



UCL
Université
catholique
de Louvain

Coping strategies, attachment, and adjustment to bereavement

Anne-Sophie Ryckebosch-Dayez, Emily Delespaux, & Emmanuelle Zech

Université catholique de Louvain (UCL) - Belgium

Contact: anne-sophie.ryckebosch@uclouvain.be

1. Introduction

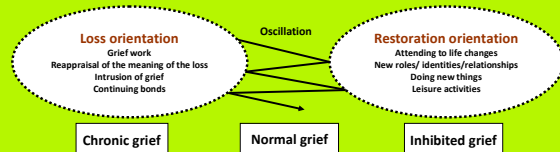
According to the *Dual Process Model of coping with bereavement* (DPM, Stroebe & Schut, 1999), effective adjustment should involve a flexible **oscillation** between 2 coping processes: **loss-orientation (LO)** and **restoration-orientation (RO)** (see Figure 1). Therefore, LO or RO coping strategy without oscillation should lead respectively to **chronic** or **inhibited** grief.

Finally, this model postulates an influence of **attachment style** on coping strategies: contrary to secure attachment, **anxious** and **avoidant** attachment should disturb the oscillation process and support only one type of coping strategy: LO or RO respectively (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005).

These assumptions were examined in the present study.

2. Hypotheses

Figure 1. The Dual-process model of coping with bereavement (DPM)



- Anxious attachment → LO > RO → Chronic grief
- Avoidant attachment → LO < RO → Inhibited grief

3. Method

Participants

- 321 conjugally bereaved individuals
- 284 widows and 37 widowers
- The average age of participants was 40.91 years ($SD = 14.22$, range = 18-88)
- Bereaved individuals were widowed for an average of 2.56 years ($SD = 4.75$)
- 68 bereaved participants (21.2%) met criteria for Traumatic Grief (according to the ITG)

Procedure

- The study was carried out on the Internet by the means of an **online questionnaire**
- Messages were sent on discussion **forums** (both general and grief-related)

Questionnaire (4 main sections)

- Personal and demographic characteristics
- **Attachment:** *Experiences in Close Relationships* (ECR, Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998) (adapted to conjugal bereavement)
- **Coping strategies:** A *Grief Coping Questionnaire* has been created to access grief coping strategies related to the DPM (consisting of 7 LO and 7 RO Likert-format items) (Ryckebosch-Dayez, Delespaux, & Zech, unpublished)
- **Intensity of grief reactions:** *Inventory of Traumatic Grief* (ITG, Prigerson, Kasl, & Jacobs, 2001)

4. Results

Correlations between attachment, coping strategies and grief reactions



- Individuals with an avoidant attachment style used restoration oriented (1) rather than loss oriented strategies (2).

- The use of loss oriented strategies was associated with a higher intensity of grief (3).
- The use of restoration oriented strategies was associated with a lower intensity of grief (4).

Mean attachment and grief by oscillation balance

Oscillation balance was calculated by subtracting the total LO score from the total RO score (RO minus LO). Then, intervals of oscillation balance were created upon half standard deviation units (0.5 SD) above and below the center point (0).

Avoidance M (SD)	Anxiety M (SD)	Oscillation balance M (SD)	Grief M (SD)	n
1.90 (.85) ^a	3.30 (1.16)	Primarily LO ^d	109.18 (15.43) ^a	188
2.05 (.81)	3.34 (1.14)	Relative balance ^e	93.87 (22.35) ^b	85
2.30 (.95) ^b	3.20 (1.02)	Primarily RO ^c	74.42 (22.34) ^c	48

^{a,b,c} Means with different superscripts differ at $p < .05$ according to Bonferroni post hoc analyses.

^d Oscillation balance score > 0.5 SD below zero

^e Oscillation balance score < 0.5 SD > 0

^f Oscillation balance score > 0.5 SD above zero

- Bereaved individuals with a high avoidance attachment score were less engaged in primarily LO coping and oscillation processes than in primarily RO coping, $F(2,318) = 4.39$, $p < .05$.

- Bereaved individuals engaged in primarily LO coping reported less favorable adjustment outcomes compared to those who were either more balanced or primarily RO engaged, $F(2,318) = 72.98$, $p < .001$.

5. Discussion

- In support with our hypotheses, results indicated that **avoidant attachment** was associated with RO strategies. In contrast, there was no association between **anxiety attachment** and coping strategies.

- In support with the DPM, individuals who focused more attention and activities on LO coping experienced greater grief reactions compared to those who tended to **oscillate**. Surprisingly, emphasis on RO was linked to the most favorable adjustment.

Attachment avoidance and RO strategies were associated with a more favorable adjustment

- Although exclusive focus on RO is associated to **inhibited grief** in the DPM, the question remains as to whether that kind of complicated grief actually exists (Bonnano et al., 2005). Further studies are needed in order to assess whether RO would be associated with **resilience** and **personal growth** rather than such type of complicated adjustment.