UNDERSTANDING COMPLICATED GRIEF, RESILIENCE, AND COPING SKILLS

IN AFRICAN AMERICAN WOMEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

by

Gyna M. Grant

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Philosophy

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APPROVED BY:

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ABSTRACT

Complicated grief can have an impact on the resiliency and coping skills of African American women in ways that can be damaging in their daily life routines. Research studies have focused on the female population affected by complicated grief, but none of these studies have looked specifically at the African American female population. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences and resiliency of African American women coping with complicated grief following significant loss utilizing an open-ended survey. The population for this study was African American women, living in the southern areas of Connecticut, who have experienced complicated grief after a significant loss within a 2-year timeframe. Data for this study were collected from electronic surveys that were distributed to participants after they enrolled in the study. The overwhelming majority, 35 out of the 38 participants, felt that spirituality and a relationship with God is a prominent coping skill to demonstrate resilience when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss. As indicated in the open-ended survey results, the overall common theme was established that African American women lean on their spiritual connection and relationship with God to cope with complicated grief after a significant loss and that there is a need for a safe space to express significant loss when dealing with complicated grief and to increase forms of support, interventions, and treatments in faith-based institutions. This research illuminated these experiences and added to the literature about complicated grief in this population.

Keywords: grief, complicated grief, resiliency, coping

Copyright Page

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated in loving memory to my grandmother, Pauline "Mother" C. Thomas. You were a true woman of God and a pillar of strength in my life and our family. You declared and decreed that I would be a doctor and your words of life encouraged it to be so. I still hear you praying, "How wonderful to realize the Father loves us and how faithfully he listens to our prayers. How wonderful to know that when the mountain seems too steep for us, we have no need to worry. God is there!" Thank you for loving me selflessly and sharing your wisdom, life struggles, and testimonies. I have and will continue to love and miss you to the end of days.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

Introduction

African American women have been perceived as having shifting degrees of everyday stressors, including sadness, which influence their feelings, independence, and focus (Bottomley et al., 2017). More explicitly, African American adult females show various degrees of resiliency inside their communal group, home, and work environment when affected by complicated grief (Bottomley et al., 2017). Furthermore, this specific population encounters complicated grief and its adverse consequences at higher rates than other populations (Aten et al., 2019). Researchers have sought to provide understanding of grief among the African American population and have placed emphasis on the importance of spiritual beliefs, community kinships, and generational rituals of grief as coping skills and demonstrations of resiliency (Bottomley et al., 2017). However, few empirical studies have addressed the distinct traits, values, and coping skills used, and limited attention has been given to the resiliency exhibited during complicated grief among the African American female population after a significant loss of a child, spouse, sibling, or parent (Barboza & Seedall, 2021). This disparity in research has brought about inadequate therapies and intervention methods for this population.

Bellet et al. (2018) described complicated grief as a genuine mental disorder with an extended, incapacitating, and occasionally lethal reaction. According to Aten et al. (2019), there is a 30% prevalence rate of complicated grief among the African American adult female population. In the research conducted by Crunk et al. (2017), African American women reported greater occurrences of complicated grief, with a prevalence rate of 32%, compared to their Caucasian counterparts, who have a prevalence rate of 10%. Given these differences, considering that African American adult females have a greater risk of experiencing complicated grief than

Caucasian adult females, it is essential to explore coping skills and resiliency. Understanding these phenomena may benefit other African American women who experience complicated grief and may help practitioners create interventions to help these women become more resilient. This qualitative research study can add to constructive social change by introducing explicit behaviors by which this population of African American women could be sustained while managing complicated grief.

Background

Besides the recognition of a significant loss and emotional responses, what is understood about the distinction of grief and complicated grief involves the unique differences between the two types of grief (Bellet, et al., 2018). Huggins and Hinkson (2021) defined grief as the experience and response to loss, recognition of a loss, and distress resulting from bereavement. Grief is a puzzling human experience that provokes emotional displays and communicates important information about the expresser (Delaney, 2019). Although grief is a profound experience when acknowledging a loss, complicated grief is a more intense grief that ties in multiple factors such as emotional and psychological states after a loss. Bellet et al. (2018) defined complicated grief as a serious psychological disorder with an elongated, debilitating, and sometimes life-threatening grief response. Dodd et al. (2021) found greater emotional complications among the African American female population than the Caucasian female population following a significant loss, which contributed to the maintenance of complicated grief. Fifty percent to 60% of African American women experience complicated grief after a significant loss (Bottomley et al., 2017). The effects of risks of leaving complicated grief unaddressed are severe.

Complicated grief has been linked to decreases in mental health functioning and to increases in insomnia, depression, and suicidality (Bottomley et al., 2017). Complicated grief symptoms have been shown to be associated with lower quality of life (Hirsch, 2019). Crunk et al. (2017) explained separation distress as a bereaved person means that they are experiencing yearning such as craving, pining, or longing for the deceased, as well as a physical or emotional suffering as a result of the desired but unfulfilled reunion with the deceased on a daily basis or to a disabling degree. According to Eisma and Stroebe (2021), psychologically disturbing and intrusive thoughts of the deceased repeatedly focuses the attention on negative emotions, making negative thoughts more accessible and salient; interferes with problem solving; impedes instrumental behavior; and drives away social support. Masferrer et al. (2020) described a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness as an acute, chronic sense that daily life has little worth or significance, leading to an impulsive appetite for strong physical sensations and dramatic relationship experiences. Kubler-Ross (1969) discussed having trouble accepting the reality of loss as the difficulty in effort to collect oneself and as a less radical defense in accepting that a loved one no longer exists in one's life. Crunk et al. (2017) identified the difficulty in making a life without the deceased loved one as a lack of purpose and identity apart from the significant deceased loved one. Finally, and most salient to this research, the elevated state of persistent, complicated, profound separation distress, psychologically disturbing and intrusive thoughts of the deceased, a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, trouble accepting the reality of the loss, and difficulty in making a life without the deceased loved one negatively impacts the manifestation of coping skills and the state of resiliency of among African American women (Bellet et al., 2018).

Though coping and resiliency are separate entities in the psychological literature, there is a level of collaborative cohesion when experiencing, enduring, and overcoming devastation and adversity such as grief. Coping is exhibited in many ways to help deal with and eventually overcome devastation and adversity. Sanabria (2021) defined coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific internal and external demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of an individual.

Goradel et al. (2019) defined resiliency as the ability to withstand and rebound from adversity and suggested that it is an optimistic approach to understanding an individual's experiences. Aten et al. (2019) described resiliency as the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity, or risk. In the areas of emotional stability and successful relationships in the community, workplace, or family environment, the processes and strategies used by women to cope after a loss can include isolation or an increase in their interaction with other people to avoid the reality of their loss (Rodriguez - Rey et al., 2017). While the concept of resiliency and factors that promote it have received considerable attention in previous research, few studies have examined the development and maintenance of resiliency among African Americans women when impacted by complicated grief (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2019).

The notion of strength, self-sufficiency, and resiliency among African American women is often viewed as a strict expectation to regulate strength in several dimensions of their lives when encountering adversity (Aten et al., 2019). The experience of losing a loved one due to death may be similar for all ethnicities, but African American women have distinct cultural experiences that greatly influence grief and coping, which research indicates are not often experienced by women of other cultural backgrounds (Kristensen et al., 2016). A recent study by

Johnson et al. (2019) reported the development and validation of the African American Women's Shifting Scale (AAWSS) as a measure of how African American women alter their self-presentations by shifting responses to adapt to and accommodate social expectations. They often wear metaphorical masks without conscious awareness to fit in with the perceived demands of their social surroundings to accommodate perceived African American cultural norms, including the appearance of strength and mental toughness when navigating difficult experiences. Johnson et al. (2019) noted that African American women exhibit a stronger tendency to engage in shifting behaviors, such as speaking and acting one way in professional/formal settings and speaking and acting another way in a more relaxed Afrocentric environment, as part of their individual racial identification and acculturative process. This specific concept of shifting can be construed as a special case of coping and demonstrating resiliency among African American women (Johnson et al., 2019), particularly when coping with grief or complicated grief.

African American women confronted with the undertaking of overseeing and leading the household frequently take on stressful authoritative obligations, like defender, supplier, guardian, therapist, provider, and encourager, while coping with complicated grief, which might influence different parts of their life (Barboza & Seedall, 2021). Chami and Pooley (2021) suggest there are differences between challenges and resources which are negotiated by the African American woman's capacity to coordinate functions of accomplishment, independence, and autonomy with the more customary female functions of caregiving and supporting as a standard.

McDuffie et al. (2019) recommended there are factors that impact the degree of power in view of the individual and the meaning of substantial grief. Barboza and Seedall (2021) suggested the difficult duty of overseeing and coping with complicated grief according to the viewpoint of an African American adult female. Furthermore, Barboza and Seedall (2021)

revealed the African American adult female population depends on the commonality of social and traditional understanding, which directs how to cope and oversee the life demands and pressures when influenced by complicated grief (Barboza & Seedall, 2021).

Collazzoni et al. (2016) pointed out the critical topics that influence ways of life and life perseverance of grieving women that incorporate having a consciousness of the passing of a loved one, coping skills, providing care, evolving feelings, and financial stability. Collazzoni et al. (2016) focused on the development in which the grieving individual rethinks and takes part in managing their grieving process while trying to rebuild their lives to persevere through the challenges. Family support, communal group support, and strategy and social change attempts to focus in on offering help that is necessary to cope (Collazzoni et al., 2016).

Research has indicated that a high percentage of the African American female population struggle with psychological distress such as depression, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and paranoia while grieving (Aten et al., 2019). Aten et al. (2019) explored a subgroup of African American women and how they struggled to embrace ways of demonstrating resiliency to cope with and conquer complicated grief. They discovered that the African American adult female population who had escalated positive spiritual coping skills were less discouraged than those with lower levels of positive spiritual coping skills. They analyzed the connection between mental turmoil and coping, while at the same time distinguishing the most productive coping methods to balance the impacts of the grieving experience inside the African American adult female population.

Grief is important for appreciating the value of life. Death will undoubtedly come in this world and great sorrow with it. Grief is not a feeling to be ignored or flee from, but a must to recognize and process. God's family is essential and a critical resource by which God attends to

us. God can utilize grief to support us with knowing Him more, as we embrace His peace, and as our grief encourages us to see the value in the blessing of life more completely and all the more profoundly grasp the truth of transgression. Grief can draw us closer to the Heart of God. Psalm 34:18 says that "the Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Philippians 4:6-7 affirms that God understands our anguish and pain and desires to dwell with us and comfort us with Promises from His Word and the "peace that passes all understanding" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Passing of a loved one is a definite time of grief for the bereaved, rather the hope and grace Christians possess in Christ supports us with persevering through our grief process.

