



Universiteit Utrecht

The Impact of Culture and Afterlife Belief on Bereavement Outcome

Master Thesis

by

Selin Arslanlar

Student Number: 6237878

Supervisor: Dr. Henk Schut

Faculty of Social and Behavioral Sciences

Clinical Psychology Master's Program

Utrecht University

August 2020

Abstract

A study of a sample of bereaved individuals tested for the impact of afterlife belief and cultural difference on bereavement outcome. Previous research present inconsistent findings on the valence of afterlife belief: whether positive, negative, or neutral impact on one's bereavement. Culture, societal norms, and values shape one's understanding of death, subsequent mourning and grief. Therefore, this study aims to investigate the relationship between afterlife belief and culture on bereavement outcome. The sample consisted of 270 participants from 4 countries: Greece, Ireland, Lithuania, and Turkey, divided into two groups; individualistic and collectivistic. Two-way ANCOVA was conducted to examine these hypotheses: first, cultural differences in bereavement outcome; second, the impact of afterlife belief on grief level; third, culture \times afterlife belief interaction on grief level. The results showed that the interaction effect of culture \times afterlife belief reveals a statistically significant effect. However, there was no evidence of differences in culture and afterlife belief on influencing grief level, when tested by themselves. Covariates of the study, existence of previous losses, a chance to say goodbye and the age of the deceased found to be significant predictors of bereavement outcome.

Key words: bereavement, grief, afterlife belief, culture, individualism, collectivism

The Impact of Culture and Afterlife Belief on Bereavement Outcome

Death is the inevitable end of every living organism. From the day we are born, the only thing that one can be sure of is that death is a part of life. Before even experiencing our own demise, in most cases, that would make us face death is the loss of a loved one. Losing someone to death is universal, however, dealing with a loss is experienced and observed differently and can vary due to many factors such as age, gender, cause of death, the role of the deceased as well as societal, cultural norms and belief systems (Averill & Nunley, 1988; Bonanno, 2004; Rosenblatt, 1988).

Bereavement is the objective fact of losing someone significant to death (Zisook & Shear, 2009). The affective response with emotions as well as cognitive, behavioral, social, and functional reactions after losing someone or something important (e.g. a house, job, relationship, etc.) can be described as *grief* (Stroebe, 2001). Grief can also be considered as a recovering process from a lost object (Catlin, 1993). In this research, the word '*grief*' is only associated with the loss of a loved one.

Can it be said that every human being experience grief in more or less the same way? Losing someone close is a universal experience but could reactions to bereavement be considered as universal? Reactions, expectations, and the impact of losing someone differ among cultures; even in subcultures (Stroebe & Schut, 1998; Walter, 2010). Hardy-Bougere (2008) states that individuals' reaction to bereavement is in line within cultural norms.

Since bereavement cannot be experienced the same way universally, the research area has expanded with cross-cultural studies since the 1970s (Rosenblatt, 2017). Although studies have been conducted to describe and understand the process of grief for decades, the influence of culture has broadened our insight into how humans react to and experience bereavement.

Kleinman and Good (1985) explained cultural differences (Non-Western vs. Western societies) in depressive symptoms following a bereavement. They noted that Western cultures often suffer from

depression after losing someone to death. They also stated that non-Western societies tend to demonstrate more somatic symptoms such as boredom, pain, dizziness, inner pressure rather than reporting feeling sad (Kleinman & Good, 1985).

In accordance with the previous study, the representation of grief may depend on the societal contexts, cultural norms, values, traditions, etc. (Averill & Nunley, 1988; Hardy-Bougere, 2008; Walter, 2010). Furthermore, Wikan (1988) compared two Muslim countries; Egypt and Bali, focusing on their reaction after a loss. Although both cultures believe in the same God and death itself is believed to be something ordained by God's will, their expressions of grief are divergent. Bereaved Egyptians showed more hectic grief responses like crying, screaming and agitatedly talking about the deceased and death. Whereas "cheerfulness and laughter" take pride of place in Balian funerals (Wikan, 1988, p.453). They lack the gloomy and despondent atmosphere of an Egyptian funeral and participants are especially dissuaded from crying (Stroebe & Schut, 1998).

