How Do Yearning and Emotional Pain Relate to Approach and Avoidance Behaviors in Adults with Complicated Grief?

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Yearning

- An unsatisfied, intense, and future-oriented appetitive desire (Davis, 1984)
- In grief, a manifestation of separation distress
- The most common (68.3%) and most informative of the criteria for complicated grief (Prigerson et al., 2008)
- Symptom of Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder in DSM-5
- Correlates with reward neural activation in people with complicated grief (O'Connor et al., 2008)

Emotional Pain

- The pain affect that arises in response to loss of social connection (Eisenberg, 2012)
- In grief, pangs, waves, or spells of painful emotion are common (Horowitz, 1997; Zisook & Shear, 2009),
- Especially in response to reminders of the death or the absence of the deceased
- Manifestation of separation distress
- Symptom of the DSM-5 Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder

Grief-Related Avoidance

- Any behavior or cognition aimed at preventing or reducing engagement with stimuli related to the death or the deceased
- Frequently present in complicated grief (e.g., Shear et al., 2007)
Grief-Related Approach

- Behavior or cognition initiated with the aim of increasing engagement with stimuli related to the deceased
- Proximity seeking behaviors

Participants

- 262 bereaved adults
- Took part in a clinical trial for Complicated Grief
- Selected based on Inventory of Complicated Grief ≥ 30
- Excluded if:
  - Current substance abuse or dependence
  - Bipolar disorder
  - Psychotic disorder
  - Imminent threat to self or others

Demographics

- Age: 52 (±15) years
- 75% Female
- 79% White
- Median time since the loss: 2.5 years (min 6 mos)

PERSON LOST:

- 34% Spouse or significant other
- 31% Parent
- 17% Child
- 18% Other relative or friend

CAUSE OF DEATH:

- 41% Prolonged Illness
- 20% Sudden Illness
- 13% Accident
- 13% Suicide

YEARNING IN SITUATIONS OF LOSS (O’CONNOR et al., 2013)

- 21 item self-report instrument
- Measures yearning across different types of losses (bereavement, romantic breakup, homesickness)

Craving in Complicated Grief Scale (Shear et al., unpublished manuscript)

- 12-item self-report
- Assesses craving in grief
- Based on addictions research
Davidson Trauma Scale (Davidson et al., 1997)
- 17-item self-report measure
- Assesses DSM-IV symptoms of PTSD
- Frequency & severity subscales
- Applied to the trauma of the loss

Grief-Related Avoidance Questionnaire (Shear et al., 2007)
- 15-item self-report instrument
- Situations bereaved individuals typically avoid

Analyses
- Structural Equation Modeling
- To examine causal relationships between the four latent constructs

Yearning Construct
- YSL10. The feeling of wanting ________ back is so strong it is indescribable.
- CCG.9 It would be difficult right now to stop longing for ________.
- CCG.11 I crave feeling like I am with ________ right now.

Emotional Pain Construct
- Three items from the Davidson Trauma Scale:
  1. Have you had any painful images, memories, or thoughts of the event?
  4. Have you been upset by something which reminded you of the event?
  17. Have you been physically upset by reminders of the event?

Approach Construct
- YSL4. I daydream about ________.
- YSL11. I like to imagine what I would do if ________ were with me.
- YSL12. I am much more engaged in a conversation if it is about ________.
- CCG.2 All I really want to do is to day dream or spend time with ________’s possessions
Avoidance Construct

- 11 items from the Grief-Related Avoidance Questionnaire were selected, e.g.
  - 1. Do you avoid visiting the final place of rest (gravesite, urn, etc.) or memorial site?
  - 3. Do you avoid looking at photographs of the person who died?
  - 7. Do you avoid rooms or places that you associate with the person who died?

The Final Model

SUMMARY

- Both yearning and emotional pain are frequent affective experiences in complicated grief.
- Yearning was strongly associated with approach behavior, whereas emotional pain to reminders of the loss was strongly associated with avoidance.
- Complicated Grief is unique among emotional disorders in containing emotions that compel both approach and avoidance behavior.