Problem Statement

Researchers concentrating on grief and bereavement have focused on grief in the adult female population (Gildea, 2021), yet there continues to be a substantial gap in research with the African American adult female population. Specifically, research that examines the lived experience and resiliency of African American women over the age of 18 who are coping with complicated grief is absent from the grief research. African American women encounter complicated grief and its adverse consequences at higher rates than all other demographic groups (Aten et al., 2019). Fifty percent to 60% of African American women experience complicated grief after a significant loss (Bottomley et al., 2017). Bellet et al. (2018) showed a 30% occurrence of complicated grief encountered among the African American adult female population. Research conducted by Crunk et al. (2017) discovered that 32% of African American women encountered complicated grief, while the occurrence rate was just 12% among Caucasian women. In spite of the greater prevalence rates, Chami and Pooley (2021) have shown that there

is a higher degree of resiliency among the African American adult female population than the Caucasian adult female population.

Grief and bereavement research that does focus on African Americans does not specifically focus on African American women (Bellet et al., 2018). Researchers have investigated the anguish of grief encounters of African American relatives coping with grief because of brutality, aggression, and hostility caused by murder as well as African American mothers related to violent crimes caused by the use of guns (Bottomley et al., 2017; McNeil et al., 2017). Other studies have explored grief experiences of African Americans who have imprisoned spouses/ significant others (Burge et al., 2017). However, none of these studies address complicated grief specifically — the lived experience of grieving a significant loss, how it feels to utilize coping skills after a significant loss, and what exhibiting resilience means for African American women when experiencing complicated grief after a significant loss. Hence, the problem this research attempted to address is the substantial gap in research concentrating on African American women coping and displaying resiliency when affected by complicated grief after the passing of a loved one.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. As per Kalu (2019), grief research has disregarded the grief experience for the African American female population, except for the study of Goldsmith et al. (2018). Based on this research, these findings suggest that African American women have a greater risk of developing complicated grief compared to their Caucasian peers (Goldsmith et al., 2018).

This research examined complicated grief experienced by African American women using an open-ended survey. By pursuing this line of inquiry, the potential exists in identifying emergent themes relevant to lived experiences of the participants.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?

RQ 2: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?

RQ 3: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss?

Assumptions and Limitations of the Study

The first assumption of this study was that African American women experiencing complicated grief was willing to participate. Since grief is a private experience for many, reluctancy may exceed willingness to participate in this study by completing a questionnaire. Mouton and Southerland (2017) identified the African American female population prefers faith-based support, such as worship service, prayer, and counseling with clergy. Therefore, the participants may prefer to lean into these types of support, and some chose not to participate. The second assumption of this study was that participants answered both the screening questions and survey questions honestly. If participants answered either the screening or survey questions dishonestly, then data elicited was not identified as reliable.

This research study had two limitations. The first limitation was that although data were collected from participants associated with faith-based institutions, these institutions were not

predominantly Christian based. The second limitation of this study was that it was not generalizable. Limiting participants from one geographic location in the United States limited the ability to generalize results to represent the African American women population.

<div align="center">**Theoretical Foundations of the Study**</div>

This research study was based on resiliency theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory. According to Macdonald et al. (2018), resiliency theory generally refers to protective factors (personal, social, familial, and institutional safety nets) that enable individuals to maintain competent functioning in the face of major life stressors. According to King et al. (2019), Resiliency theory posits that resiliency occurs in three waves. The first wave is framed as identifying strengths that help people overcome adversity, the second wave as recognition that resiliency is a process for accessing resilient qualities, and the third wave as the force that drives a person to grow through adversity and disruptions (King et al., 2019). When the disruption of personal, social, familial, and/or institutional safety nets occur, traits of resiliency transpire in forms of adapting to the disruptive event to overcome adversity (Macdonald et al., 2018).

Lazarus's cognitive stress theory frames coping skills as a process. This coping process is one of following appraisal as an assessment of the possible impact of the stressor and the cognitive and behavioral efforts as resources to manage stressors and the subject impact which are grouped into five main categories: problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, social support coping, religious coping, and cognitive reframing (Traut-Mattausch et al., 2021). Aan Zomeren et al. (2019) defined problem-focused coping as thoughts and acts directed at solving the problem that will create and enact a plan to manage the stressor. According to Conte et al. (2022), emotion-focused coping attempts to manage internal emotions about the problem to maintain a response to the disruptive event. Social support coping solicits others to assist in

managing the stressor to overcome adversity (Lipp & O'Brien, 2022). According to Harris et al. (2019), religious coping is seeking help from a higher power to rationalize and understand the purpose and reality of the disruptive event that caused the stressor to manifest. Cognitive reframing is attempting to cognitively process the disruptive event to obtain a new perspective (Traut-Mattausch et al., 2021).

Relating this framework to this study allowed this researcher to better define the participants in the study, as well as provide a better understanding of resiliency and the coping skills used among the female population in the African American culture when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss, within the timeframe of two years. Resilience theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory provide greater understanding of the effective coping skills African American women may be using to promote emotional and behavioral self-regulation to overcome disruptive events that merit adjusting (Santarnecchi et al., 2018). In addition, this theoretical framework served as an outline of how emotional stability and conscientiousness influence interpersonal dynamics which provides an understanding of the connection between the degree of coping skill processes when adapting to a significant loss (Smigelsky et al., 2020). Resilience theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory have been previously utilized to conceptualize how people cope with and exhibit resiliency in the face of grief (Santarnecchi et al., 2018). However, these theories have not been utilized to help conceptualize the experiences of African American women who have complicated grief. Therefore, this study extends their use in the grief literature.

Definition of Terms

The following is a list of definitions of terms that are used in this study.

Belief Perseverance

Belief perseverance is the tendency to cling to one's initial belief even after receiving new information that contradicts or disconfirms the basis of that belief (Taylor et al., 2019). This tendency encourages the cognitive processing of rationalization of adaptive functioning (Taylor et al., 2019).

Complicated Grief

Complicated grief is characterized by a state of persistent grieving reflected in profound separation distress, psychologically disturbing and intrusive thoughts of the deceased, a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, trouble accepting the reality of the loss, and difficulty in making a life without the deceased loved one (Kalu, 2019).

Coping

Lee et al. (2017) define coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific internal and external demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of an individual.

Emotion Focused Coping

Emotion-focused coping influences the social context in the development of coping mechanisms to manage stress, which is seen as an internal productive way to manage external stress (Xin et al., 2021). According to Huggins et al. (2020), emotion-focused coping requires the individual to cognitively distract oneself from stressors and reduce the level of stress.

Grief Response Manifestation Domains

Grief responses are divided into four domains. Lorraine (2022), identified social, physical, emotional, and cognitive domains, which affect the grieving process and support a griever's ability to function when encountering grief. According to Piazza-Bonin et al. (2015),

within the social domain of grief responses, African American women demonstrate withdrawal behavior and are likely to decline invitations to participate in social or community events. In regard to the physical domain of grief responses, Lorraine (2022) found that individuals were extremely stressed from loss, which resulted in health conditions such as hypertension, severe migraines, and other acute or chronic diseases. Within the cognitive domain, cognitive function is significantly disrupted in the perception of stimulus and cognitive abilities (Liu et al., 2021). In regard to the emotional domain of grief responses, emotional distress is evident, but African American women struggle to openly exhibit levels of emotional distress. These levels are associated with an ability to perform daily roles, based on symptoms of guilt, sadness, fear, anger, shock, denial, and depression they experience from their loss (Matthews et al., 2021).

Manifestation of Grief Responses

Khang et al. (2020) characterized grief responses as an intense emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physiological response that might continue for months or years, or even fail to resolve as a result of the encountered experience of grief.

Perseverance

Perseverance is the sustained attempt to continue with life activities despite the presence of pain (Stensland, 2021).

Problem Focused Coping

Problem-focused coping aims at problem solving or doing something to alter the perceived stress by managing situations to mitigate stress when it occurs (Delaney, 2019). According to Huggins et al. (2020), problem-focused coping requires the individual to identify the stressor and then generate an alternative solution by balancing benefits and consequences of responding to or escaping the stress.

Provisional Aspects of Coping with Grief

There are provisions to help bereaved individuals manage the process of complicated grief, such as treatments, interventions, and supports (Harrop et al., 2020). The most prevalent and important form of treatment, intervention, and support for African American women is spirituality (Harris et al., 2019). Within the African American community, spirituality serves as a protective factor and a survival strategy for triumphing over adversity, such as grief, while developing positive social bonds (Sigurvinsdottir et al., 2020). According to Choi and Hastings (2019), religious institutions have occupied an important position in the African American community, and studies have reported that a majority of African Americans are affiliated with a religious denomination.

Resiliency

According to Barboza and Seedall (2021), resiliency is the dynamic and protective process that reduces individual maladjustment during difficult experiences and unfavorable conditions. Affect regulation, self-efficacy, optimism, finding meaning in challenging circumstances, and social support are all factors that contribute to one's demonstration of resiliency (Zheng et al., 2020).

Significance of the Study

This study's significance lies in the intention of addressing an identified gap in the literature that focused specifically on the resiliency and coping skills used among the female population in the African American culture when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss, within the timeframe of two years.

The U.S. Census Bureau (2022) reported that 65% of African American females outlive African American males. This data suggests that a study regarding grief, coping skills, and

resiliency could potentially assist in improving mental health states for African American women by having a better understanding of how African American women perceive and cope with grief differently than their non-African American peers. The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experiences and resiliency of African American women coping with complicated grief following significant loss. This research is significant because of its potential to improve future approaches and support for grief therapy when working with African American women, as well as to add awareness and understanding of the distinct traits, values, and uniqueness of coping skills and demonstrations of resiliency when impacted with grief after a significant loss, within the timeframe of two years, among the African American adult female population.