As another example to illustrate the importance of culture in emotional expression following a grieving process, Rosenblatt et al. (1976) studied across 78 cultures. They revealed that in 50 of 66 countries expression of anger (i.e., verbal and/or physical aggression) is present during bereavement period and it is more common in non-Western societies. In the same study, they stated that 72 of 73 societies cry over their loved one's death. Bali is the only country in the study where people do not cry following a loss. Roseblatt et al. (1976) also commented that Euro-Americans demonstrate less emotions and cry less when compared to non-Western societies.

Individualism vs. Collectivism

Since this research is concerning cultural differences in grief, it is important to clarify cultural dimensions. Hofstede introduced a 6-dimension model with the aim of describing national culture (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Individualism vs. Collectivism (IDV) is one of the dimensions which is the focus of this study regarding cultural differences.

Individualism can be conceptualized as being independent from in-groups such as community, family, tribe and nation. People in individualistic cultures tend to act based on their own personal values and attitudes rather than the in-group norms (Hartung et al., 2010; Triandis, 2001). On the other hand, people from collectivistic societies define themselves as a part of the group (i.e., being interdependent within a group) and their behavior is formed by communal goals and values (Triandis, 2001). Although Hofstede (1991) defined I-C as “opposite poles of one dimension” (as cited in Triandis, 1993, p.162), both tendencies can be seen coexisting in one society depending on a given situation (Triandis, 1993; Triandis et. al, 1986; 1988).

Cultural differences shape the understanding of death, mourning, bereavement and the process of grief (Parkes, Laungani, & Young, 1997; Rosenblatt, 1993). The study conducted by Catlin (1993) among bereaved university students assessed two countries: USA as an individualistic society and Spain as a collectivistic one. The findings showed that after facing the death of a loved one, American participants experienced an overall negative effect on their self-esteem and also their liking and trust of others. When compared, the negative effect on self-esteem was reported to be significantly higher in Spanish samples. In contrast, liking and trust of others were positively affected following a loss in Spanish samples in comparison to Americans.

In another study, Bonanno et al. (2005) examined the cultural differences in the context of grief processing between bereaved samples from the USA (i.e., individualistic) and China (i.e., collectivistic). They report that the level of grief processing is not a determinant for long-term psychological consequences in Chinese samples. However, among Americans, higher levels of grief processing are indeed a predictor of a poorer long-term adjustment. Another finding from the study suggests that Chinese bereaved samples show more rapid recovery from bereavement than American participants, in spite of their intense expression of distress in the first months after a loss.

Afterlife Belief and Grief

Literature on bereavement has shown that culture plays an influential role in attitudes towards death as well as reaction to grief. As being essential components of a culture, religion and belief system shapes one's belief in life after death. Biological death is an end to physical life. Yet is there an existence after death? Throughout history, two most common metaphysical models that describe afterlife are reincarnation and the existence of heaven and hell.

Belief in afterlife is recognized to be strongly associated with grief and contributes to the meaning of the loss for a bereaved person (Wuthnow et al., 1980) along with its influence on "appraisal, coping and adjustment to a loss" (Benore & Park, 2004, p. 2). However, there is a remarkably small number of studies inquiring into the effect of afterlife belief in bereavement (Benore & Park, 2004).

In grief studies, death-specific beliefs (i.e., afterlife beliefs) can have a positive effect in coping with and adapting to a loss due to the possibility of reunion in another existence along with providing meaning to a loss and source of comfort to the bereaved (Benore & Park, 2004; Chapple et al., 2011; Nowatzi & Kalischuk, 2009; Root & Exline, 2014; Smith et al., 1992; Wuthnow et al., 1980). Smith et al. (1992) pointed out that belief in an afterlife is firmly associated with a better recovery and sustained well-being when facing a loss regardless of the cause of death. The idea of the loved one (the deceased) in a better existence, where one can be rewarded for one's good deeds provides comfort to bereaved people (Abrums, 2000) along with decreased distress and less depressive symptoms (Benore & Park, 2004).

