

**The Relationship Between Meaning in Life, Grief, and Meaning-Making of Loss**

**Among the Bereaved**

A Cultural Comparison Between Turkey and Germany



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### **Abstract**

Prior literature emphasizes the role of meaning in life beliefs in positive adjustment to stressful life events. However, most of the studies have been mainly conducted in Western cultures and it remains unclear how meaning in life beliefs are associated with meaning-making of loss and grief among different cultures. Therefore, this study investigated the relationship between meaning in life beliefs, grief and meaning-making of loss between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. A sample of 306 bereaved German and Turkish participants answered an online questionnaire. The findings of this study reveal that greater meaning in life beliefs were associated with higher meaning-making of loss and less grief. Greater feelings of closeness to the lost one were further related to higher levels of meaning-making of loss. Cultural differences indicate that with higher meaning in life beliefs, collectivistic cultures reveal lower levels of grief as compared to individualistic cultures. Additionally, culture does not significantly moderate the relationship between meaning in life beliefs and meaning-making of loss. Nevertheless, a trend reveals that compared to Germans, Turkish people report higher meaning-making of loss with lower meaning in life beliefs. This study is the first to demonstrate the role of meaning in life beliefs in the psychological adjustment to the loss of the loved one and how this differed between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. By investigating this association empirically, a general understanding concerning the psychological mechanisms will be enhanced, and practical help for individuals with different cultural backgrounds can be provided.

*Keywords:* meaning in life, bereavement, meaning-making, grief

## The Relationship Between Meaning in Life, Grief, and Meaning-Making of Loss Among the Bereaved

### A Cultural Comparison Between Turkey and Germany

Losing a loved one inevitably disrupts life and requires significant psychological readjustment. Great times of grief are characterized by missing and longing for the person one has lost. Suddenly everything in the surrounding reminds of the loss (Parkes, 1972).

When the adjustment is failed, it may cause adverse health outcomes such as depression or complicated grief (Eisma et al., 2019; Maccallum & Bryant, 2019). Certainly, such a loss leaves a 'hole' which will be more accepted within the context of time (Flesner, 2013). Yet, there may be certain factors that are associated with assisting this process, such as one's beliefs in the meaning in life (Reker & Wong, 2012).

*Meaning in life* beliefs are defined as the purpose of one's existence and the pursuit of life goals, happiness and accomplishments (Martela & Steger, 2016). From a clinical perspective, a lack of belief in the meaning in life has been connected to increased grief levels (Edmonds & Hooker, 1992). In contrast, having a sense of meaning in life was related to greater wellbeing. Steger (2012) explains that believing firmly in the meaning in life can be viewed as a protective factor for dealing with loss-related distress, which may support adjustment processes. Furthermore, meaning in life was associated with higher meaning-making of loss which leads to our second crucial concept: Meaning-making of loss (Brandstätter et al., 2014).

*Meaning-making of loss* is defined as accepting the loss and finding benefit, new sense and a redeeming value in the loss (Folkman, 1997; Lichtenthal et al., 2010).

Bereavement literature has embraced meaning-making of loss as playing a role in psychological adjustment to the loss (Holland et al., 2006; Barrera et al., 2011). This psychological adjustment can be explained by the ability to integrate the experience of loss into one's meaning systems of coping mechanisms (Currier et al., 2010).

When considering meaning-making of loss as a coping mechanism, Coleman and Neimeyer (2010) found that bereaved widowers that made meaning of the loss had an increase in wellbeing. In contrast, bereaved parents who were not able to make meaning of the loss indicated elevated grief levels and other psychological complaints (Keesee et al., 2008).

However, the literature regarding meaning in life and meaning-making of loss is limited. It is unclear how meaning in life beliefs are related to meaning-making of loss (Murphy et al., 2003). Furthermore, most of the studies on meaning in life and meaning-

making of loss regarding bereavement have been from qualitative nature and meaning-related concepts have been too broadly defined (Flesner, 2013; Neimeyer et al., 2002). Henceforth, more reliable and objective research is needed to shed more light on this topic.

Therefore, this paper investigates the relationship between meaning in life beliefs, grief and meaning making- of loss among a bereaved sample. It is hypothesized that higher beliefs in the meaning of life are associated with higher levels of meaning-making of loss and lower levels of grief.

### **Culture**

Cultures can be differentiated by the degree of collectivism and individualism (Peterson & Hofstede, 2003). Collectivism is viewed as the orientation towards one's social environment, whereas individualism takes a more intra-personal perspective indicating a sharper focus to the self. The main difference between the two cultures is to view oneself from an independent or interdependent perspective (Fiske et al., 1998).