Summary

Chapter one outlined the study problem and gaps in research about complicated grief in African American women. In an effort to address the gap in research about the lived experience of African American women, this study's purpose and research questions were posed. This chapter also provided a brief rationale of the study's significance and outlined study assumptions, limitations, theoretical foundation of this study, and key terms. In addition, this chapter provided the theoretical foundation for this study, based on resiliency theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory. In Chapter 2, the literature review, an empirical literature review will be presented to provide an overview of the key concepts related to this study's topic.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Complicated grief is defined as chronic, exaggerated, and/or masked grief that is exhibited through the difficult process of bereavement (Eisma & Stroebe, 2021). Individuals face many difficulties when trying to cope with complicated grief. Complicated grief can impair psychological and emotional stability, which can contribute to poor daily life functioning among individuals (Wilson et al., 2022). According to Matthews et al. (2021), 10% to 15% of bereaved individuals who experienced complicated grief struggled with the inability to carry out normal daily routines, such as hygiene maintenance, sleeping, getting dressed, and preparing meals. These negative effects can impair social and personal functioning, thus decreasing an individual's ability to manage daily living demands after a significant loss. Various grief reactions that can negatively affect a person's ability to manage daily routines include depression, anxiety, PTSD, and physical illness (Keser & Isiki, 2022).

Although some researchers have sought to provide understanding of grief among African Americans, there are limited empirical studies that address all aspects of complicated grief. Complicated grief involves an ongoing heightened state of mourning that keeps individuals from healing (Aoyama et al., 2021). In complicated grief, over an extensive length of time, the painful emotions and feelings of loss are severe and debilitating at times, making it difficult to accept the loss and resume living without the loved one (Hirsch, 2019). Prior research placed emphasis on the importance of spiritual beliefs, community kinships, and generational rituals of grief as coping skills and demonstrations of resiliency (Hamilton et al., 2018). However, few empirical studies have addressed distinct traits, values, and coping skills of African American women. There has also been limited attention given to the state of resiliency exhibited during the

complicated grief process among the African American female population (Pabon & Basile, 2021). Given the disparities between African American women and the general population, it is important to examine the common coping skills and the states of resiliency that African American women exhibit when they are impacted by complicated grief. The discussion of resiliency and coping skills will focus on the employment of cognitive and behavioral efforts to minimize, tolerate, or adjust in order to manage daily living demands related to complicated grief.

Description of Search Strategy

The databases used for this literature review were PsycARTICLES, PsycINFO, and SAGE Premier. The keywords for the research of this study were resiliency, grief, complicated grief, coping, emotion-focused coping, emotional disturbance, manifestations of grief responses, perseverance, brief perseverance, prolonged grief disorder, and problem-focused coping. The reviewed articles used in this study were English-language only, peer-reviewed journals published between 2017 and 2022. Biblical resources include The King James Version Holy Bible, Bible concordances, and peer-reviewed journals published between 2017 and 2022. The concerns and difficulties that were reviewed were resiliency, perseverance, belief perseverance, grief, specific manifestations of grief responses, grief response domains, provisional aspects, coping, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and the conceptual framework of resiliency theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory.

Review of Literature

Relationship Between Complicated Grief, Depression, and Stress

Complicated grief (persistent complex bereavement disorder) affects the bereaved who have lost a significant loved one to death for longer spans of time than grief (Kalu, 2019). As a

result of complicated grief, the bereaved may exhibit symptoms of isolation such as avoiding social contacts, suicidal ideations such as thoughts and desires to have died rather than the deceased loved one, and diminished quality of life (Crunk et al., 2017). Although complicated grief and depression overlap, treatment and interventions are unique to each disorder. Unlike depression, complicated grief has an effect on the brain once the event of grief has been initiated. LeRoy et al. (2019) conducted a study and found that participants with complicated grief felt pain upon presentation of grief-related stimuli, which activated neurocognitive mechanisms for reward processing to yearn for their deceased loved one. Lee et al. (2021) found that complicated grief can stimulate the amygdala, causing avoidance behaviors, thus explaining why complicated grief prolongs avoiding the acceptance of the loss of a loved one.

Depression is a disorder that starts in the brain due to the imbalance of neurotransmitters, and involves exhibiting extreme sadness, which is a symptom of complicated grief (Matthew & Panonnummal, 2022). Although depression can impact people from all walks of life, mental health is often stigmatized in the Black community, and cultural habits and/or historical experiences can cause depression to be expressed and addressed differently among Black women (Walton & Oyewuwo-Gassikia, 2017). Data published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) revealed that 7.6% of African American women sought treatment for depression compared to 13.6% of the general female population in 2011. Depression is not only treated at lower rates in the African American community, particularly among African American women, but of those who do receive treatment, many do not receive adequate treatment. Matthew and Panonnummal (2022) found African American women had lower rates of use of depression care compared to Caucasian women.

Boelen and Lenferink (2020) conducted a study exploring bereavement and complicated grief symptoms among subjects without a history of coronary heart disease at the time of a first acute coronary syndrome to evaluate the relationship of complicated grief symptoms and found the loss of a close relative and the severity of complicated grief symptoms are associated with poorer health status. They are also at increased risk of negative physical outcomes, including cardiovascular disease, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, hypertension, diabetes, and pancreatic cancer (Spillane et al., 2017). According to the CDC (2021), African American women have 45% higher hypertension rates than Caucasian women. According to Taylor et al. (2019), stress can cause hypertension through repeated blood pressure elevations as well as by stimulation of the nervous system to produce large amounts of vasoconstricting hormones that increase blood pressure. Factors affecting blood pressure through stress include job strain, race, social environment, and emotional distress (Hines et al., 2020).

Key Concepts

Many essential factors contribute to individuals' rationalization when processing grief and their experience coping with complicated grief. Cognitive processing, physiological symptoms, social behaviors, environmental influences, and emotional expressions are five elements of the rationalization of processing grief (Lechner-Meichsner et al., 2022). According to Lechner-Meichsner et al. (2022), these five components support gaining an understanding of the normative responses of African American women—throughout their lifespan—significantly associated with complicated grief. The way individuals cope with complicated grief depends upon the nature of the grief and other personal, sociological factors. Generally, a person's ability to cope with grief depends on their personality and the significance of the grief but coping with complicated grief is often more difficult.

Complicated grief involves an ongoing heightened state of mourning that keeps individuals from healing. Lorraine (2022) identified factors that influence a person's intense levels of grief. Stressors on the bereaved, such as multiple significant losses within a short period of time, increase intensity levels. Other factors also influence levels of grief, for example, the nature of the relationship the bereaved had with the deceased, such as the strength and security level of attachment, as well as financial dependencies, and circumstances surrounding the death, such as natural causes, accidental death, suicide, or homicide. Pabon and Basile (2021) provided a more focused analysis of grief and found that the population of African American women relied on the familiarity of developing or replicating behaviors based on the expectations and observations of others. Other factors that impact the lifestyle and life endurance of grieving African American females include coping skills, caregiving, changing feelings, and financial (Huggins & Hinkson, 2021).

Complicated Grief

Complicated grief is characterized by a state of persistent grieving reflected in profound separation distress, psychologically disturbing and intrusive thoughts of the deceased, a sense of emptiness and meaninglessness, trouble accepting the reality of the loss, and difficulty in making a life without the deceased loved one (Kalu, 2019). Those who suffer from complicated grief are confronted with a variety of challenges with psychological distress leaving them at substantial risk for mental health problems (Metzger et al., 2021). Those who suffer from depression and post-traumatic stress are at risk for co-occurring mental and physical health problems, including high mortality, cancer, heart trouble, high blood pressure, suicidal ideation, and changes in eating habits (Aoyama et al., 2021; Lund, 2021).

Cognitive behavioral conceptualizations of complicated grief suggest that negative cognitions play a core role in the development and persistence of emotional problems after bereavement because they generate negative emotions and cause mourners to engage in counterproductive attempts to avoid the implications and the pain of the loss (Liu et al., 2021). Such bereavement experiences have resulted in deep emotional, psychological, physical, social, and spiritual suffering for countless survivors in the wake of a death (Eisma & Stroebe, 2021). These survivors are left severely disabled by complicated grief symptoms (e.g., profound separation distress, and an inability to accept the loss) that have been linked to long-term physical and mental health problems, suicidality, and early mortality (Eisma & Stroebe, 2021).

Recent studies indicate that the grief experience of African Americans may differ from their Caucasian counterparts in a number of important ways (Bottomley et al., 2017). Approximately 10% of the Caucasian bereaved population suffers from an extended, debilitating, and sometimes life-threatening grief response known as complicated grief (Kalu, 2019). A study by Goldman et al. (2008) found that African Americans have a higher prevalence of complicated grief (32%) than their Caucasian counterparts (12%). Furthermore, the African American female population that dealt with multifaceted forms of grief increased from 27% to 50% during the decade of 2005-2015 (Huberty et al., 2020). African Americans exhibited negative bereavement complications from complicated grief at higher rates than the general population, and thus are more likely to be at risk during grieving (Bottomley et al., 2017). Despite its importance, bereavement researchers have largely ignored the grief experience for African Americans (Bottomley et al., 2017).

Resiliency

Although coping with complicated grief is difficult, individuals who exhibit behaviors of resiliency can initiate healing during trying times. Huggins and Hinkson (2022) identified behaviors of resiliency as the bereaved individual reconnecting and embracing social supports, finding a sense of purpose in life, connecting to one's spirituality, and maintaining both physical health and daily living routines, such as sleeping, eating healthy, and hygiene upkeep. Lassiter and Poteat (2020) examined the relationship between psychological distress and coping, and they identified the most efficient coping strategies to mediate the intensified effects of the grief experience among a particular subset of African American women. African American women who had intensive, positive religious coping skills were less depressed than those with lower levels of positive religious coping skills. Individuals who treat grief as a process will be more likely to endure through a given difficulty (Huggins & Hinkson, 2022).

According to Barboza and Seedall (2021), resiliency is the dynamic and protective process that reduces individual maladjustment during difficult experiences and unfavorable conditions. Affect regulation, self-efficacy, optimism, finding meaning in challenging circumstances, and social support are all factors that contribute to one's demonstration of resiliency (Zheng et al., 2020). The endurance and resilience of African American women depends upon their desire and potential to develop insight, knowledge, and understanding from experiencing hardships (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015). Hampton-Anderson et al. (2022) identified four aspects of resiliency among African American women: survival, identity, self-expression, and the conceptualization of empowerment as an inward reflection as opposed to an outward action. In the face of such stressors, African American women have also historically been perceived as particularly resilient. This resiliency stems from a shared sense of identity, a unique

pattern of coping strategies, and an increased sociopolitical awareness. African American women exhibit resilience while struggling with a high degree of caretaking responsibility and internalizing the need to exhibit strength as a catalyst for increasing goal-focused behavior, independence, and enhancing moral character (Hampton-Anderson et al., 2022).