On the other hand, some studies have stated no effect, weak or negative relationships (Feldman et al., 2016; Chan et al., 2005). Higgins (2002) assessed parental bereavement in relation to belief in afterlife and depressive symptoms. Although it was found that lower levels of depression are correlated with belief in afterlife, the relationship vanished after controlling age, gender, race, marital status and education.

A study conducted by Carr and Sharp (2014) examined the belief in afterlife in late-life spousal bereavement and its relation to psychological distress. They found that in both 6 and 18-month follow ups

after the loss, participants who believe in afterlife yet do not believe in afterlife reunion reported increased symptoms of depression and intrusive thoughts. Raised anger was reported only at 6-month follow up when comparing with non-believers. When compared, participants who believe in afterlife or question its existence demonstrated less anger symptoms than their non-believer counterparts. In addition, symptoms of anxiety and yearning, and their relation to afterlife belief did not expose a significant effect.

The belief that there will be a reunion in an afterworld may provide comfort because death itself is not a permanent separation (Root & Exline, 2014). However, the protective aspect of afterlife, the reunion, may only help in the short-term. In the case of widow(er)s, as time passes, the persevering feeling of attachment as well as the wish for reunion in the afterlife may obstruct their future relationships, choices for new social roles and activities (Carr & Sharp, 2014). As Stroebe and Schut (1999) proposed in their grief model (i.e., Dual Process Model), the bereaved needs to adapt “new roles, identities, relationships” (p.215) in order to meet the restoration-oriented dimension of grief and this has been seen as a vital source for adaptation and adjustment to a loss (Carr & Sharp, 2014; Stroebe, 2004; Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Furthermore, because afterlife does not have to be always rewarding (i.e., Heaven); the idea of punishment in Hell can induce distress and this concept may affect the means of coping with a loss in an adaptive way.

The purpose of the present study is to investigate the relationship between culture and belief in afterlife and its differences in the course of bereavement outcome. Since the literature is inconsistent about the relationship between afterlife belief and grief, we aim to contribute to the field by focusing on differences in individualistic and collectivistic bereaved populations.

In order to explore their similarities and differences within the focus of this paper, 4 countries have been selected as case studies: Turkey, Greece, Ireland, Lithuania. The cultural differences will be assessed in 2 dimensions; individualism (Ireland & Lithuania) vs. collectivism (Turkey & Greece).

We hypothesize that participants from collectivistic countries experience lower levels of grief compared to their counterparts in individualistic countries. Our second hypothesis presumes that

participants who are afterlife believers (rewarding/joy & punishment and earth-based afterlife) experience lower levels of grief compared to non-believers regardless of culture. Lastly, the third hypothesis is that non-believer participants from collectivistic cultures demonstrate lower levels of grief than non-believers from individualistic cultures. In order to reflect the interaction of cultural difference and afterlife belief, participants from both collectivistic and individualistic countries who hold an afterlife belief will be compared with non-believers from both cultures.

Method

Sample

Participants in this study are 280 bereaved individuals. All the participants had experienced a loss of someone close within the last four years. The sample was selected from four countries: Turkey, Greece, Ireland and Lithuania. Turkey and Greece were selected as representative of collectivistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Shneor et al., 2013; Triandis, 1993), whereas Ireland and Lithuania are representing individualistic cultures (Hofstede, 1980; Triandis, 1993; Urbonavicius & Sezer, 2019). A total of 239 (85.3%) females and 41 males (14.7%) took part in the survey and the mean age is 35.34 ($SD=13.1$). For more comprehensive demographic information and characteristics of the loss, see Appendix A and B, respectively.

