have various levels of direct or indirect influence on their lives. It is perhaps not advisable or even possible to try to pull apart and analyze the different cultural influences at play in someone's life and it may be best to see others as the product of these complex cultural relationships.

The sub-theme that identifies the concept of becoming caught between two or more of these intersecting cultural influences also becomes an important factor to consider. As the world becomes more globalized and interconnected, more cultures are coming into contact with one another and sometimes creating contradictory beliefs and understandings about a variety of concepts, including death and the expectations regarding grief and bereavement practices. This is especially important to consider when working with children who are being raised in the nexus of this cultural globalization. It some ways it could prove helpful to be influenced by such a rich variety of cultures, but there needs to be an understanding that this could also create contradictory feelings and confusion for children, especially if parents and other caregivers are not able or willing to engage with them about the differences, similarities, and benefits of different cultures.

The next theme category is similar to the first and indeed, strongly influenced by it. If we deem the first theme concept, that culture influences perceptions, understandings, and practices around death and bereavement, to be true then it seems logical to conclude that culture also influences the expectations and parameters that a culture maintains regarding the appropriate way to respond to the death of a loved one.

The research data suggested that all cultures have varying levels of comfort with the idea of death and the subsequent bereavement practices and mourning rituals. It was

also clear that some cultures have stricter parameters and expectations regarding death and the acceptableness of bereavement practices than others. One could even suggest that the less comfortable a culture was with the concept of death, the more limits would be employed to ensure individuals do not engage in drawn out, elaborate mourning rituals that may add to the collective discomfort.

All the research respondents were licensed grief therapists working in the Midwest United States and therefore were most familiar with the modern Western culture of American Society. Their general consensus was that western culture was typically uncomfortable with the concept of death and treated it like a taboo subject. To use this American Western culture as an example, when something is treated as an uncomfortable taboo topic it becomes implicitly discouraged from general discussion. Therefore, there are unwritten cultural societal social parameters regarding the discussion of death, (expressing grief too much or too little), and acceptable coping behaviors; so as not to make others uncomfortable. This is unfortunate because it is generally regarded as a healthy coping strategy for an individual to talk about and express their grief with others, and it is especially important for children to have an outlet to talk about and express their grief as part of their coping process.

Based on the data gathered for this research, this concept seems to hold true on the opposite end of the spectrum as well. Therefore, a culture that is very comfortable with death is likely to have fewer cultural parameters implicitly discouraging the discussion and expression of grief and bereavement. They would likely engage in more discussion regarding death, comfortably maintain greater spiritual (and sometimes physical) connection with the deceased, and feel free to express their grief in a variety of

ways without feeling that their grief is impinging on others. This same concept can be applied to smaller cultures as well; a family that is more comfortable with the concept of death is more likely to talk about it and express their grief without fear of restriction compared to a family that implicitly or explicitly discourages the discussion or expression of grief. It seems clear that if this premise is held as true, then it seems that a healthier environment for a child's grief expression would be as part of a culture that is more comfortable with death and more likely to encourage the child to express their grief without placing cultural parameters and expectations on them.

The third major theme category supported a potentially valuable connection between various cultural coping strategies and grief therapy modalities. This is clearly a very complex concept with many influencing factors. At this point in the research of this topic, it is not possible to strongly support this connection with any degree of reliability, as there is precious little corroborating research available. However, this research data clearly showed some support for the idea that different specific cultural coping strategies have the potential to be integrated into grief therapy modalities and provide positive results. Learning about the ways in which other people and other cultures perceive, understand, and respond to death could be beneficial for individuals and children from any culture because it could give them alternate or additional ways of understanding and coping with a death.

There were several different specific cultural understandings and coping strategies that were mentioned within the research data, which were analyzed and added as sub-themes to support this discussion of cultural coping strategies maintaining a useful connection with grief therapy modalities.