Additionally, African American women maintain a state of resiliency while demonstrating adaptive functioning in an attempt to secure a survival mode foundation, despite their challenging circumstances (Briscoe, 2022). Adaptive functioning refers to the skills necessary to function and participate in everyday activities, such as communication, social interaction, and self-help when affected by personal and environmental contributors, such as a bereavement experience (Alvis et al., 2022). Together with adaptive functioning, Gildea (2021) defined the survival mode foundation as a state of emerging from trauma, including fear, sadness, anger, stress and anxiety, and decreased self-worth by demonstrating stamina and perseverance while encountering distress. Adaptive functioning helps people form a survival mode foundation, which is essential for the process of coping with complicated grief.

Resilience is the skill to maintain a psychological equilibrium after or during exposure to negative and stressful events improving personal resources and growth to rebound from misfortune, hardship, and trauma (Barboza & Seedall, 2021). Research has been conducted on resilience and has focused primarily on developmental psychology of children and adolescents. In an analysis of resilience, a sense of self, determination, and pro-social attitudes emerged as the defining attributes of resilience (Barasa et al., 2018). There is limited research that speaks to the resilience of African American women impacted by complicated grief.

Perseverance

  An essential element of resiliency is perseverance. Perseverance is the sustained attempt to continue with life activities despite the presence of pain (Stensland, 2021). Love et al. (2021) found that resilient individuals work to achieve various goals, which is an important component of adaptive functioning. The exhibition of perseverance behaviors provides greater understanding of the reasons people push themselves to keep going and to increase their ability to cope with their pain (Stensland, 2021).

  African American women often struggle with perseverance because they are more likely to blame themselves for traumatic events than African American men (Briscoe, 2022). African American women often view themselves and the world in a negative light, which potentially affects their beliefs in their ability to succeed (Dixon et al., 2020). Therefore, African American women are more likely to persevere if they shift their effective cognitive structures that direct and regulate behavioral processes to emphasize the importance of family and community, where they feel a sense of pride (Walker, 2018).

Belief Perseverance

  Belief perseverance is the tendency to cling to one's initial belief even after receiving new information that contradicts or disconfirms the basis of that belief. This tendency encourages the cognitive processing of rationalization of adaptive functioning (Taylor et al., 2019). Belief is a powerful tool that can determine one's foundation of stability or instability (Harris et al., 2019). Taylor et al. (2019) explained three psychological processes that underlie belief perseverance: the availability heuristics in deciding what is most likely to happen, illusory correlation in seeing or remembering more confirming cases and fewer disconfirming cases than really exists, and data distortions in confirming cases that are inadvertently created and

disconfirming cases that are ignored. African American women exhibit perseverance in the form of belief perseverance through their ability to hold onto their beliefs based on self-impressions and social impressions (Johnson et al., 2019).

The values that have been instilled in African American women throughout generations cause them to revert to the familiar practice of perseverance, while relying on their foundation of belief (Johnson et al., 2019). Although adverse circumstances arise, African American women tend to find the strength to resist a defeated response to a traumatic event, which evolves and develops their psychological processing into a unique perspective on life (Dixon et al., 2020). African American women believe that their survival depends on the obligation to manifest strength, suppress emotions, succeed, help others, and resist being vulnerable or dependent (Johnson et al., 2019).

Manifestation of Grief Responses

In response to a loss, grief can manifest as acute and/or complicated grief. Williams et al. (2021) defined grief as the experience of a person who is responding to a death and the distress resulting from bereavement. Khang et al. (2020) characterized grief responses as an intense emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physiological response that might continue for months or years, or even fail to resolve as a result of the encountered experience of grief. Lorraine (2022) defined acute grief as the initial response to a loss, which is a mixture of separation and traumatic distress. Zakarian (2019) defined complicated grief as a debilitating syndrome that is comprised of symptoms that interfere with adaptation and reengagement in life after bereavement.

The manifestations of grief are often difficult for the grievers and those around them to understand and control. It is important for grievers to know the form of their grief—acute and/or complicated. This knowledge is as important for the grieving process as the acceptance that a

person is in a state of grief (Zarkarian et al., 2019). Piazza-Bonin et al. (2015) discussed grieving as an interpersonal process between the griever and their social environment. African American women often internalize the way others perceive their grief and worry that their responses might not fit societal expectations (Ivanova et al., 2022). This leads to the women feeling guilty and ashamed of having exhibited any grief, losing trust in others, isolating themselves, and silencing their needs, thoughts, and emotions (Pabon & Basile, 2021). If an individual who is grieving does not understand their grief and/or is worried about the ways others perceive their grief, it will be more difficult for them to cope and be resilient during the grieving process (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2015).

Grief Response Manifestation Domains

Grief responses are divided into four domains. Lorraine (2022) identified social, physical, emotional, and cognitive domains, which affect the grieving process and support a griever's ability to function when encountering grief. According to Piazza-Bonin et al. (2015), within the social domain of grief responses, African American women demonstrate withdrawal behavior and are likely to decline invitations to participate in social or community events. In regard to the physical domain of grief responses, Lorrraine (2022) found that individuals were extremely stressed from loss, which resulted in health conditions such as hypertension, severe migraines, and other acute or chronic diseases. According to Huberty et al. (2020), a higher percentage of grieving African American women had changes in appetite and weight, sleep disturbances, and more severe health problems than grieving Caucasian women. Acute and chronic stress, irrespective of the source, can also decrease immune system functioning and increase vulnerability to disease and infection (Raj, 2020). Within the cognitive domain, cognitive function is significantly disrupted in the perception of stimulus and cognitive abilities (Liu et al.,

2021). Tiwari and Deshppande (2020) found that 10-15% of African American women impacted by complicated grief experience prolonged intrusive thoughts, forgetfulness, and preoccupation with grief-related memories.

Emotions serve as an adaptive function to ensure human welfare and survival, which influence attitudes, behaviors, and affect what people notice and remember (Hill et al., 2021). In regard to the emotional domain of grief responses, emotional distress is evident, but African American women struggle to openly exhibit levels of emotional distress. These levels are associated with an ability to perform daily roles, based on symptoms of guilt, sadness, fear, anger, shock, denial, and depression they experience from their loss (Matthews et al., 2021). Difficulties in the ability to effectively express emotions and regulate emotional responses have been found to predict PTSD, chronic worry, and generalized anxiety disorder (Baumann et al., 2022).

African American women often use emotion-focused coping strategies including ruminative, avoidant, or confronting coping strategies, which play a crucial role in the effectiveness of emotion regulation as a coping mechanism (Augustine et al., 2022). Therefore, African Americans are compelled to adopt an orientation that the loss is too painful. They are likely to believe that their future is limited, which increases their feelings of hopelessness and is more likely to cause psychological distress (Sigurvinsdottir et al., 2020). Although emotion-focused coping strategies are important means of coping for African American information, there is limited additional research concerning these coping strategies.

Provisional Aspects of Coping with Grief

There are provisions to help bereaved individuals manage the process of complicated grief, such as treatments, interventions, and supports (Harrop et al., 2020). The most prevalent

and important form of treatment, intervention, and support for African American women is spirituality (Liu et al., 2021). There is a higher degree of religious participation among African American women than European American women (Rogowska et al., 2020). Religious coping and spirituality influence the psychological well-being of African Americans (McDuffie et al., 2019).

Within the African American community, spirituality serves as a protective factor and a survival strategy for triumphing over adversity, such as grief, while developing positive social bonds (Richardson et al., 2022). According to Choi and Hastings (2019), religious institutions have occupied an important position in the African American community, and studies have reported that most African Americans are affiliated with a religious denomination. African American women utilize church as a forum to promote a sense of community, provide positive role models, and provide an outlet for shared experiences into a new identity (Choi & Hastings, 2019). Religion plays such a large role in the African American community because it facilitates discussion about issues of oppression, quest for liberation, love, hope, and justice; having a venue for such discussion plays a key role in the process of grief for African American women (Eisma & Stroebe, 2021). Relying on religious coping and spirituality is a central coping strategy for African Americans, particularly for women dealing with grief and adversity (Wilt et al., 2019).

Social Supports

Social support is an available resource to provide emotional care in one's time of need (Funk et al., 2017). The pain of grief can often cause a person to want to withdraw from others, but support of others is vital to healing from loss of a loved one, which is key against isolation (Bottomley et al., 2017). According to Reime et al. (2022), social supports provide the bereaved

with an opportunity to find support, comfort, and encouragement in their grief. The benefit of

social support improves the ability to cope, alleviate the effects of emotional distress, and

promote positive mental health (Delaney, 2019).

Emotional support is a protective factor in health, the absence of which predicts mortality

and morbidity and is critical to achieving and sustaining complex behaviors for chronic disease

management and healthy lifestyles (Tofthagen et al., 2017). White et al. (2022) found that those

who rarely or never received emotional support were 4.1 times more likely to report mental

distress and 6.8 to exhibit depressive symptoms than those who have received emotional support

during the time of grieving. Emotional support often provides reassurance and understanding to

those who are experiencing grief or mental distress (Chooljian et al., 2019).

Coping Styles

Coping is an essential factor in the process of healing from grief. Lee et al. (2017)

defined coping as the cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage specific internal and external

demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of an individual. In an effort to

cope with their grief, African American women develop, grow, and learn the ways to redefine

and differentiate their sense of self in relation to their concerns and feelings for others as a way

to minimize the intensity of their grief (Briscoe, 2022). According to the theoretical construct of

John Henryism Active Coping (JHAC), poor African American women who are confronted with

limited economic resources and chronic psychosocial stressors believe that hard work and self-

determination are required to cope with and overcome adversities (Sullivan et al., 2018).

Coping is the natural counterpart to stress, which generally refers to the person's efforts

to anticipate and respond to challenging or troublesome conditions (Rodríguez-Rey et al., 2017).

There are two major styles of coping (Briscoe, 2022). One is to alter the situation that is causing

the stress through problem-focused coping, which consists of attempts to deal with the source of the stress by changing the environment either by direct actions or by changing one's behavior, such as active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, or seeking instrumental social support (Schoenmakers et al., 2017). The second style of coping is to regulate emotions to reduce emotional distress through emotion-focused coping, which consists of seeking emotional social support, positive reinterpretation, acceptance, denial, or turning to religion (Webber et al., 2018).