Instruments

Inventory of Complicated Grief (ICG)

The ICG is an instrument, developed by Prigerson and colleagues (1995), aiming to assess bereavement outcomes within the scope of maladaptive features of grief (Prigerson et al., 1995). The original ICG has 31 items. In this study the short version of ICG which consists of 19 items were used. An example of an item is "*I think about this person so much that it's hard for me to do the things I normally do*". Items were rated with a 5-point Likert scale from "Never" to "Always". Higher scores suggest higher levels of grief.

In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha is .91. Prigerson et al. (1995) also stated that after repeatedly evaluated with test-retest reliabilities, the scale has shown strong reliability and validity.

Afterlife Expectation Scale

Originally, the Afterlife Expectation Scale consisted of 45 items with six subscales: (a) Joy/Reward Afterlife, (b) Judgement Afterlife, (c) Earth-based Afterlife, (d) Surreal Afterlife, (e) Extinction Afterlife (No Afterlife) and (f) Items not included in subscales (Rose & O'Sullivan, 2002). Overall, the instrument is composed of many varieties of possible folk and also traditional beliefs about life after death (Rose & O'Sullivan, 2002). In this study two subscales (Surreal Afterlife and Items not included) are excluded. The language of the original scale is an internal language (e.g., "When I die, I believe that I will be punished"), but that has been changed to an external language (e.g., "When *people* die, I believe that *they* will begin a new cycle on earth), in order to make it less emotionally confronting. Examples for reward subscale which constitutes a positive outcome of a death are: "When people die, they will be reunited with people they love; they will experience ultimate joy; etc.". For judgement subscale, the items suggest being in purgatory after the death; "When people die, they will need to be purged of their sins".

In this study, the overall Cronbach's alpha is .85. For each subscale, the Cronbach's alpha follows as; .73, .89, .82, .72, respectively. Moreover, Rose & O'Sullivan (2002) reported that the psychometric properties of the questionnaire were proven to be strong. The scale is assessed with a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Procedure

The study was conducted via online survey program Thesistool Pro. The survey was distributed via social media accounts, such as Facebook and Twitter between January and March 2019. In addition, it was sent to friends, family members, as well as acquaintances. They were asked to share the link of the survey on their social media accounts and with their own contacts as a snowball sampling.

All scales gathered in this study were originally in English. Unfortunately, not every scale which has been used has different language options. Therefore, three students, who were working on this study collaboratively, from the countries included (Lithuania, Greece, and Turkey) translated the instruments into

their native language and then the back-translation also took part in the procedure. Then, the survey was sent to the target population with the same native language.

The survey started with a consent form which indicated that there would be no risk or reward, along with the information that they could quit the survey anytime they want. Furthermore, the objectives of the study as well as confidentiality and privacy aspects (i.e., how their data would be stored and coded) were explained. Then, those who agreed to participate in the study filled in the demographic questions about themselves as well as information about the deceased, such as the age and gender, and cause of death. After demographic questions, participants filled all the scales. The participants who had not answered all the questions or who had dropped out during the survey were excluded. Furthermore, people who lost their loved ones more than 4 years ago were excluded from the study. The average time spent on the survey was 25 minutes. At the end of the survey, participants were thanked for taking part in the study.

Analysis of data

For this study, the dependent variable (DV) is the ICG-score. Independent variables are cultural differences (i.e., Individualistic vs. Collectivistic) and belief in afterlife (i.e., believer vs. non-believer). The analyses were performed using SPSS 25.0. Two-way ANCOVA was conducted to test 3 hypotheses. Demographic information about the participants and the characteristics of the loss were analyzed by Independent sample t-test, one-way ANOVA, and Pearson Correlation.

Results

The loss characteristics of given cultures (individualistic vs. collectivistic) are as following: in the individualistic cultures, the mean age of the deceased in years was 57.64 ($SD = 26.84$); 115 (41.1%) out of 149 reported experiencing multiple losses in the last 4 years, the most disturbing loss was asked to be chosen in order to fill the questionnaires; 59 (21.1%) participants stated that they had a chance to say goodbye to their loved ones. A total of 62 (22.1%) participants were afterlife believers. The mean ICG score for individualistic cultures was 2.28 ($SD = .75$), the scale range is from 0 to 5. The higher scores on ICG demonstrated higher levels of grief.