The concept of maintaining some sort of bond with a deceased loved one or thinking about their death as a transition was a positive coping strategy that is common in many ethnic, religious, and family cultures according to the research data. Feeling a connection with that deceased loved one, believing that you will see them again someday on another plane of existence, believing that they are in a better place and watching over you, are all identified by the research data as beliefs and understandings that typically help children and adults cope with the death of a loved one.

Another culturally informed coping strategy that the research data showed was the practice of finding meaning out of the death. Proposing that an individual's perception of the death and the meaning they make out of it directly affect the way in which that individual feels about the death and strongly influences whether or not they can accept that death, why it happened and attain some level of closure. Someone whose belief is that everything happens for a reason and there was a reason their loved one died is much more likely to accept the death and cope with it then someone who believes the death of their loved one happened because the world is a cold cruel place.

The sub theme found in the research data regarding the cultural coping strategy of experiencing grief in stages was identified as a helpful concept because this grief stage approach that many cultures utilize takes some of the pressure off the individual or family to know what to do and when to do it. They do not have to decide how long they should grieve for or what they should do at which point in the grief because that is already clearly defined for them. It gives some order and stability to individuals, especially children, during a time when so much is thrown into chaos.

This concept of experiencing grief in stages is not to be confused with the concept of different cultures putting restrictions and parameters on grief due to an overall cultural discomfort, as was discussed earlier. These are stages and parameters created to help individuals cope, not parameters to stifle their grief responses.

Rituals were found to be an important concept within the data as valuable ways in which children and adults can express their grief as well as celebrate and honor their deceased loved ones. The research data regularly extolled the value of rituals as a way to cope with the loss of a loved one. Rituals can involve ancient cultural traditions, religious practices, or can simply be created by a grieving family. The point is to engage in some type of ritual, traditional or generic, to express feelings about the death and honor and remember the loved one that has died.

The concept of death being treated as a celebration of the individual's life is perhaps the most commonly known of the cultural coping strategies that were identified within the research data. This idea that a healthy way to respond to someone's death is by celebrating their life and all the things they experienced and accomplished is a common philosophy in various cultures around the world. This is a good example of a cultural coping strategy being integrated into other grief perceptions. Parties to celebrate someone's life are becoming more common in Western culture, which traditionally perceived death as something that needs to be mourned, not as a celebration.

The ability to rely on a strong system of friends, family, neighborhood and religious communities was a common theme within the research data. The more community supports a child or family has to provide them with emotional and physical support, the better off they often are. With increased community support, there are more

people to talk to, more opportunities to express the grief in an acceptable setting and more individuals to help with the activities of daily living. In some cultures, the whole community comes and wraps around the grieving child and/or family and provides them with as much support as they need for as long as they need it. This is especially true in cultures where everyone works together for mutual benefit. In cultures that typically value autonomy, the child, individual or family are more likely to be left alone to their own devices to deal with their grief in private.

Culture is often a sensitive area for discussion and it is not the intention of this research, nor was it the intention of the research respondents, to advocate for the forceful integration of beliefs and practices of other cultures, especially regarding a topic such as this. However, the research data did stress the importance of gently encouraging simple discussion regarding the differences in cultural understandings and practices around death and grief responses in an effort to provide individuals with an alternate viewpoint that they may find beneficial. This would ideally result in a, "take what resonates with you and leave what does not", discussion atmosphere. The research data also was strong in its opinion that all individuals, children and adults, should give others the freedom to express their grief in whatever way feels comfortable and natural for them. It is important to give people, especially children, permission to talk about and express their grief, even if it is outside of the popular cultural norms.

The fourth and final theme category identified within the research data supported the idea that there are several coping strategies that are likely to be beneficial to grieving children and that these coping strategies are not necessarily culturally informed.

Therefore, they could also theoretically be used with grieving children from any culture as a positive coping strategy.