According to Li et al. (2019), emotion-focused strategies are focused on internal emotional states, which are more likely to occur in situations in which an appraisal determines that nothing can be done to modify a harmful, challenging, or threatening environmental condition. Therefore, emotion-focused coping is directed toward altering the emotional response to a stressful situation (Li et al., 2019). In contrast, problem-focused strategies alter the stressor by direct action, which is more likely when environmental conditions are assessed as being able to change (van Zomeren, 2019). Although the African American population utilizes emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies, in comparison to the general population, problem-focused coping strategies of African Americans were significantly lower than emotion-focused coping strategies, such as denial and venting (Baumann et al., 2022). Following is a more-detailed discussion of the two coping styles.

Problem-focused Coping

Problem-focused coping is the first of two coping styles (Li, et al., 2019), although African Americans sometimes are hesitant to rely on this form of coping (Briscoe, 2022). Problem-focused coping is the more direct and aggressive way to manage stress and is influenced by the social context in the development of managing stress (Zara, 2020). Problem-

focused coping aims at problem solving or doing something to alter the perceived stress by managing situations to mitigate stress when it occurs (Delaney, 2019). According to Huggins et al. (2020), problem-focused coping requires the individual to identify the stressor and then generate an alternative solution by balancing benefits and consequences of responding to or escaping the stress. It is important for an individual to have a sense of control in finding a resolution to a problem because then the individual is more likely to have a positive emotional outcome (Zara, 2020).

Along these same lines, Sullivan et al. (2018) found that active coping identifies the stressor and attempts to minimize an adverse outcome by managing or changing a situation constructively, which also supports a sense of control over the issue. Active coping provides the individual the opportunity to examine a hardship and grants psychological freedom to make choices that lead to productive conclusions (Kline, 2018). Planning requires the individual to actively participate in cognitive processing to develop a strategy to reduce stress (Pfeffer & Strobach, 2018). Developing a guideline unifying purpose, direction, and effort affords coping skills to aid in managing decisions and outcomes (Mengo et al., 2021). Suppression of competing activities affords the individual the power to avoid approaching challenges to manage stressors (Hansen & Ghafoori, 2017). Stifling participation in competing activities to constrict involvement allows opportunity to focus on managing stressors to identify resolve (Hagger et al., 2017).

Restraint coping delays action to ensure a resolve until an appropriate opportunity is presented to effectively manage the stressor (Lovell & Gaszka, 2018). The sense of control to regulate the stressor solicits empowerment (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018). Seeking social support for instrumental reasons is seeking advice, assistance, or information for getting moral support,

sympathy, or understanding (Hansen & Ghafoori, 2017). The tendency to seek out social support

lends to an individual's insecurities as a result of a stressful event to foster a manifestation of a

community presence (Hagger et al., 2017).

African American woman often do not exhibit problem-focused coping because

they are concerned about the ways such forms of coping could be perceived by the

society in which they live (Harris et al., 2019; Xin et al., 2021). Briscoe (2022) suggested

that one reason some African American women tend to minimize the severity of their

adversity is to reduce the possibilities of being labeled insane or incompetent. However,

these attempts to minimize psychological disorder labeling can result in debilitating

behaviors such as smoking, drinking, drug use, and overeating, which can cause

damaging health problems such as heart disease, cancer, and obesity (Delaney, 2019).

Emotion-focused Coping

The second coping style is emotion-focused coping. Seeking social support is a coping

strategy related to emotion-focused coping. Social support can act as a buffer against the

physiological and psychological effects of stress, but it can also protect against potential stress

on a daily basis without apparent stressors (Finkelstein-Fox et al., 2018). The perception or belief

that emotional support is available appears to be a much stronger influence on mental health than

the actual receipts of social support (Rodríguez-Rey et al., 2017). Mueller et al. (2021) regarded

positive reinterpretation as a type of emotion-focused coping aimed at managing distressed

emotions rather than at dealing with the stressor. Managing distress emotions presents a process

blueprint that supports being able to understand and manage the specific stressor (Hansen &

Ghafoori, 2017). Acceptance acknowledges the reality of a stressful situation with the attempt to

deal with the situation (Mueller et al., 2021). Acceptance does not eliminate the existence of the

stressor, but it provides opportunity for the individual to embrace the responsibility to respond in a positive manner (Perzow et al., 2018). Denial is refusing to accept or believe that the stressor exists or is real (Edelstein et al., 2022). Denying the reality of the event or situation of a stressor can impede coping later (Hagger et al., 2017). An individual might turn to religion when dealing with a stressor for widely varying reasons such as serving as a source of emotional support or as a tactic of active coping with a stressor (Aten et al., 2019). The tendency to turn to religion in times of stress is to gain an understanding of the execution, purpose, presence, and resolve of the stressor (Park et al., 2018). African American females rely on emotion-focused coping more often than the general population. Rogowska et al. (2020) found that the African American female population was more likely to utilize emotion-focused coping through confiding in a friend or applying spiritual beliefs to desensitize forms of burden. African American women use emotion-focused coping strategies to handle their internal state, while adapting to the stressor without altering it (Allen et al., 2019). Emotion-focused coping influences the social context in the development of coping mechanisms to manage stress, which is seen as an internal productive way to manage external stress (Xin et al., 2021). Individuals tend to utilize emotion-focused coping to regulate their emotional state in correlation with five stages of the Kubler-Ross grief model. This model explains the emotions attached to denial, bargaining, anger, depression, and acceptance (Bregman, 2019). According to Huggins et al. (2020), emotion-focused coping requires the individual to cognitively distract oneself from stressors and reduce the level of stress. According to Zara (2020), this broad-ranged coping strategy aims at controlling and regulating the emotional impact of a circumstance by managing the emotions tied to the negative psychological distress level in connection to the traumatic event.

There is potential to utilize both problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping strategies solely or simultaneously, depending on the personality of the individual and the effect of the traumatic event. Generally, problem-focused coping is utilized when the individual perceives potential control and will confront the source of the stressor, while developing a plan to change the impact of the traumatic event (Delaney, 2019). On the other hand, emotion-focused coping is used in situations that are perceived to be uncontrollable, such as a suicide, homicide, or accidental death (Xin et al., 2021). Baumann (2022) found that women who utilize both problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping are likely to be more optimistic during the process of coping.

Biblical Foundations of the Study

Circumstances that manifest grief can happen unexpectedly. Since Genesis 3, human lives have been set apart by the truth of brokenness and grief in the midst of magnificence (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Death is many times the catalyst for grief. Amidst the time of grief, God is concerned for His creation and understands our grief and extends grace by remaining close and providing comfort with guarantees from His Word. Psalm 34:18 says that "the LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). God is so concerned for people to have purpose and belong that He has made provision for us to never be lonely, but always belong because they are heirs to the Throne and Kingdom of God. In Hebrew 13:5, assurance is given that He will never leave us, nor forsake us (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017) and John 14:16 affirms that after the Resurrection of Jesus, God will provide another Helper, that He may be with His people forever (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Ecclesiastes 3:1-4 provides biblical evidence the realization and confirmation that

everything does have a season, including the death of a significant loved one (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017).

The Five Stages of Grief is a theory that provides a foundational understanding that humans go through five unmistakable stages after the loss of a loved one. The theory identifies the five stages as denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969). Jesus provided an exemplar example of supporting a loved one as they are walking in their season of loss/grief. John 11:20 -35 states that at the point when Jesus saw Martha and Mary sobbing, and the Jews who had shown up with her likewise sobbing, he was profoundly moved in His soul and grieved (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Jesus asked, "Where have you laid him?" When Jesus was brought to the deceased, He wept (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). The majority of human beings have been near somebody who has strolled through misery or the departure of a friend or family member. The profound love and care for the individual to be able to move on poses struggle with experiencing complicated grief (Lee et al., 2021). Human nature is to try to rapidly "tackle" the issue, searching for answers for issues and anything that will assist with reducing the aggravation and sooth their spirits. However, their own grief, thoughts, and emotions over their torment causes confusion on how to assist (Lechner-Meichsner et al., 2022).

Christians hold two very different perspectives on the topic of perseverance. The first is the Arminian perspective, which holds that sincere Christians have the ability to stray from God and give up (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). This fits with the idea of salvation, which places man's free will at its core which follows logically that since a person's free will decision determines whether or not a person will be saved, the individual could subsequently decide to reject God and therefore forfeit one's salvation. The Bible unmistakably teaches that when one

comes to the assurance and faith in Christ, the individual is born again by the Holy Spirit

(Verster, 2019). Each individual who has been born again is secure in their eternal state and will

not fail. Philippians 1:6 states ~~us~~ that "He who began a good work in you will bring it to

completion at the day of Jesus" Christ (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Jesus proclaimed the

foundational doctrine of perseverance in John 6:37-399 "all that the Father gives me will come to

me" and "I shall lose none of them that he has given me" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). The

individual enduring in godly spiritual discipline will bring blessings in the midst of hardship and

tribulations. God blesses His creation more abundantly as perseverance is demonstrated in the

Christian walk, which gives us greater endurance to continuously persevere (Robinson-Edwards

& Kewley, 2018).

Exhibiting the ability to adjust to difficult life circumstances and pull through adversity is

a sign of resiliency (Barasa et al., 2018). In the face of tragedy, catastrophe, or other major life

events, resiliency is the ability to recover from difficulty and carry on (Barboza & Seedall,

2021). Being resilient does not imply that a person is unaffected by or unconcerned with the

change in their life. Resiliency is the capacity of the human heart to endure suffering and learn

from it. The Bible provides many examples of resiliency. For instance, The Book of Ruth

provides an example of loss, resiliency, and the God's Provision. Ruth 1:1-22 tells us of the

difficult life circumstance of Naomi, Ruth, and Orpah's significant loss of their husbands and

Naomi's sons (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). These three ladies endure the burden of

complicated grief losing their loved ones, needing a place to live, and continuing to live in the

midst of basic daily life demands such as eating. In Ruth 2:2, Ruth exhibits resiliency when she

told Naomi "Let me now go to the field and glean ears of corn after him (Boaz) in whose sight I

shall find grace" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Ruth refused to succumb to the burden of grief and sorrow.