On the other hand, in the collectivistic cultures, the mean age of the deceased was 67.41 ($SD = 19.87$); 70 (25%) out of 131 participants had multiple losses; 57 (20.4%) participants had a chance to say goodbye; the mean ICG score was 2.13 ($SD = .67$), the range is from 0 to 5.

In order to test 3 hypotheses of the study, two-way ANCOVA was conducted since there are two independent variables (1: culture; 2: belief in afterlife) and one dependent variable (1: ICG score).

The covariates included in the analysis, multiple losses; age of the deceased; chance to say goodbye, were significantly related to the grief level; $F(1, 270) = 3.81, p = 0.52$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.14$; $F(1, 270) = 52.95, p < 0.01$, partial $\eta^2 = .16$; $F(1, 270) = 4.63, p = 0.32$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.17$, respectively.

For the first hypothesis which argued that participants from collectivistic cultures would score lower scores on ICG than participants from individualistic cultures, the predictability of cultural difference on grief level was checked. Before controlling for the covariates, the result revealed that participants from individualistic societies scored slightly higher ($M = 2.28, SD = .75$) than participants from collectivistic societies ($M = 2.13, SD = .67$). The result revealed that there was no statistically significant main effect of cultural difference (individualistic vs. collectivistic) on grief level after controlling for the effect of multiple losses, age of the deceased and chance to say goodbye, $F(1, 270) = .356, p = .55$, partial $\eta^2 = .001$. Therefore, the first hypothesis was rejected.

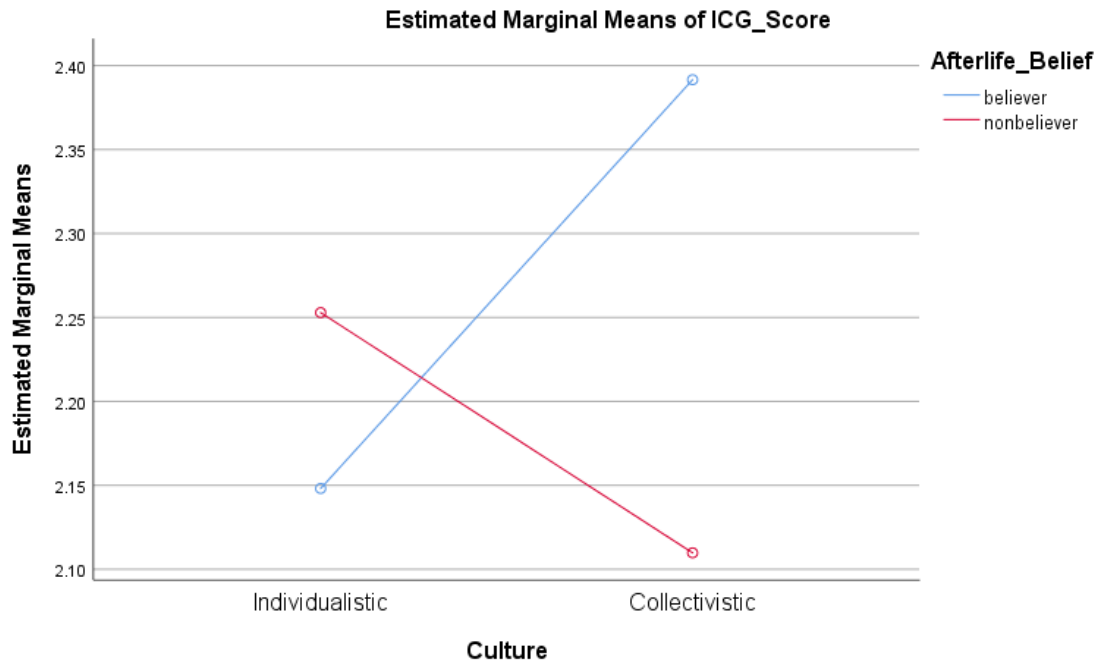
In our second hypothesis, it was claimed that regardless of their cultural differences, participants who are afterlife believers would demonstrate lower levels of grief when compared to non-believer participants. In the preliminary analysis, when covariates were not controlled, the mean grief level between afterlife believers ($M = 2.26, SD = .75$) and non-believers ($M = 2.18, SD = .7$) did reveal a modest difference. The result indicated that the main effect of believing in afterlife on level of grief was not statistically significant, $F(1, 270) = 1.19, p = .27$, partial $\eta^2 = .004$; when multiple losses, age of the deceased and chance to say goodbye were controlled. Afterlife belief was not found to have a predictor value for the grief level. Thus, our second hypothesis was also rejected.