These non-cultural coping strategies have to do with maintaining a semblance of structure and stability when progressing through a grief response, allowing yourself to feel different emotions and not constantly dwelling on the loss in sadness, modeling positive grief responses to children, being honest with children regarding death, and giving them, and others, the space and platform to express their feelings regarding the death of a loved one. These were all identified within the research data as important coping strategies to employ, especially for children.

Fit between the researcher's findings and the relevant literature

Several similarities were found between the research findings and the literature used to form the basis for this research. As expected, the findings showed much support for the concept of culture influencing perceptions, understandings, and practices regarding death and bereavement. Although death, and subsequently, grief and loss is an experience that everyone in the world shares, it is "culturally embedded" and understood according to that culture's norms, beliefs and traditions (Anderson, 2010, p. 134; Rosenblatt, 1997, p. 31). This concept is augmented nicely by the research data as seen in the following quote from one of the research respondents: "There are obviously differences in feelings and perceptions around death depending on where you come from" (respondent quote, 2013).

Another result of the research which supported the existing literature was the belief that different cultures had varying levels of comfort with the concept of death and subsequently had varying parameters and expectations regarding how grief should be

expressed. "death and bereavement are argued to be topics that contemporary western societies struggle to make sense of, resulting in a public absence/private presence of death (Mellor, 1993, as cited in Ribbens-McCarthy, 2007 p. 286). This is very similar to the resulting information from this research. "I don't think Western culture is comfortable with the topic of death" (respondent quote, 2013).

The results that emerged from this research data appear to support the idea of using cultural coping strategies, which was also found in the literature review. Rosenblatt (1997) discusses this idea that it could be helpful to "bring in knowledge from a culture different from one's own and from the culture of the person one hopes to help" (p. 48). This is also supported within the research results of this endeavor. "So we're assuming that perhaps a child is not connected with a specific culture, or that they've lost their culture? Could practices and beliefs from various cultural groups resonate with this child? Yes, absolutely…I think it's allowing there to be space of possibility and that while they don't feel that they're currently holding a specific culture, or they've lost that, then it's our job as the adults and the clinicians to help bring something to them that might resonate. It might, it might not, but I think it's important to try it out" (Respondent quote, 2013).

Many of these specific cultural coping strategies that were identified in the literature review, also emerged in the research data. Maintaining bonds with the deceased was a concept that was supported by the literature and the research results. In many cultures, there is a belief that when a loved one dies they are able to maintain a literal communication connection (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006). "People understand that the deceased will continue to have an impact on the living and continue to communicate

with the living…the deceased can be understood as real and potentially or actually present" (Parkes et, al., 1997, p. 31-32).

"Individuals seem to find peace in knowing that they will see their loved one again" (respondent quote).

This is also true for the concept of experiencing death as a transition. In many cultures, death is not viewed as the end of life, but as one of many steps or transitions throughout life (Glascock & Braden, 1981; as cited in Parkes et al., 1997). A key component of this belief is that the next step after death is not nothingness, but some other plane of existence (Glascock & Braden, 1981; as cited in Parkes et al., 1997). "When I think about families who come from a belief of reincarnation, I believe that what I see different in their feelings and perceptions is perhaps there's an easier time accepting what has happened, in that they often feel comforted to know that this is not the end of their life, that this is part of a journey, that this is the end of a portion of their life here on earth in their physical relation to them, but they feel comforted to know that this soul is going to carry on and they might come across this soul at another point in their life" (respondent quote, 2013).

Experiencing death in stages was another cultural coping strategy within the literature that was supported by findings in the research data. "The obvious appeal of stages is that they order chaos and lend predictability to the uncertainty of grieving. Stages are best understood as a framework for the dynamics of dying and grieving that are always unique" (Anderson, 2010, p. 133). "You know what it is you're gonna do, there's no unknown, so it feels like you kind of have some control and doesn't feel so chaotic and overwhelming" (respondent quote, 2013).