Philippians 3:13-14 mandates to forget the things which are behind reach forth to the things that are ahead and to press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Overcoming difficulty and persevering in the midst of tribulation requires faith in God (Verster, 2019). When life presents in a manner to be spinning out of control, faith is the root that manifests resiliency (Howard-Snyder & McKaughan, 2022). 2 Corinthians 4:8-9 mandates, "That though we are press hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Paul encourages the people of Corinth that difficulty is not the result of an ending, but an opportunity for faith to be manifested through the actions of resiliency.

Accepting sorrowful life events that manifest is difficult. Grief can impact the degree of suffering based on one's perspective and ability to cope (Choi & Hastings, 2019). According to Chami and Pooley (2021), coping is an attempt to reduce and/or diminish distress, sorrow, or pain associated with traumatic experiences. In John 16:33, Jesus reminds us that we will have troubles in this world, but to be encouraged because He has overcome the world (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Understanding the God's design for His creation contributes to the effectiveness of coping. Having hope in God directs the viewpoint of tragedy, grief, and sorrow.

Grief is personal and complex which presents opportunity for support (Yoo, 2021). Giving support or assisting others can help them in coping with a range of physical, emotional, and social issues. Friends, family, neighbors, support groups, and religious organizations are all sources of social support that are beneficial in stressful situations (Koopmans et al., 2021). An

element of the purpose God has for His creation is to be communal human beings. God makes it clear in Genesis 2:18 that "It is not good for man to be alone" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Social support and helping one another has been a focus for human being since the beginning of time. Proverbs 27:17 states that "iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). James 5:16 instructs to "pray one for another, that we may be healed because the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017).

Such hope in God when enduring sorrow, pain, and anguish reveals coping mechanisms to process the reality that a loved one has transitioned to eternity (Krause & Pargament, 2018). God also understood sorrow here on earth (Lundmark, 2019). John 11:35 states that Jesus wept when he received word that his friend Lazarus died (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Jesus's heart was heavy, but he understood God's design and opportunity for faith to be restored among the loved ones of Lazarus. The reasons of trials and tribulations may never be understood on this side of Heaven, but David reminds God's creation in Psalm 46:1 that "God is our refuge, our strength, and is a very present help in the time of trouble" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). In Matthew 28:20, God promised spiritual security, ensuring His creation that "Lo, I am with you always" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). In the spiritual security of God, coping with troubles shows the manifestation of faith and trust in God. Overall, it is significantly challenging to see a loved one in agony initiate attempts to induce remedy and restoration (Aoyama et al., 2021). Individuals who are grieving need time to lament which evolves into the opportunity to cope (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020). Knowing what we know about grief through the literature and what the Bible says about grief, the need to fill the gap on what is known about African American women's grief, coping skills, and degrees of resiliency is evident to examine the lived experience

of resiliency and coping skills to bring awareness and reverse the lack of support and therapies for the African American adult female population.

Summary

Chapter two reviewed the empirical literature on the impact of complicated grief on coping skills and resiliency among African American women in order to provide an overview of the themes between resiliency and coping skills that African Americans use when impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss. Overall, the studies in this review discussed numerous explanations about the ways African American women endure complicated grief. Scholarly articles were discussed in relation to resiliency, perseverance, belief perseverance, specific manifestations of grief responses, grief response domains, provisional aspects, coping, emotion-focused coping, and problem-focused coping. Scriptures from the new and old testaments were utilized to provide a biblical foundation to gain understanding of God imparting hope to the individual coping with loss and complicated grief. Additionally, resiliency theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory were discussed as the theoretical framework for this study.

This research study intended to address gaps in the scholarly research and literature by providing further understanding of the lived experiences and resiliency of African American women coping with complicated grief following significant loss. Researchers have focused on addressing grief in the female population. African American women experience complicated grief and its negative effects at higher rates than the general population (Lassiter & Poteat, 2020). There have been studies that researched the grief experience of African American family members coping with grief due to violence resulting in homicide (Sharpe et al., 2014) as well as African American mothers associated with gun violence (McNeil et al., 2017). Other research studies have addressed the grief experience of African Americans who have incarcerated mates

(Yeboaa et al., 2022). However, research specifically focusing on resiliency and coping skills among the African American female population regarding complicated grief was missing from the grief/resilience literature. It is to this gap that this research attends. In Chapter 3, Research Method, the methodology, research design, and data analysis that was used to fulfill this study's research agenda will be detailed and justified.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHOD

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experience of African American women over the age of 18 who were coping with complicated grief following significant loss. According to Bottomley et al. (2017), with the exception of Goldsmith et al.'s (2018) study, bereavement research has ignored the grief experience for this population. According to Matthews et al. (2021), the incidence of complicated grief, among African American women, ranges from 30% to 32%, which is higher than the Caucasian female population of 12%. This chapter provides a detailed description of the research methodology, study design, as well as study instrumentation, data collection and analysis plan. The chapter ends by outlining study, delimitations, assumptions, and limitations. The methodology in this present chapter outlines the strategy used for this study by defining the target population and procedures for recruiting participation and explaining procedures to analyze and interpret data.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?

RQ 2: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?

RQ 3: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss?

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research methodology and phenomenological study design. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), "The overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve and understanding how people make sense out of their lives, delineate processes of meaning making, and describe how people interpret what they experience . . ." (p. 15). Since this study's purpose was to understand the lived experiences of African American women with complicated grief, a qualitative approach is an appropriate methodology. While several study designs were considered in order to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of African American women who are coping with complicated grief, phenomenology was deemed the best fit because it lends to the life experiences, themes, and trends without the need to include external factors to reach relevant conclusions to answer the research questions in the study (Creswell, 2009). In addition, phenomenology was an appropriate study design because its purpose is to uncover the essence of the participants' lived experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Finally, phenomenology was an appropriate research design for this study because it does not help to establish causation (Bordens & Abbott, 2002). This study did not attempt to determine cause and effect but examined the lived experiences of African American women with complicated grief after significant loss.

Participants

Population and Sample

The population for this study was African American women who had experienced complicated grief after a significant loss. The U.S. Census Bureau (2022) reported that there are 309,843 African American women living in Connecticut, and 195,304 African American women live in the southern region of Connecticut. According to the Connecticut Department of Public

Health (2020), the mortality rate is significantly higher for African Americans. Of the 26%

percent of deaths among African Americans, 4% of African American women living in the

southern region of Connecticut were impacted by grief in the past 2 years and fewer than 4%

sought professional bereavement counseling (Connecticut Department of Public Health, 2020).

The New Haven, Middlesex, and New London areas are the southern areas in

Connecticut where participants were recruited for this study. These southern areas of

Connecticut were selected because of the high population size for the criteria of African

American women living in the State of Connecticut. The researcher was able to access more

African American women living in the specified southern Connecticut areas that contributed to

this study and supply ample data to analyze.

From this population, the researcher recruited a sample of 38 participants. A sample size

of 38 participants is appropriate to this study because small purposeful sample sizes are often

utilized in phenomenological studies. In phenomenological studies, a few participants can

provide an in-depth view of their lived experience (Starks & Brown Trinidad, 2007). While

sample sizes of one to 10 are often utilized in semi-structured interviews, the researcher chose a

sample of 38 participants because of the decision to collect data via open-ended survey. A

sample of 20 - 40 participants ensured that data analysis would reach saturation. However, if

during interim data analysis saturation was not reached, more participants would have been

asked to participate in this research study.

In order to participate in this study, participants needed to meet the following inclusion

criteria. They had to (a) identify as female (b) be 18 years of age or older (c) live within the

Southern areas of Connecticut (d) be African American (e) have experienced a significant loss,

to death, of an immediate family member, other relative, and/or close friend within the past 24 months prior to completing the screening questionnaire.

Study Procedures

Participant Recruitment Procedures

Contact Gatekeepers

First, permission to recruit participants was sought from various group gatekeepers via email (See Appendix A for Permission to Recruit Letters). Gatekeepers who were contacted to help the researcher locate potential participants included facilitators of faith-based programs, program-based counselors, and certified therapists in the New Haven, Middlesex, and New London areas of Southern Connecticut. Permission to recruit study participants was granted by several of these gatekeepers (See Appendix B for Permission Granted Letters). Once Institutional Review Board (IRB) granted approval, the researcher sent Recruitment flyers to those gatekeepers who indicated their willingness to distribute them. (See Appendix C for the Recruitment Flyer.) The Recruitment Flyer contained the study information, as well as a link to the study survey.

Screen Participants

When potential participants click on the study link, they were presented with five screening questions (See Appendix D for Screening Questions). The first screening question asked potential study participants to confirm gender identity. The second screening question asked them to confirm age. The third question asked them to confirm living in the Southern area of Connecticut. The fourth question asked potential participants to confirm their race. The final screening question asked to confirm or deny if the potential participant has experienced a significant loss, to death, of an immediate family member, other relative, and/or close friend

within the last two years. Only those who answer yes to all of the screening questions were allowed to access the rest of the survey. Those who did not meet the criteria were informed of such and then thanked for their time prior to being exited from the survey. Those who did meet the criteria were allowed to enter the next step, which was informed consent. The informed consent addressed the purpose of the study, estimated time to complete the survey, voluntary participation, risks, anonymity, data storage methods, right to withdraw, and the fact that consent is obtained by virtue of completing the survey. After completing the informed consent, study participants entered the data collection phase of the survey, which was an open-ended survey containing 14 questions. The estimated time to complete the survey was no more than one hour.

Obtain Informed Consent

Participants who met inclusion criteria and wished to enroll in this study were asked to give their informed consent (See Appendix E). Informed consent was obtained after participants completed the screening questionnaire and met inclusion criteria. The researcher informed the participants about the consent process by ensuring that participation in this study was solely voluntary. Participants were given information that fully informed them of the risks, benefits, purpose, and procedures of this study. The participants were assured that they had the right to decline or withdraw participation without consequence. The researcher upheld each participant's right to anonymity and privacy by providing participants anonymous questionnaires that did not identify the participant as a risk to employment security, financial standing, or criminal charges. To protect the participants and this study, the researcher designed the anonymous survey by developing questions in such a way as to encourage participants to provide responses to sensitive questions.

Data Collection Procedures

Data for this study were collected from electronic surveys that were available using a link included on the recruitment document. Data collection occurred via SurveyMonkey. By taking the survey through the provided link, anonymity of participant's identity ensured their privacy throughout the entire procedure, from start to finish. No personal identifiable data about participants was collected. Each survey was numbered in the order in which it was completed per SurveyMonkey procedures. After completing the survey, participants were asked to select "submit" and the recorded responses were recorded in the SurveyMonkey software to be analyzed.