The third hypothesis indicated that non-believers from collectivistic cultures would score lower levels of grief than non-believers from individualistic cultures. To test our third hypothesis with the reflection on the interaction between culture and afterlife belief, afterlife believer participants from both cultures were compared with non-believers from both cultures (see Table 1). Three covariates were controlled. There was a statistically significant interaction effect, $F(1, 270) = 5.8, p = .017$, partial $\eta^2 = .021$ (see Figure 1). The result suggests that collectivistic participants who do not believe in afterlife demonstrated lower levels of grief than non-believers in individualistic societies. Whereas afterlife believers in collectivistic cultures scored higher grief levels than participants from individualistic cultures who hold afterlife belief.

Table 1. ICG-Score, M (SD), Adjusted Means (M_{adj}), (SE) by Culture and Afterlife Belief

ICG-Score	Individualistic		Collectivistic	
	Believer	Non-Believer	Believer	Non-Believer
M (SD)	2.23 (0.77)	2.32 (0.73)	2.32 (0.71)	2.02 (0.63)
M_{adj} (SE)	2.15 (0.08)	2.25 (0.07)	2.39 (0.1)	2.11 (0.07)

Figure 1. Graph of the Interaction Effect of Culture and Afterlife Belief on Grief Level



Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Age_Deceased = 62,2641, Multiple_Losses = ,3213, Goodbye = -,1697

Discussion

The present study aimed to investigate how cultural differences (i.e., individualism and collectivism) and belief in afterlife are related to grief levels, and whether culture and afterlife belief have an impact on bereavement outcome by themselves individually. The literature on afterlife belief regarding bereavement outcome reveals inconsistent findings; positive, negative, or neutral influence on grief levels. Moreover, culture, its norms and values provide understanding and perspective towards losing a loved one to death. The study covers three predictors of bereavement outcome; previous losses, age of the deceased, and having a chance to say goodbye. The hypotheses presented were as follows:

- a) *Participants from collectivistic cultures will score lower levels of grief than their counterparts in individualistic cultures.*
- b) *Regardless of their cultural aspects, participants who hold afterlife belief will demonstrate lower levels of grief than participants who do not believe in afterlife.*
- c) *Participants from collectivistic societies who do not believe in afterlife will have lower levels of grief compared to non-believers in individualistic societies.*

The results of the present study revealed that subjects from individualistic societies scored slightly higher on ICG-score when compared to the participants from collectivistic societies. However, when significant predictors of grief level, multiple losses, age of the deceased, and chance to say goodbye, were controlled, the analysis resulted in no significant main effect of culture. Thus, we can conclude that cultural difference itself is not a predictor of grief level. The previous longitudinal studies among Western and non-Western societies and/or individualistic and collectivistic cultures (Bonanno et al., 2005; Catlin, 1993; Kleinman & Good, 1985) stated that difficult grief processing and negative bereavement outcomes were more evident in the earlier stages of bereavement for collectivistic societies. However, as the time passes by, better psychological outcomes and easier adaptation to the loss were seen in the collectivistic samples. A plausible explanation for our finding of the first hypothesis might be due to the cross-sectional design of the study. A longitudinal study, in which participants would be tested multiple times over the time, might

reveal a different outcome. In addition, the time duration since the loss was not considered as a significant predictor of this study. Furthermore, perceiving grief is highly associated with cultural norms. In this study, 2 countries were grouped into one, regardless of their specific grief perspective within a culture. We assumed that 2 clusters of cultural aspects would have similar attitudes towards their loss of loved ones. This reason might cause a different result due to culturally structured emotional expressions and reaction to bereavement (Hardy-Bougere, 2008). The impact of cultural aspects on grief level was inconclusive.