Culture has been proposed to affect meaning-making of loss and meaning in life beliefs among bereaved individuals (Rosenblatt, 2013; Neimeyer et al., 2014). The influence of culture and familial contexts further impacts how people react to the loss, how they grieve and how they give meaning to the loss (Cohen & Hill, 2007; Neimeyer et al., 2008).

In individualistic cultures individuals tend to express emotions and reasoning more towards themselves and there is further evidence that Western societies find meaning in the loss in a more *intrapersonal* way (Oyersmann et al., 2002; Mcclocklin & Lengelle, 2018). In contrast, collectivistic cultures have a strong *interpersonal* focus. In this regard, Aksoz-Efe et al. (2018) investigated death rituals, beliefs and grief among a Turkish sample and found that most of the participants described their grief experience in interpersonal terms. This interpersonal focus may have a significant influence on meaning-making of loss due to strong familial relations and social practices, as family is viewed as a meaning system and serves as a coping method which is termed '*family love*' (Mahoney, 2003). However, there is empirical evidence that individualistic cultures do not rely as much as collectivistic cultures on familial sources in meaning-making of loss (Ahmadi et al., 2019).

Most of the studies around meaning in life and meaning-making of loss have been conducted in mainly Western individualistic cultures. Studying bereavement related aspects by including Western individualistic and Eastern collectivistic cultures may enrich knowledge about the cross-cultural factors about meaning-making in people who have lost a loved one. More knowledge regarding bereavement related factors across different cultures is required to, first, enhance the interaction between people coming from different backgrounds.

Secondly, there is a need for more significant insights in health care to approach clients from various cultural origins.

Therefore, the current paper investigates the second research question to shed light on the relationship between meaning beliefs and meaning-making of loss between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Countries such as Turkey and Germany were taken into account and have been compared on their culture. Relative to one another, Germany scores twice as much on the degree of individualism as compared to Turkey revealing a large cultural difference (Hofstede, 2020). Henceforth, in this study we consider Germany as an individualistic culture and Turkey as a collectivistic culture. It is hypothesized that culture moderates the relationship between meaning beliefs and meaning-making of loss. First, it is expected that collectivistic cultures would engage in higher meaning-making of loss, when their meaning in life beliefs are high as compared to individualistic cultures (Hypothesis 1). Second, it is expected that, with higher meaning in life beliefs, collectivistic cultures would reveal lower levels of grief as compared to individualistic cultures (Hypothesis 2).

## **Method**

### **Participants**

456 participants (237 German and 219 Turkish) participated in this study. Inclusion criteria were that the loss was experienced within the last three years; participants had to be at minimum age of 18; and the nationality had to be in line with the country of current residence. 150 participants were excluded based on the criteria resulting in a sample size of 306 participants (38 males, 12.40 %, 267 females, 87.00 %). The overall age range was between 18 and above 75 years, with a median age of 25-34 years ( $M = 2.53$ ,  $SD = 1.49$ ). The sample size of the Turkish sub-sample was 146 (29 males, 19.90 %, 117 females, 80.10 %) and the median age was 18-24 years ( $M = 1.79$ ,  $SD = 1.22$ ). The German sub-sample consisted of 160 participants (9 males, 5.60 %, 150 females, 93.80 %, 1 diverse, .60 %) with a median age of 35-44 years ( $M = 3.19$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ).

A chi-square test of independence (Table 1) and an independent samples t-test (Table 2) were performed and confirmed significant differences between Turkish and German participants regarding age, education, religion, closeness, time of loss and cause of death [ $\chi^2(6, N = 307) = 31.89, p < .01$ ]. There are differences between Turkish and German participants on all background variables. The degree of religious belief and the time of loss is greater for Turkish participants. German participants have a higher educational background, age, and closeness to the loved one. Regarding the cause of death, German participants have

lost a person more often in a sudden and unexpected way due to accident, suicide and homicide.

**Table 1**

*Sample differences in frequencies for the variable cause of death using chi-square test of independence*

		Country				
		German		Turkish		
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	TOTAL
Cause of Death	Disease	103	48.40	110	51.60	213
	Accident	17	68.00	8	32.00	25
	Suicide	14	66.70	7	33.30	21
	Homicide	4	80.00	1	20.00	5
	Other	16	10.00	0	0.00	16
	Not known	6	28.60	15	71.40	21
	TOTAL	160	52.30	146	47.70	306

**Table 2**

*Sample differences for background variables employing t-test for equality of means*

	German		Turkish		<i>t</i> -test
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	
Age	3.19	1.41	1.79	1.22	9.31**
Education	4.51	1.39	3.43	0.73	8.41**
Religion	5.70	3.06	7.47	3.10	-5.01**
Closeness	9.34	1.34	8.07	1.94	6.64**
Time of Loss	1.81	.84	2.05	.83	-2.52*

*Note.* *M* = Mean. *SD* = Standard Deviation. Age ranges from 1 (18-24) to 7 (75 and older).