Instrumentation and Measurement

The data collection instrument for study was an open-ended survey. An open-ended survey was an appropriate data collection method for this study because it allowed the researcher to obtain an accurate response from each participant without any undo researcher influence. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, open-ended surveys allowed individuals to freely express their experiences with complicated grief.

Survey Constructs/Questions

The screening questionnaire (see Appendix D) consisted of five screening questions to determine inclusion criteria of potential participants. The survey consisted of 14 researcher-created open-ended questions. Based upon this study's purpose and the themes that emerged in the literature, the researcher designed an open-ended survey to elicit data. In creating this survey, the researcher aligned open-ended questions to the research questions (see Table 1). Themes from the literature that informed this survey included problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance-focused coping.

Table 1

Research Questions Aligned to Open-Ended Survey Questions

Research Questions	Open-ended Survey Question
RQ 1: What is the lived experience of adult African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?	1. How "present" do you feel your grief is with you on a day-to-day basis? 2. How does your grief affect your ability to deal with financial obligations? 3. How does your grief affect your ability to deal with emotional balance? 4. How does your grief affect your spirituality? 5. How would you describe your relationship with God before while dealing with your grief?
RQ 2: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?	6. How are you moving forward aka "still living" even with your grief? 7. How well have you been able to re-establish daily routines (e.g., personal care, etc.) in the midst of your grief? 8. In what ways do you feel you have recovered from your loss? 9. How do you try to cope with your grief? 10. Can you please describe how you cope emotionally with your grief?
RQ 3: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss?	11. What is your experience with how religion has helped or not helped you cope with your grief? 12. Can you share any ways that your thinking has helped you cope with your grief? 13. Please describe how your support system has helped or not helped you cope with your grief. 14. Can you tell a story about a time that you coped in a way you found helpful or unhelpful?

Data Analysis

Once all survey data were uploaded, data analysis began. Data were analyzed thematically using Creswell's (2014) Six Step process. The initial step of the Creswell's (2014) Six Step process calls for the organization and preparation of the data for analysis through the transcription of interviews, efficient material scanning, and categorization of all visual materials, among other activities. The next step was to review and comprehend all the data (Creswell, 2014). The purpose of this step was to get a general understanding of the data and to have the chance to consider its overall significance. Coding the data was the third step in Creswell's (2014) Six Step research process to classify the text into different groups before giving each category a term. The coding process was used in the fourth step to create a description of the participants, environment, or categories/themes for analysis (Creswell, 2014). This action was crucial because it aided in creating comprehensive descriptions for various research endeavors (Creswell, 2014). The fifth step required the researcher to refine how themes and descriptions were portrayed in the qualitative narrative in the previous step (Creswell, 2014). Lastly, making an interpretation of the data or conclusions was the last phase where the research demanded that the researcher reflect on the knowledge acquired (Creswell, 2014). Both resiliency theory and Lazarus' cognitive stress theory were used as a lens through which to view the survey data.

Delimitations, Assumptions, and Limitations

Delimitations

Delimitations of a study are those characteristics which result from limitations in the scope of the study and arise via conscious exclusionary or inclusionary decisions. made during development of the study plan (Denny & Weckesser, 2022). Delimitations of this research included the focus on a purposeful sample of participants who met the inclusion criteria

(Palinkas et al., 2020). African American women who participated in this study had experienced a significant loss of a close friend, immediate family member, and/or close relative. The number of years was a period when the individual was possibly still coping with their loss and can contribute to accurate responses (Schakowski et al., 2022).   As a result, these components were considered study delimitations and were therefore controlled. (Denny & Weckesser, 2022).

Assumptions

The first assumption of this study was that African American women experiencing complicated grief were willing to participate. Since grief is a private experience for many, potential participants may be hesitant to enroll in this study by completing a questionnaire. Mouton and Southerland (2017) identified the African American female population prefers faith-based support, such as worship service, prayer, and counseling with clergy. The participant had to trust that the researcher would respect, value, and keep the participant's grief confidential. The second assumption of this study was that participants answered both the screening and survey questions honestly. If participants answer either the screening or survey questions dishonestly, then the study's data will not be reliable, which would sully the results of the study.

Limitations

This study had two limitations. The first limitation was that although data were collected from participants associated with faith-based institutions, these institutions were not predominantly Christian based. The second limitation of this study was that it was not generalizable. Limiting participants to one geographic location in the United States limited the ability to generalize results to represent the African American women population. However, though this study's results were generalizable, the study results still provided a window into the

experience of this particular subset of African American women upon which other researchers can build.

Summary

Chapter three discussed the methodology, research design, and data analysis that was used to examine the lived experiences of African American women with complicated grief. A qualitative phenomenological approach was utilized, and data was collected via an open-ended survey. Data were analyzed using Creswell's (2013) Six step approach. This chapter also addressed the ways in which the study's methods were carried out confidentiality and how it was maintained. This chapter also described the study's assumptions, limitations, and delimitations, as well as and how this researcher ensured study trustworthiness. Chapter four will present the results of data analysis thematically using a detailed description as well as connect the findings to the research questions.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. As per Kalu (2019), grief research has disregarded the grief experience for the African American female population, except for the study of Goldsmith et al. (2018). Based on this research, these findings suggest that African American women have a greater risk of developing complicated grief compared to their Caucasian peers (Goldsmith et al., 2018).

This research provided insight on the views of African American women regarding the utilization of coping skills to exhibit resiliency after a significant loss. This study sought to gauge the emotional impact, thoughts, beliefs, and values of study participants toward the impact of complicated grief. This research involved exploring actual occurrences in the real world that are shared by African American women to determine the culture that they experience on a daily basis. This study allowed a space to determine measures of resiliency while coping with complicated grief.

This qualitative phenomenological research focused on the viewpoint of African American women, living in the Southern areas of Connecticut, who have been impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss. Data were obtained from an open-ended online survey. The open-ended questions focused concern on participants' views on resiliency, coping skills used when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss, and reasons for holding these views. Due to the sensitive nature of this topic, open-ended surveys allowed participants to freely express their experiences with complicated grief. This research study used questionnaire data to

determine common themes. A qualitative approach was used to allow me to be open-minded and reduce the number of preconceptions concerning the topic and allow theory to emerge from the findings (Piazza-Bonin et al., 2016).

This research study answered the following research questions:

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?

RQ 2: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?

RQ 3: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss?

Descriptive Results

In this section, all descriptive results are presented. In order to participate in this study, participants needed to meet the following inclusion criteria. They had to (a) identify as female (b) be 18 years of age or older (c) live within the Southern areas of Connecticut (d) be African American (e) have experienced a significant loss, to death, of an immediate family member, other relative, and/or close friend within the past 24 months prior to completing the screening questionnaire. The total number of people who wished to participate in this study and the total number who qualified to participate in this study, as well as any relevant responses to questionnaires, are presented. Any relevant descriptive results are outlined in this section.

To address the research questions, a flyer including a link to an anonymous online open-ended survey was distributed to four faith-based institutions located in the Southern area of Connecticut. An opening coding method compared participants' responses to determine common themes. A total of 63 responses demonstrated interest to complete the survey. However, 38

qualifying (60.3 %) participants submitted responses to the online open-ended survey questions. Qualified participants completed five screening question and provided consent to participate in this study. The open-ended survey consisted of 14 researcher created open-ended questions. Participants were not restricted with a time limit to complete the survey. Participants had no personal or organizational conditions that prevented them from partaking in the research nor were the participants influenced by the researcher in a manner that would interfere with the results of the research. Participants were able to complete the questionnaire at their leisure and in a setting that was conducive to them such as their home, place of employment, or faith-based institution.

Study Findings

This section is organized by research question and presents the research findings. This research study provided insight on the views of the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women. This research sought to gauge the emotional impact, thoughts, beliefs, and values of study participants toward the impact of complicated grief. The findings for this study are reported by the three research questions below.

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?

RQ 2: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?

RQ 3: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss?

Data Collection

Data were collected from 38 participants. The electronic surveys were distributed to four faith-based institutions among the Southern area in Connecticut in the format of a recruitment document that included a link to access the anonymous open-ended survey via SurveyMonkey. The autonomy of participant's identity and privacy was ensured throughout the entire procedure, from start to finish, by accessing the survey through a provided link. No personal identifiable data about participants were collected. Each survey was numbered in the order in which it was completed per SurveyMonkey procedures. After completing the survey, participants were asked to select "submit" and the responses were recorded in the SurveyMonkey software to be analyzed. Participants were not restricted to a time limit to complete open-ended survey. This study collected 38 out of 63 completed surveys. While 63 individuals expressed interest in completing the study, data was collected from the 38 individuals who met the study inclusion criteria assessed through the screening questions. Data were collected to review, analyze, and establish common themes that existed. There were no variations of data collections as presented in Chapter three as well as no unusual circumstances that were encountered while collecting data.

Data Analysis

Participants' responses to the open-ended survey were analyzed to examine the data to establish themes throughout this research study. The overwhelming majority, 35 out of the 38, participants felt, that spirituality and a relationship with God is a prominent coping skill to demonstrate resilience when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss. Participants supported the notion of a prayer life is vital to exhibit resiliency based on experiencing a significant loss as a way to cope with complicated grief.

There were 84% of participants who reported a strong reliance on their spiritual connection with God and support of family and friends. There were 16 % of participants who reported a moderate reliance on their spiritual connection with God and support of family and friends. There were no percentage of participants that reported no reliance on their spiritual connection with God and support of family and friends to exhibit resiliency based on experiencing complicated grief after a significant loss because it is a way to cope with complicated grief.

This research provided insight on the views of African American women the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss. This research sought to identify themes based on thoughts, emotional impact, values, and spiritual beliefs toward utilizing coping skills to exhibit resiliency when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss among African American women. The findings for this study are reported by the three research questions below.

Research Question One

This question asked: What is the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?

The African American women participants indicated similar reliance on connecting with God to cope with complicated grief and demonstrate resiliency after a significant loss. Participants reported the importance of maintaining a spiritual connection with God when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss included prayer, mediation, listening to gospel music, and spending time in nature to feel closer to God.