Treating death as a celebration of life is an important concept that was identified in both the literature review and the research results as a potentially helpful way to perceive and respond to the death of a loved one. The deeper themes of this celebration are intense spiritual beliefs about maintaining an absence of fear towards death. "Instead, relatives typically embrace death by celebrating their connection with their deceased loved ones" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 79). "I think that in other cultures, when I've worked with families from Africa, there is a real celebration around death. It becomes a celebration of their life and a recognition of what this person has brought in the time that they were physically present, and it seems that they have an easier time perhaps" (respondent quote, 2013). . "This is a time when families and communities exchange memories and commune with the souls of their loved ones" (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006, p. 79).

The cultural coping strategy within the literature review which identified the concept of death as a community event was closely related to the research theme of community support vs. isolation. Both explain that the presence of community support can be beneficial for the grieving individual or family. Jewish traditions regarding death and bereavement are focused on providing support for the individual dying as well as the bereaved in an attempt to "dispel the loneliness that comes with death and bereavement, and to embrace the dying and bereaved within the Jewish community" (Levine, 1997, p. 102). "It allows them to not feel so alone and isolated in their experience and to feel the support from others around them" (respondent quote, 2013).

All of these are examples of not only how the research results fit with and support the background literature, but excellent evidence for the postulation that cultural coping

strategies have a legitimate positive connection to grief therapy modalities in western countries that may not retain many of their cultural heritages and traditions.

Limitations of the Research

There are several limitations of the research that were discovered while undertaking this lengthy process. One major limitation is that the topic that was chosen was far too broad for the time constraints it was conducted within. To give this topic its due attention and consideration, the researcher would have needed a longer time period in which to conduct the research and analyze the results. This made it difficult to glean all of the relevant information from the research data and also made the information difficult to synthesize in a coherent way. The breadth of the paper made it difficult to follow as there were many concepts being interwoven together in an attempt to make several different assertions about the interconnection of culture and grief.

An unfortunate limitation of this research is that there was insufficient data to create a theme supporting cultural coping strategies providing a useful intervention for preventing a trauma response in children experiencing the loss of a parent. This is not to say that cultural coping strategies are not a potentially effective intervention strategy for reducing trauma responses in children experiencing the death of a parent; simply that this research did not bear this idea out. The inability to gain supportive data for cultural coping strategies preventing a trauma response was likely a structural issue, as the interview question addressing this concept was asked at the end of the interview and most likely did not yield as rich of a response as it may have in the middle of the interviews. This idea warrants further research that could not be completed by this study alone.

Another major limitation of the research is that it was not independently coded and analyzed by another researcher. This takes away from the rigor of the results of the study as they have not been verified by an outside source.

The last main limitation to be identified here was the small sample size that the research data was pulled from. There were five research participants who were interviewed for this research project (n=5). This was sufficient for the purposes of this research paper, but the larger the sample size the larger the credibility of the research results.

A related limitation is that the small number of research respondents were all recruited from the same general area of the Midwestern United States. Due to time and monetary restrictions for this project the researcher was unable to interview grief therapist from other areas of the country. It would be useful to duplicate this study in other areas of the United States to see if the same findings hold true.

Implications of Research Findings

In addition to being useful as a basis for future research in the area of culture influencing grief therapy, these research results could also prove extremely valuable for direct practitioners and clinicians in the field of grief therapy. They could also be very beneficial for a parent or primary caregiver who is dealing with the death of a loved one and simultaneously raising a child. The research results discuss many cultural and non-cultural coping strategies that grief therapists and parents could employ when working with children that are dealing with the death of a loved one.

Most of these interventions make logical sense and now that there is some research backing them, the support is all the stronger for their use in helping children cope with the death of a loved one and increasing their resiliency.