Education ranges from 1 (no education) to 5 (Bachelor/Postgraduate). Religion is scored 1 (no religious belief) to 10 (strong religious belief). Closeness to deceased is scored from 1 (not close) to 10 (very close). Time of Loss is scored from 1 (Less than 1 year) to 3 (2-3 years).

\*\**p* <.01. \**p* <.05.

## Materials

The current study was part of a larger research project which investigated different bereavement related constructs such as grief, perceived meaning in life and meaning-making of loss.

**Demographics.** The questionnaire included demographic items concerning gender, age, nationality and educational level. It further asked for the degree of religiosity, the relationship to the lost one, cause of death, and the time of loss.

**Meaning in Life Belief.** For assessing meaning in life beliefs, the subscale ‘presence’ of the Steger’s Meaning in Life Scale (MLQ-P) was used (Steger, 2006). The MLQ-P analysed how meaningful one considers his or her life. Psychometric qualities of the MLQ-P are good, and the internal consistency of the presence scale is high (.86) (Steger et al., 2006). The MLQ-P indicates an advanced discriminant validity over other meaning measures and its psychometric properties are comparable to longer meaning questionnaires (Steger et al. 2006).

The Cronbach’s alpha of the MLQ-P for both the German and Turkish version were high indicating a Cronbach’s alpha for Germany of .85 and Turkey .87. It contains of 5 items referring to the perception of viewing life as personally meaningful and goal directed. Examples of the items are “I have a good sense of what makes my life meaningful” and “My life has a clear sense of purpose”. The Scoring ranges from 1= absolutely untrue to 7=absolutely true. A high scoring indicates a high meaning in life score. Item 5 ‘My life has no clear purpose’ was reverse coded.

**Meaning-making of loss.** To examine meaning-making of loss, a shortened version of the ‘Grief and Meaning Reconstruction Inventory (GMRI) was used. The GMRI and its factors show a good internal consistency and a strong convergent validity on bereavement associated emotions (Gillies et al., 2014). The shortened version consists of 16 items referring to three factors: personal growth, sense of peace and valuing life. The Cronbach’s alpha for the subscales of the GMRI for both the German and Turkish version were high (sense of peace .76 = German, .74 = Turkish; Personal Growth .79 = German, .80 = Turkish; Valuing Life .66 = German, .56 = Turkey). The three subscales dealt with positive psychological growing and perceiving life with greater appreciation. Personal growth included 7 items such as “Since this loss I am more self-reflective”. Sense of peace consisted of 5 items for instance “I have been able to make sense of this loss’. The subscale valuing life’ asked for 4 items such as “I value family more than before the loss”. The scoring of the items included a five-point Likert scale reaching from answer options of 1= strongly disagree to 5= strongly agree. A high scoring indicated greater meaning-making after loss.

**Grief.** To examine grief, the short version of the Prolonged Grief Disorder-13 (PG-13) was used (Pohlkamp et al., 2018). The PG-13 was shown to have overall good psychometric properties, high internal consistency and powerful associations with concurrent psychological complaints, grief rumination and risk factor of PGD (Pohlkamp et al. 2018).

The Cronbach's alpha of the PG-13 for both the German and Turkish version were high indicating a Cronbach's alpha for Germany of .87 and Turkey .86. Due to technical problems, the item 'Do you feel empty after your loss' was removed. Example items are 'How often have you felt longing or yearning for the person you lost' or 'In the past month, how often have you had intense feelings of emotional pain, sorrow, or pangs of grief related to the lost relationship? Items asking for risk factors of complicated grief were 'Have you experienced a significant reduction in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning (e.g., domestic responsibilities)?'. The scoring of the items was either on a 5-point Likert Scale ranging from 1= not at all to 5= overwhelmingly, or yes- no responses. A high scoring on the items indicated a greater grief intensity.

### **Procedure**

Initially, an English prototype of the questionnaires was developed. Two psychology experts translated the questionnaire into German and Turkish. By means of using multiple translation methods such as forward and backward translation, the items have been translated from source language to target language to reach for similarities on linguistic and conceptual levels (Capitolo et al., 2001).