Contrary to our expectations, our second hypothesis did not reveal a significant effect. Regardless of the cultural aspects of participants, afterlife belief was thought to be associated with lower levels of grief. Literature on afterlife belief and its relation to grief is inconsistent. However, the comfort aspect of afterlife (i.e., possible reunion) is associated with decreased level of grief (Ganzevoort & Falkenburg, 2012; Klaassen et al., 2015; Kryszynska et al., 2014; Wood et al., 2012). On the other hand, in line with our findings, some studies suggest that either presence or absence of afterlife belief may not alleviate coping with grief as successfully as general religious beliefs found to be (Brown et al., 2004; Cacciatore & Flint., 2012; Maple et al., 2012; Neimeyer et al., 2006). In a study investigating the relationship between death-specific religious beliefs (e.g., afterlife belief, continuing bonds with the deceased, etc.) and grief levels concluded that afterlife belief, itself, may not provide comfort to people who are suffering from their bereavement (Eberle Medina, 2019). When considering afterlife belief and its relation to grief, there are more possible factors which might affect the outcome. For instance, the cause of death, a chance to say goodbye, religious orientation, and the extended range of afterlife beliefs. Thus, we failed to confirm our second hypothesis.

Our third hypothesis suggested that participants from collectivistic societies who do not hold afterlife belief will score lower ICG-scores than non-believers from individualistic societies. The result confirmed that there is an interaction effect between culture \times afterlife belief on ICG-score. People from collectivistic cultures who do not believe in afterlife had lower levels of grief than non-believer individualistic societies. For the sake of the complete reflection on the hypothesis, believers in both societies were also compared for their interaction effect. We also found a statistically significant interaction effect between believers in different cultures. It might be suggested that the reason for lower levels of grief in

participants from individualistic countries who believe in afterlife might be based on the hope of reunion. Since individualism suggests that being independent from in-groups yield lacking social support, the possibility of a reunion with their loved ones might provide comfort and therefore decreased grief levels during bereavement (Cacciatore & Flint., 2012; Wood et al., 2012). On the contrary, afterlife believers in collectivistic cultures showed significantly higher levels of grief. A possible explanation might be the characteristics of the society (i.e., being interdependent within a group) and their rituals. Certain death related rituals are practiced with people from the deceased's surroundings, family and friends. Thus, one might assume that during and after these rituals (e.g., funerals, periodic mourning rituals, etc.) might increase overall grief levels by causing a shift to loss-oriented coping.

Although current study has the potential contributions to the bereavement literature, it has several limitations. First, this study is a retrospective design. Therefore, the recall bias cannot be denied. Secondly, the questionnaires were filled as self-report which can bring along some limitations and biases: introspective ability, interpretation ability, rating scale bias, response bias, etc., which jeopardize the confidentiality of the responses. Thirdly, countries were clustered into 2 groups regardless of their cultures' specific norms and values. Thus, if cultural differences were tested separately, the findings could have been possible different. If the sample is more representative, it would allow to find more generalized results. Another limitation would be the generation difference within our sample. There were no age groups defined. Therefore, the perspective of age groups might differ.

As my supervisor Dr. Henk Schut once said: If we consider bereavement as a movie, our study is a snapshot of the grief process. Thus, we are only assessing our samples' lifelong bereavement process by one-time single shot. As it is suggested in Dual Process Model (DPM) by Stroebe & Schut (1999), the dynamic process of oscillation is a vital factor to consider when discussing one time shot of a bereavement process.