Implications of Research Findings for Social Work Research

This research builds on the research of others in the area of culture and grief therapy. Social work researchers should constantly be finding better ways to help children and adults deal with significant loss so it does not become a chronic problem. The more research that can be done about ways of helping individuals process the loss of a loved one, the more emotionally and psychologically stable they will become

These research findings have partially laid the foundation for future social work research in the area of cultural coping strategies as grief therapy interventions. It has also added to the base of research regarding different cultural attitudes toward death and bereavement.

Because these research findings were based on the experience and expertise of qualified grief therapists in the Midwestern United States, a recommendation for future research would be to duplicate this study in other parts of the country and the world to see if they yield similar results.

Future social work researchers could use this research as a basis to create other targeted research studies that studied specific cultural coping strategies in an attempt to further confirm their validity as appropriate interventions in grief therapy modalities. More qualitative studies in this area of culture influencing grief therapy models could eventually bring the research in this area to a point that quantitative research could be done to run hypothesis testing to prove whether or not cultural coping strategies really

can be used as interventions in grief therapy modalities. In the vitally important area of

grief therapy, a constant effort should be maintained to research and evaluate the ways in

which we provide grief therapy interventions to adults and children and identify new

effective treatments to assist as much as possible in this difficult process.

References

Anderson, H. (2010). Common grief, complex grieving. *Pastoral Psychol*. 59. 127-136.

Black, D. (1998).Working with the effects of traumatic bereavement by uxoricide (spouse
killing) on young children's attachment behaviour. *International Journal of Psychiatry
in Clinical Practice*, 2(4), 245-249.

Boss, P. (2006). *Loss, trauma, and resilience: therapeutic work with ambiguous loss.*
New York, NY: W.W. Norton & Company.

Cohen, J.A., & Mannarino, A.P. (2004). Treatment of Childhood Traumatic Grief.
Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology, 33(4), 819 – 831.

Dopp, A.R., & Cain, A.C. (2012). The Role of Peer Relationships in Parental
Bereavement during Childhood and Adolescence. *Death Studies*, 36, 41-60. DOI:
10.1080/07481187.2011.573175

Farber, M.L.Z., & Sabatino, C.A. (2007). A Theraputic Summer Weekend Camp for
Grieveing Children: Supporting Clinical Practice through Empirical Evaluation.
Child Adolescent Social Work Journal, 24, 385-402. DOI: 10.1007/s10560-007-
0090-0

Field, N. P., Gal-Oz, E., & Bonanno, G. (2003). Continuing bonds and adjustment at 5
years after the death of a spouse, *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*,
71, 110–117.

Freud, S. 1917. *Mourning and melancholia*. In J. Strachey (ed and trans.) Standard
Edition of the
Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, pp. 152–70. London: The
Hogarth Press.

Gielen, U. P. (1997). A death on the roof of the world: the perspective of Tibetan Buddhism. In Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P., Young, B. (Eds.). *Death and bereavement across cultures*. (73-97). New York, NY: Routledge.

Glascock, A.P. & Braden, R.W. (1981) Transitions of being: death and dying in cross-cultural perspective, unpublished paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Los Angeles, CA, December, 1981.

Green, J. W. (2008). *Beyond the good death: The anthropology of modern dying*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hooyman, N. R., & Kramer, B. J. (2006). *Living through loss: interventions across the life span*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.

Klass, D., Silverman, P., & Nickman, S. (Eds.). (1996). *Continuing bonds: New understandings of grief*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association Press.

Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: Sage.

Krueger, D.W. (1983). Childhood parent loss: Developmental impact and adult psycho-pathology. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 37(4), 582-592.

Levine, E. (1997). Jewish views and customs on death. In Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P., Young, B. (Eds.). *Death and bereavement across cultures*. (98-130). New York, NY: Routledge.

Lopez, S. A. (2011). Culture as an influencing factor in adolescent grief and bereavement. The *Prevention Researcher,* 18(3), 10-13.

Marshall, R., & Sutherland, P. (2008). The social relations of bereavement in the
      Caribbean. *OMEGA*, 57(1), 21-34.