Bereaved participants were recruited via non-probability sampling methods by means of convenience sampling and purposive sampling. Participants were invited to answer the questionnaire via a link, provided on personal networks such as Facebook, WhatsApp or orally to contacts of the researchers. Individuals were further invited via Facebook, particularly those who were members of bereavement related discussion groups. The data collection and recruitment lasted from February 2020 to April 2020.

The participants answered online questionnaires which were provided via the platform Qualtrics. The Turkish questionnaire was addressed to exclusively Turkish citizens living in Turkey, whereas the German questionnaire was targeted at German citizens who lived in Germany. The first page of the questionnaire included short information concerning the research. If they agreed, they subsequently provided their active informed consent and were invited to fill out the questionnaire. No reward was provided. The average time to fill in the questionnaire was approximately 20 minutes.

### **Data analysis**

After cleaning the data for missing responses and participants whose nationality was not in line with the place of living, sum scores of meaning in life belief, meaning-making of loss and grief were mean-centred. The significance level was set to .05 two-tailed. The dependent variables were grief (continuous, range: 12-52) and meaning-making of loss



(continuous, range: 16-80). The independent variables were country (binominal: 1 = Germany, 2 = Turkey) and meaning in life belief (continuous, range: 5- 35).

Descriptive statistics have been analysed for gender, age and education. To display differences, variables such as closeness to the deceased (continuous, range: 1-10), religious belief (continuous, range: 1-10), time of loss, cause of death (nominal, range: 1-6) and education (continuous, range: 1-5) were analysed by a t-test and a chi squared test.

The assumptions testing of a multiple regression analysis (e.g. normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity) have been tested. The Macro PROCESS by Hayes in SPSS (2016) was used to conduct two moderated regression analyses via PROCESS in order analyse the main effects of meaning in life as the predictor variable and the moderation effects of country on:

1. The relationship between meaning in life beliefs and grief
2. The relationship between meaning in life beliefs and meaning-making of loss

The interaction variable for “country x meaning in life” was created. Covariates by mean-centred scores of the scale variables education, religion, time of loss and relationship to the deceased were included in the analysis.

### **Results**

All assumptions of MLR analyses have been met (i.e., normality, linearity, multicollinearity, homoscedasticity).

It was hypothesized that greater meaning in life beliefs are associated with greater scores in meaning-making, and that this association is stronger for Turkish participants. The statistical analysis for the relationship between meaning in life, country and meaning-making of loss revealed a significant regression equation of  $F(7, 298) = 17.12, p < .01, R^2 = .29$ . As indexed by the  $R^2$  statistic, the multiple regression analysis accounted for 29 % of the total variability in meaning-making of loss which indicates a medium effect. Table 3 shows the statistics of the MLR analysis.

**Table 3**

*Regressions of associations between different variables and the outcome variable meaning-making of loss*

Variable	Estimate	SE	t	p	95 % CI	
					LL	UL
Meaning making						
Fixed effects						
Intercept	.31	.17	-1.66	.10	[-.60, .05]	
Meaning in Life	1.04**	.25	4.20	.00	[.55, 1.53]	
Country	2.92*	1.34	2.18	.03	[.28, 5.56]	
Education	-.62	.46	1.35	.18	[-.28, 1.52]	
Religion	.13	.16	.80	.42	[-.19, .45]	
Time of Loss	1.17	.60	.28	.78	[-1.01, 1.34]	
Closeness	-.02	.31	-.06	.95	[-.62, .58]	

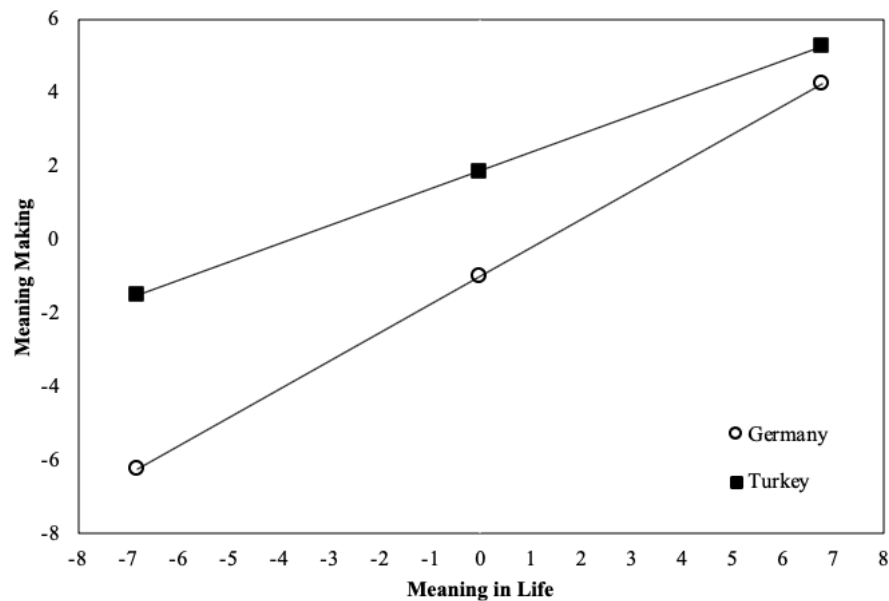
*Note.* CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit;  $N = 306$ .