As a recommendation for future studies, cultural aspects and their characteristics regarding bereavement should be further searched in a detailed manner. Measuring afterlife belief within an entire range of ideas and beliefs from no afterlife to believing extremely strongly in afterlife or even spectrum of

afterlife belief should be taken into account for future studies. In addition, a longitudinal study with interviews may eliminate the self-report bias as well as creates a bigger picture of the bereavement process.

As a clinical practice suggestion, when working with bereaved clients, it is crucial to understand their afterlife belief and the outcome of these beliefs regarding their grief process. Being culturally sensitive as a clinician is one of the most important skill sets. Therefore, being aware of the cultural characteristics, norms, and values as well as one's personal afterlife belief would shed light on the grief process and bereavement outcome.

To sum up, losing a loved one to death is one the most hurtful life experiences one can encounter. Culture and afterlife belief were investigated in the light of bereavement outcome. The result of our study suggests that culture and afterlife belief interaction play a vital role in grief level. Neither culture itself, nor believing in afterlife do predict the levels of grief by themselves. There are several predictors of bereavement outcome which should be taken into consideration when investigating grief (e.g., multiple losses, age of the deceased, and a chance to say goodbye, etc.).

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Appendix A: Descriptive of Participant Demographics

	Individualistic Countries (Lithuania & Ireland)				Collectivistic Countries (Turkey & Greece)			
	N	M	%	SD	N	M	%	SD
1. Gender								
Female	132		47.1		107		38.2	
Male	17		6.1		24		8.6	
2. Age								
		38.36		13.8		32.33		12.4
3. Education Level								
< High school	0		0		2		0.7	
Vocational Edu.	10		3.6		2		0.7	
High School Diploma	37		13.2		33		11.8	
Bachelor's Degree	50		17.9		59		21.1	
Master's Degree	50		17.9		32		11.4	
Doctoral Degree	2		0.7		3		1.1	
4. Religion								
Catholic	106		37.9		0		0	
Orthodox Christian	0		0		61		21.8	
Muslim	0		0		37		13.2	
Buddhist	1		0.4		0		0	
Jewish	0		0		1		0.4	
Unaffiliated	17		6.1		13		4.6	
Non-Religious	15		5.4		17		6.1	
Other	10		3.6		2		0.7	
5. Participants were his/her...								
Spouse	7		2.5		2		0.7	
Partner	1		0.4		1		0.4	
Parent/Stepparent	23		8.2		6		2.1	
Child/Step C.	35		12.5		33		11.8	
Sibling/Step Sb.	7		2.5		2		0.7	
Friend	25		8.9		13		4.6	
Other	26		9.3		27		9.6	
Grandchild	25		8.9		47		16.8	

Appendix B: Descriptive of Loss Characteristics

	Individualistic Countries (Lithuania & Ireland)				Collectivistic Countries (Turkey & Greece)			
	N	M	%	SD	N	M	%	SD
Multiple Losses								
Yes	115		77.2		70		53.4	
No	34		22.8		61		46.6	
Time since loss/month		24.6		15.6	24.5		14.6	
Age of the deceased		57.6		26.8		67.4		19.9
Gender of the deceased								
Female	66		44.9		44		33.6	
Male	81		55.1		87		66.4	
Cause of death								
Accident	16		10.8		10		7.7	
Homicide	2		1.3		0		0	
Suicide	18		12.1		4		3.05	
Natural Sudden	45		30.2		52		39.7	
Natural Anticipated	49		32.9		49		37.4	
Other	19		12.7		16		12.2	
Previous suicide attempt								
Yes	4		30.8		0		0	
No	9		69.2		3		100	
Expectedness of the loss		2.3		.78		2.2		.79
Chance to say goodbye		2.4		.82		2.4		.75
Caregiver								
Yes	39		26.2		44		33.6	
No	110		73.8		87		66.4	
Caregiver right before death								
Yes	26		44.8		24		35.8	
No	32		55.2		43		64.2	