McClatchy, I.S., Palardy, G., & Vonk, M.E. (2009). The Prevalence of Childhood
      Traumatic Grief: A Comparison of Violent/Sudden and Unexpected Loss.
      OMEGA, 59(4), 305-323.

Mellor, P. (1993) *The Sociology of Death*. Blackwell, Oxford.

Noy, C. (2008). Sampling knowledge: the hermeneutics of snowball sampling in
      qualitative research. *Int. J. Social Research Methodology,* 11(4), 327-344.

Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P., Young, B. (Eds.). (1997). *Death and bereavement across*
      cultures. New York, NY: Routledge.

Prigerson, H. G., Shear, M. K., & Jacobs, S. C. (1999). Consensus criteria for traumatic
      grief: A preliminary empirical test. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 154, 1003-1009.

Rosenblatt, P. C. (1997). Grief in small-scale societies. In Parkes, C. M., Laungani, P.,
      Young, B. (Eds.). *Death and bereavement across cultures*. (27-51). New York,
      NY: Routledge.

Rothe, E. M., Tzuang, D., & Pumariega, A. J. (2010). Acculturation, Development and
      Adaptation. *Elsevier,* 19, 681-696.

Ribbens-McCarthy, J. (2007). 'They All Look as if They're Coping, but I'm Not': The
      Relational Power/lessness of 'Youth' in Responding to Experiences of
      Bereavement. *Journal of Youth Studies*, 10(3), 285-303.

Strobe, M. S., Abakoumkin, G., Strobe, W., & Schut, H. (2011). Continuing bonds in
adjustment to bereavement: impact of abrupt versus gradual separation. Personal
Relationships, 19, 255-266. DOI: 10.1111/j.1475-6811.2011.01352.x

Stroebe, M.S., Hansson, R.O., Stroebe, W., & Schut, H. (Eds.). (2001). *Handbook of
bereavement research: Consequences, coping and care.* Washington, DC:
American Psychological Association.

Stroebe, M., Gergen, M., Gergen, K., & Stroebe, W. (1992). Broken hearts: Love and
death in historical perspective. *American Psychologist*, 47, 1205–1212.

Stroebe, M., Schut, H., & Boerner, K. (2010). Continuing bonds in adaptation to
bereavement: Toward theoretical integration. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 30,
259–268.

Walker, A. C., Wilken, C. S. (2001). Cultural Comparison of Bereavement Practices.
Scarborough: National Association of African American Studies. 1804-1823.

White, M. D., & Marsh, E. E., (2006). Content analysis: a flexible methodology. *Library
Trends,* 55(1), 22-45.

Wolcheck, S.A., Ma, Y., Tein, J., Sandler, I.N., & Ayers, T.S. (2008). Parentally
Bereaved Children's Grief: Self System Beliefs as Mediators of the Relations
Between Grief and Stressors and Caregiver-Child Relationship Quality. *Death
Studies*, 32, 597-620. DOI: 10.1080/07481180802215551

Wolfelt, A.D. (1996). *Healing the bereaved child: Grief gardening, growth through grief
and other touchstones for caregivers*. Fort Collins, CO: Companion.

Worden, W.J. (1996). *Children and grief: When a parent dies*. New York: Guilford.

Worden, W.J. (2003). Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy: A handbook for the mental

    health practitioner. Hove, East Sussex: Brunner-Routledge.

Appendix A

Effective Cultural Coping Strategies for Bereavement and their Integration into Western Grief Therapy Modalities for Children

INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Introduction:

You are invited to participate in a research study investigating the role of cultural protective factors in western grief therapy models for children. This study is being conducted by Philip Kuehn, a graduate student at the University of St. Thomas and St. Catherine University under the supervision of Sarah Ferguson, a faculty member in the School of Social Work. You were selected as a possible participant in this research because you are a practicing professional providing grief therapy and counseling. Please read this form and ask questions before you agree to be in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to establish that there are cultural protective factors that could be integrated into western grief therapy models that could be effective in reducing trauma responses and increasing resiliency for children experiencing the death of a parent or primary care giver. Approximately 10 people are expected to participate in this research.