\*\* $p < .01$ . \* $p < .05$ .

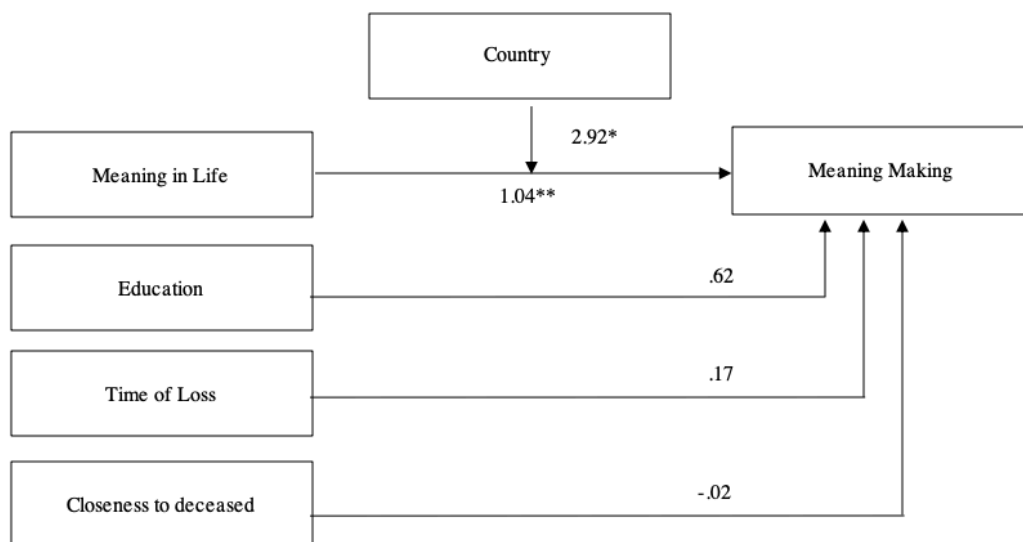
Meaning in life beliefs were a significant predictor of meaning-making of loss  $b = 1.04$ ,  $t(298) = 4.20$ ,  $p < .01$ , indicating that higher meaning in life beliefs are associated with higher scores on meaning-making of loss. Country was a significant predictor of meaning-making  $b = 2.92$ ,  $t(298) = 2.18$ ,  $p = .03$ , implying that Turkish individuals score higher on meaning-making of loss than German participants. The interaction between meaning in life and country on meaning-making of loss was not significant  $b = .31$ ,  $t(298) = -1.66$ ,  $p = .10$ . A trend indicated that, compared to Germans, Turkish people report higher meaning-making of loss when their meaning in life beliefs are low. With increasing meaning in life beliefs, meaning-making of loss scores for both groups are more similar. Figure 1 shows the regression equations concerning the relationship between meaning in life and meaning-making of loss for both participant groups.

**Figure 1**

*Meaning-making centred scores in relation to meaning in life centred scores for Turkish and German participants*

**Figure 2**

*Moderation model 1 and main effects between different variables*



*Note.* Meaning in life = independent variable, Meaning Making = dependent variable, Country = moderator, Education, Time of Loss and Closeness to deceased are all mean-centred covariates.

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). \* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

It was further hypothesized that greater meaning in life beliefs are associated with lower grief levels, and that this association is stronger for Turkish participants. The statistical analysis for the relationship between meaning in life, country and grief revealed a significant regression equation of  $F(7, 298) = 40.37, p < .001, R^2 = .49$ . The  $R^2$  statistic shows that the strength of the relationship between the model and grief is large and accounts for 49 % of the total variability in grief. Meaning in life was a significant predictor of grief  $b = -1.01, t(298) = -5.14, p < .01$  indicating that higher meaning in life scores are associated with lower levels of grief. Country was a significant predictor of grief  $b = -2.21, t(298) = -2.08, p = .04$  implying that Turkish individuals have lower scores on grief when their meaning in life beliefs are high. Education was a significant predictor of grief  $b = -.96, t(298) = -2.64, p = .01$  which suggests that higher educational levels indicated less grief. The closeness to the deceased was a significant predictor of grief  $b = 1.92, t(298) = 7.93, p < .01$ , implying that with closer relationships grief levels are greater. The time of loss predicts grief  $b = -1.53, t(298) = -3.23, p < .01$  which means that the longer ago the loved one died, the less intense grief is experienced. Table 4 displays the regression of association between the different variables and Grief.

**Table 4**

*Regressions of associations between different variables and the outcome variable grief*

Variable	Estimate	SE	t	p	95 % CI	
					LL	UL
Grief						
Fixed effects						
Intercept	.31*	.13	2.37	.02	[ .0523, .5687]	
Meaning in Life	-1.01**	.197	-5.14	.00	[-1.4005, -.6245]	
Country	-2.21*	1.07	-2.08	.04	[-4.3146, -.1146]	
Education	-.96*	.36	-2.64	.01	[-1.6751, -.2441]	
Religion	.16	.13	1.23	.22	[-.0957, .4161]	
Time of Loss	-1.53**	.47	-3.23	.00	[-2.4660, -.5977]	
Closeness	1.92**	.24	7.93	.00	[1.4431, 2.3965]	

*Note.* CI = confidence interval; LL = lower limit; UL = upper limit;  $N = 306$ .

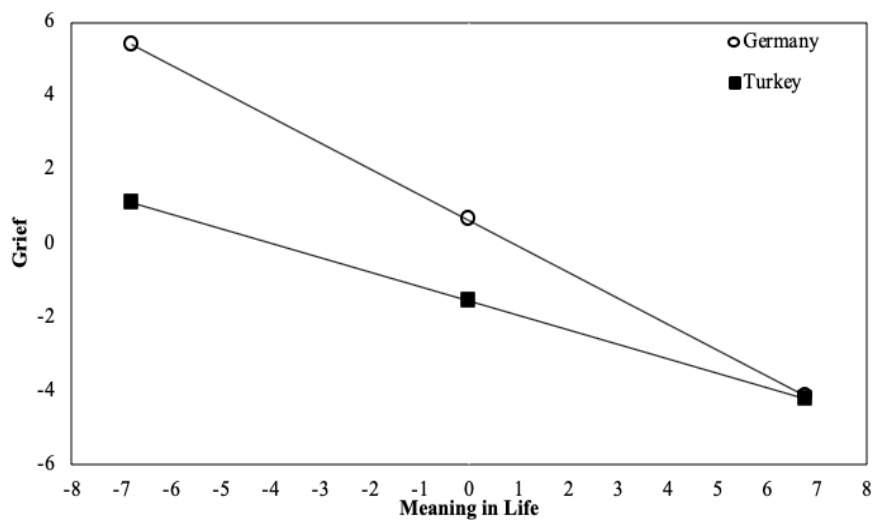
\*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

The interaction between meaning in life beliefs and country on grief is significant ( $b = .31, t(298) = 2.37, p = .02$ ). Country moderates the relationship between meaning in life and grief ( $F(1, 298) = 5.60, p = .02, R^{2chg} = .01$ ) implying that at low meaning in life levels, German participants score higher on grief as compared to Turkish individuals. Yet, this

country difference on grief is not present when meaning in life scores are high. This effect can be seen in Figure 3 which shows the regression equations concerning the relationship between meaning in life and grief for German and Turkish participants.