Procedures:

If you decide to participate, you will be asked to participate in a 45-60 minute interview in which I will ask you a series of questions related to this topic. This interview will be audio taped, transcribed, and coded to be used in the results of this research. This research will presented during a university research presentation in May of 2013.

Risks and Benefits of being in the study:

The study has minimal risks. You will be audio taped during the interview process but these recordings will be kept on a locked computer file and not be listened to by anyone but the researcher. The recordings will be listed by numbers and not linked with any names or identifying information. No specific information will be used in the research results that could link you with the information you give in your interview.

There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research.

Confidentiality:

Any information obtained in connection with this research study that can be identified with you will be disclosed only with your permission; your results will be kept confidential. In any written reports or publications, no one will be identified or identifiable and only group data will be presented.

I will keep the research results in a locked file cabinet on the St. Thomas Campus and only I and my advisor will have access to the records while I work on this project. I will finish analyzing the data by May 15th, 2013. I will then destroy all original reports and identifying information that can be linked back to you. All audio recordings will also be erased at this time.

Voluntary nature of the study:

Participation in this research study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your future relations with the University of St. Thomas or St. Catherine University in any way. If you decide to participate, you are free to stop at any time without affecting these relationships.

Contacts and questions:

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me, Philip Kuehn, at 715-577-3171 or at kueh9408@stthomas.edu. You may ask questions now, or if you have any additional questions later, the faculty advisor, Sarah Ferguson 651-690-6296, will be happy to answer them. If you have other questions or concerns regarding the study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, you may also contact Dr. John Schmitt, Chair of the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board, at (651) 690-7739.

You may keep a copy of this form for your records.

Statement of Consent:

You are making a decision whether or not to participate. Your signature indicates that you have read this information and your questions have been answered. Even after signing this form, please know that you may withdraw from the study at any time.

I consent to participate in the study and I agree to be audio-taped.

Signature of Participant   Date

_____

Signature of Researcher   Date

_____

Appendix B

Interview questions:

Main research questions: Is there a useful connection between cultural coping strategies and current grief therapy modalities for children? What role might they play in reducing a trauma response and increasing resiliency?

1) In general, how do you think people feel about death? Perceive death? Respond to death?

2) In your experience, how do you think children feel about death? Perceive death? Respond to death?

3) What does coping mean to you? How do you know or measure that someone is coping or has coped?

4) Are you currently working with any children that are grieving?

5) What do you think helps children cope? What do you think hinders their coping?

6) Are there differences in the feelings and perceptions of death depending on how connected people are with their culture? (For the purposes of these questions, the definition of culture is not racial culture, but "the sum total of the possessions, ways of thinking, and behavior which distinguish one group of people from

another and which tend to be passed down from generation to generation"

(Parkes, Laungani, and Young, 1997, p. 10). In this case, the definition would also

include religion and spirituality as this is often inextricably tied to culture.)

7) Are there differences in coping strategies depending on how connected someone

is with their culture?

8) How do you take culture into account when providing grief therapy?

9) What is your knowledge of cultural rituals, practices, and understandings around

death that could be considered beneficial for individuals of that culture, especially

for children?

10) Could culturally based rituals, practices, and understandings regarding death

resonate with individuals, especially children, that are *not* connected with a

specific culture, or have lost contact with their culture?

11) Do you think there are cross-cultural protective factors that could be utilized when

providing grief therapy to individuals from any culture?

12) Based on your experience, what might these cross-cultural coping strategies be,

why are they protective for individuals from that culture, and could they be

helpful for others.

13) Speak to the role of cultural coping strategies decreasing a trauma response and

increasing resiliency in children that have lost a parent?