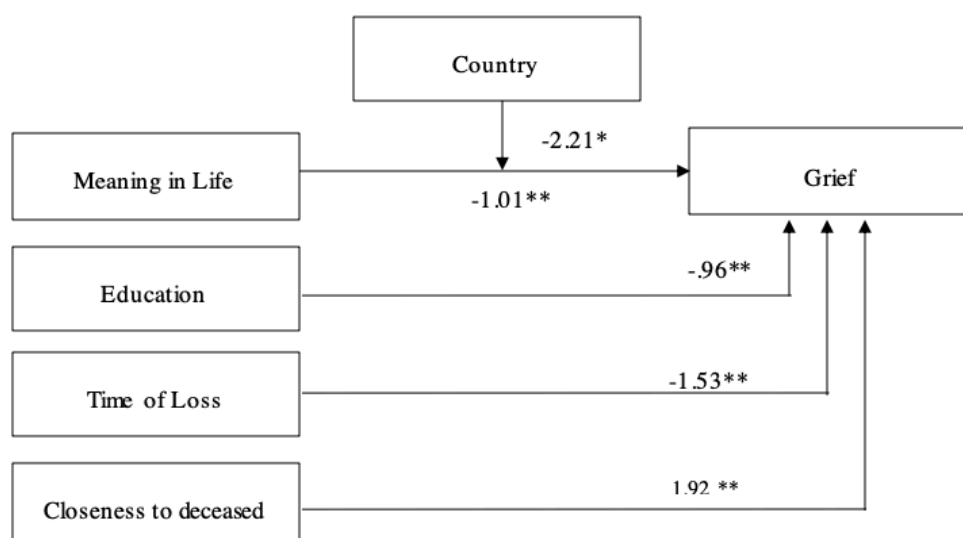
**Figure 3**

*Grief centred scores in relation to meaning in life beliefs centred scores for participants from Turkey and Germany*



**Figure 4**

*Moderation model 1 and main effects between different variables*



*Note.* Meaning in Life = independent variable, Grief= dependent variable, Country = moderator, Education, Time of Loss and Closeness are all covariates.

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

## **Discussion**

The present study is the first to investigate the relationship between meaning in life beliefs, grief and meaning-making of loss among a bereaved sample of Turkish and German participants. The current findings support the hypothesis that higher meaning in life beliefs were associated with higher meaning-making of loss and lower levels of grief. One additional finding was that higher levels of closeness to the lost one were related to higher levels of grief and meaning-making of loss.

The findings concerning the negative association between meaning in life and grief are in line with Edmonds and Hooker (1992). Further consistencies are seen with the works of Steger (2012) and Brandstätter et al. (2014), who emphasize a negative relationship between meaning in life beliefs and distress, hopelessness and psychopathology and a positive association to healthy coping mechanisms and well-being. The results might be explained by meaning in life beliefs which might serve as a ‘mental’ coping guideline to assist the bereaved individuals in their loss-related adjustment (Boyraz et al., 2015). Viewing the death in a purposeful way might support one’s acceptance of the loss and might help to reframe it positively. Yet, since this study is cross sectional, it might also be that grief influenced the way one perceives his or her meaning in life. Rogers et al. (2008) provides support for this claim and found that the process of ‘recovery’ from grief, as expressed by lower levels of grief, was related to increasing meaning in life beliefs.

The current findings concerning the positive relationship between meaning in life and meaning-making of loss indicate similar results with Bonanno et al. (2004) who found that one’s search for meaning in life is positively associated with meaning-making of loss. This psychological adjustment might be explained by the ability to integrate the experience of loss into ones meaning systems of coping mechanisms.

The additional finding that higher feelings of closeness are related to higher levels of grief is in line with research by Field and Filanowski (2009) who found that closeness to the deceased revealed a positive relationship with complicated grief symptoms. Our current finding concerning the positive association between closeness and meaning-making of loss is not in line with findings by Coleman and Neimeyer (2010), stating that lower levels of closeness were associated with higher levels of meaning-making. Yet, their sample consisted of a more uniform sample of older bereaved spouses which is quite different from our mixed sample. The difference might be explained by viewing late-life spousal bereavement as a normative kind of loss which might attributed to greater meaning-making.

## Culture

Contrary to our first hypothesis, culture does not significantly moderate the relationship between meaning in life and meaning-making of loss. Collectivistic cultures do not significantly engage in higher meaning-making of loss when their meaning in life beliefs are as compared to individualistic cultures. Yet, the following trend was observed: Compared to Germans, Turks report higher meaning-making of loss when their meaning in life beliefs were low. Nevertheless, with increasing meaning in life scores, meaning-making of loss for both groups are similar to each other.

In support with our second hypothesis, culture significantly moderates the relationship between meaning in life and grief. More precisely, when the belief for the meaning in life is high, collectivistic cultures indicate lower levels of grief as compared to individualistic cultures.

The overall findings show that meaning in life beliefs play a role in the association with psychological wellbeing, as emphasized by lower grief levels and greater meaning-making of loss among different cultures. Yet, since culture did not significantly moderate the relationship between meaning in life and meaning-making of loss, the findings indicate that there might be other (cultural) factors supporting the difference in meaning-making of loss and grief between Turkish and German participants.

We initially expected that - since Turkey is strongly influenced by Islamic beliefs - it might have been that religious belief played a role in meaning-making of loss, meaning in life and grief (Rubian & Yasien-Esmael, 2004). Yet, our analysis revealed that religious belief was a non-significant factor in this setting. Notwithstanding, we have to be aware that religious belief and religion are not the same constructs, and that religion might play a role. Religion is considered as the adherence to a greater system of shared beliefs, personal practices and rituals (i.e., mourning) including faith in the spirituality. This gives rise to *multiple components* that might affect meaning making of loss, grief and the beliefs in the meaning of life. In contrast, religious belief emphasizes a way of perceiving and interpreting the world by including ideas and beliefs such as the belief in a higher power (Becker et al., 2007). When comparing both religion and religious belief, we conclude that religion seems to be more multifaceted in terms of psychological and behavioural aspects (i.e., rituals) which might contribute to stronger meaning making of loss among the Turks. In support of this claim, a study by Ahmadi et al. (2019) provides evidence that religion serves as an important way of coping in dealing with difficult life circumstances. Therefore, it is worth investigating the role of religion in this constellation.

Another aspect that might explain the findings is Turkey's strong interpersonal focus. Furthermore, Neimeyer et al. (2008), states that meaning-making is strongly influenced by familial and cultural contexts. Therefore, in a collectivistic country like Turkey, individuals might be more open to share their emotional loss-related condolences and pain to others. In this respect, Albayrak and Arici (2007) refer to a *collectivistic coherence* by emphasizing the importance of social gestures such as offering condolences - not only to the closer network - but also to the wider social network of the deceased. Also, there are differences in how individuals of certain cultures perceive themselves and the loss. Individuals from collectivistic societies have a tendency to perceive themselves as part of a wider group, which motivates them to engage in certain social actions. This is in line with Aksoz-Efe et al. (2018) who investigated death rituals, beliefs and grief among Turkish women and found that most of the participants described their grief experience in interpersonal terms, mainly by expressing their loss-related emotions to others.

These interpersonal terms might further relate to how individuals cope with the loss. For instance, they follow common goals of grieving together through social rituals, such as sharing food and talking about the lost one (Archer, 2003). Mahoney (2003) refers to the coping method of 'family love' in which the family and closer friends are viewed as a meaning system that helps to deal with the loss. This familial way of coping might further explain the differences in meaning-making of loss as a coping method among the current sample (Mahoney, 2003).

In contrast, there is further evidence that the individualisation and secularisation of Western cultures is related to individuals finding meaning in the loss in a more intrapersonal way (Mcclocklin & Lengelle, 2018). With increasing secularization across Western individualistic societies mourning rituals slowly disappear, and expressions of grief are considered to be inappropriate or unhealthy with more time passing after the loss (Twigg & Martin, 2015). On similar lines, Oyserman et al. (2002) state that in individualistic cultures, individuals tend to express emotions and reasoning more towards themselves rather towards others, whereas collectivistic cultures' emotions and reasoning is more guided by the social environment.

However, since 80 % of the current sample were females, it may have been that they predominantly engage in interpersonal actions that would explain the strong effects in meaning-making and meaning in life in the Turkish sample. Also, when considering the time of loss, the German sample indicated a more recent loss as compared to the Turkish sample. This gives rise to greater grief levels but also to less successful meaning making of loss.



Coleman and Neimeyer (2010) provides support for this claim and found that searching for meaning from six months to 1.5 years post-loss predicted subsequent grief. This highlights the bi-directional relationship between meaning-making and grief which should be considered when interpreting the findings.

### **Limitations and Future direction**

The evidence of this study suggests that the findings are in line with previous research on the role of meaning in life and meaning-making of loss in bereavement. However, the data must be interpreted with caution. When drawing conclusions on culture, we should not label the German participants into being purely individualistic, nor the Turks into completely collectivistic. Instead, we should be aware that there are considerable differences among individuals within one culture. Another crucial aspect is that Turkey is the only country that resides on two continents: It bridges Western and Eastern worlds. On top of that, there have been immense changes in the Turkish culture resulting from greater exposure to Western values (Rogers-Sirin et al., 2017). When considering methodological limitations, participants complained about the length of the questionnaire. This may have negatively influenced the findings since concentration and focus might have decreased with the course of time.

Future studies should expand research on the cultural aspects in bereavement by paying further attention to the use of shorter measurement instruments. Also, the use of experimental research is recommended to enrich the understanding of the causal effects of meaning in life to exclude potential confounding variables. Meaning-centred interventions, for instance, might be used to positively affect meaning in life beliefs to draw more valid conclusions on causal effects.

### **Conclusion**

Despite the limitations, the current research is the first to shed more light on meaning systems and grief between collectivistic and individualistic cultures. Being aware of the cultural differences in bereavement and the underlying cognitive constructs is essential for serving suitable services to clients in a multicultural setting.

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