The most common theme established in addressing Research Question #1 is that African American women experience a range of emotions and behaviors when balancing complicated

grief after losing a significant loved one. Participant #2 stated, "My grief affects my ability to deal with emotional balance because I am unable to release the feeling of sadness or express my emotions." Participant #15 stated, "I stay busy with the things that I enjoy which helps with my emotional balance." Participant #32 stated, "Grief affects the ability to deal with emotional balance in that it requires more energy/focus to manage and prioritize day-to-day activities/obligations." Participant #28 stated, "It took a little while to readjust after but at times I bury myself into work, my children and there are times of instability, and the tears are overwhelming." Overall, 84% of participants that completed the survey felt that grief was a catalyst that strengthened their spiritual connection with God.

Research Question Two

This question asked: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?

A theme identified when addressing Research Question #2 is demonstrating resiliency is not a choice or option, but a standard expectation among the African American women population. Participant #19 stated, "Being African American you learn to be strong and depend on your extended family to help you." Participant #20 stated, "I have to move forward with my loss while making love an action word for others." Participant #35 stated, "I have to be strong, so I associate with positive people with positive energy and of course praying and believing plays a big part."

Overall, 100% of the participants who responded to this research question indicated that moving forward after a significant loss is not an option because of multiple factors that are required. Some of the participants had children to care for. Some participants had the remaining parent to care for. Some of the participants felt the need to live up to the expectation of being

strong and not walling in their grief as a sign of weakness. Some participants did not want to be labeled as emotionally or mentally unstable. In the case of this study, participants were more transparent about their lived experience when impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss, know that the survey upheld full anonymity. Currently, one out of four of the faith-based institutions offer grief support to the community.

Research Question Three

This question asked: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss? A theme identified when addressing Research Question #3 is African American women mainly seek support from family, friends, and God through prayer and meditation. Participant # 7 stated, "Through prayer and meditation. Sharing time with families and friends." Participant # 21 stated, "Remaining prayerful, remembering the good, being with others." Participant # 5 stated, "I worship and pray and walk in nature."

Overall, all participants identified the necessity of utilizing coping skills to demonstrate resiliency when impacted with complicated grief. Participants reported common coping skills utilized included family connections and support, prayer, meditation, talking to someone, emotional expression through crying, listening to upbeat music, distractions by keeping busy and future planning, and reminiscing on positive thought of the lost loved one.

The participants reported that grief of a significant loss had more of an impact on their closer connection with God, staying present, and emotional balance. The participants identified the inability not to focus on their loved one while attempting to maintain daily living requirements such as financial obligations and re-establishing daily routines (i.e., personal care and optimal performance in the workplace). Participants reported that complicated grief had a greater emotional impact and need for spiritual connection. The emotional toll resulted in

spending more time in prayer and an increased need to embrace family support. Participants also reported the ability to regain some sense of control, future planning was a form of coping. Overall, complicated grief impacts the coping skills and demonstration of resilience among African American women.

Throughout the open-ended survey, the common theme was established that African American women lean on their spiritual connection and relationship with God to cope with complicated grief after a significant loss and that there is a need for a safe space to express significant loss when dealing with complicated grief and to increase forms of support, interventions, and treatments in faith-based institutions. Participant #1 stated, "I've always had a strong faith which is why I'm able to not totally fall apart on a daily basis." Participant #9 stated, "I have a very close relationship with God. I don't know how I could make it without my spiritual connection." Participant # 28 stated, "I lean on God for comfort and strength when going through grief and emotional issues."

Summary

Chapter four was an accumulation of data collected from African American women impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss through an open-ended survey in this research. The descriptive results provided insight on the required inclusion criteria for participants to complete the survey and the number who qualified to participate. The findings of this study were based on the organization of three research questions. Each research question was anonymously answered by using an online open-ended survey and collecting data. Data collection of this study identified the process of obtaining the responses of each participant though utilizing an anonymous electronic survey. A data analysis provided an examination of each participant responses that established themes throughout this research study. Chapter 5

contains a summary of findings, discussions of findings, implications, limitations, and

recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

Overview

This qualitative phenomenological study examined the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. According to Kalu (2019), grief research has disregarded the grief experience for the African American female population, except for the study of Goldsmith et al. (2018). Based on this research, these findings suggest that African American women have a greater risk of developing complicated grief compared to their Caucasian peers (Goldsmith et al., 2018).

This research examined complicated grief experienced by African American women using an open-ended survey. By pursuing this line of inquiry there was a potential to identify emergent themes relevant to lived experiences of the participants. As indicated in the open-ended survey results, the overall common theme was established that African American women lean on their spiritual connection and relationship with God to cope with complicated grief after a significant loss. It was also found that there is a need for a safe space to express significant loss when dealing with complicated grief, as well as a need to increase forms of support, interventions, and treatments in faith-based institutions.

This research study illuminated the lived experiences and added to the literature about resiliency and coping with complicated grief among African American women. This chapter will offer a summary of the study findings, discussion of findings, implications, limitations, and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

The results from this research study were guided by three research questions which focused on the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after

experiencing a significant loss. Overall findings of this study identified management and balancing a range of emotions when experiencing complicated grief after a significant loss, utilizing carious coping skills such as support from family, friends, and God through prayer and meditation contributes to the demonstration of resiliency, and exhibiting resiliency is not an option when needing to oversee daily routines.

Discussion of Findings

Research findings are arranged by research question in the discussion of this study. This research study provided insight on the views of the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women. This research sought to gauge the emotional impact, thoughts, beliefs, and values of study participants toward the impact of complicated grief.

Researchers concentrating on grief and bereavement have focused on grief in the adult female population (Gildea, 2021), yet there continues to be a substantial gap in research with the African American adult female population. Specifically, research that examines the lived experience and resiliency of African American women over the age of 18 who are coping with complicated grief is absent from the grief research. African American women encounter complicated grief and its adverse consequences at higher rates than all other demographic groups (Aten et al., 2019). The problem this research attempted to address is the substantial gap in research concentrating on African American women coping and displaying resiliency when affected by complicated grief after the passing of a loved one.

This research study included five screening questions to identify participants to meet the inclusion criteria and 14 open-ended questions on this study's survey (see Appendices D and F). The electronic surveys were distributed to four faith-based institutions among the Southern area in Connecticut in the format of a recruitment document that included a link to access the

anonymous open-ended survey via SurveyMonkey. Using these questions, I sought to obtain data on the emotional impact on resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. Data collected from survey responses were analyzed using frequencies and coded for common themes.

The findings for this study are reported by the following three research questions.

RQ 1: What is the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss?

RQ 2: In what ways might African American women with complicated grief be experiencing resiliency after a significant loss?

RQ 3: In what ways do African American women with complicated grief utilize coping skills after a significant loss?

Research Question 1 investigated the lived experience of African American women with complicated grief after experiencing a significant loss. The first theme identified in this study is that African American women experience a range of emotions and behaviors when balancing complicated grief after losing a significant loved one. Participants in this study revealed experiencing a range of emotions and behaviors when balancing complicated grief after losing a significant loved one. The findings of this study extend the research of Aten et al. (2019) which explored a subgroup of African American women and how they struggled to embrace ways of demonstrating resiliency to cope with and conquer complicated grief. This study revealed the African American adult female population who had escalated positive spiritual coping skills were less discouraged than those with lower levels of positive spiritual coping skills by distinguishing the most productive coping methods to balance the impacts of the grieving experience (Aten et al., 2019). The findings of this study not only replicate previous research; they also extend it because the African American adult female population in this study

experienced a range of emotions and behaviors when balancing complicated grief after losing a

significant loved one and provided insight into coping skills utilized deemed to be useful

throughout their experience of complicated grief.

Research Question 2 examined different ways African American women with

complicated grief experienced resiliency after a significant loss. The second theme identified in

this study is that resiliency is not a choice or option, but a standard expectation among the

African American women population. Participants in this study stressed that resiliency is not a

choice or option, but a standard expectation among the African American woman population

when experiencing complicated grief. The findings of this study support the recent study of

Johnson et al. (2019) which reported that the African American female population alter their

self-presentation by shifting responses to accommodate cultural norms and social expectations

which can be construed as coping and demonstrating resiliency among the African American

adult female population when coping with grief or complicated grief (Johnson et al., 2019). The

findings of this study further support recent research that living up to the expectation of being

strong and not wallowing in their grief as a sign of weakness and moving forward after a

significant loss is not an option because of multiple factors that are required such as honoring

financial obligations, fulfilling employment responsibilities, caring for children (participants who

have children), and a surviving parent (participants who have surviving parents).

Research Question 3 examined ways African American women with complicated grief

utilize coping skills after a significant loss. The third theme identified in this study is that African

American women mainly seek support from family, friends, and God through prayer and

meditation. Participants in this study identified that they mainly seek support from family,

friends, and God through prayer and meditation. The findings of this study extend the previous

research (Barboza and Seedall, 2021) which revealed that the African American adult female population depends on the commonality of social and traditional understanding, which directs how to cope and oversee the life demands and pressures when influenced by complicated grief (Barboza & Seedall, 2021). The findings of this study extend previous research by identifying how employing coping skills such as family and spiritual connections contributed to resiliency when impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss.

This research study was based on resiliency theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory. Relating this framework to this study allowed to better define the participants in this study, as well as provide a better understanding of resiliency and the coping skills used among the African American adult female population when impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss. Resilience theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory provide greater understanding of the effective coping skills African American women utilized to promote emotional and behavioral self-regulation to overcome disruptive events that merit adjusting (Santarnecchi et al., 2018). In addition, this theoretical framework served as an outline of how emotional stability and conscientiousness influence interpersonal dynamics which provides an understanding of the connection between the degree of coping skill processes when adapting to a significant loss (Smigelsky et al., 2020). Resilience theory and Lazarus's cognitive stress theory have been previously utilized to conceptualize how people cope with and exhibit resiliency in the face of grief (Santarnecchi et al., 2018). In this study, theories helped conceptualize the experiences of African American women who have complicated grief.

This research study was centered on the Biblical foundation that God is concerned for His creation and understands our grief and extends grace by remaining close and providing comfort with guarantees from His Word. Psalm 34:18 says that "the LORD is close to the brokenhearted

and saves those who are crushed in spirit" (*King James Bible*, 1769/2017). Participants in this study identified that God imparts hope through prayer and meditation to cope with complicated grief after a significant loss. The findings of this study provided an understanding and awareness of the lived experiences of the African American women populations' coping skills utilized and the degrees of resiliency demonstrated when impacted with complicated grief. A common theme of the open-ended survey was that African American women cope with complicated grief after a significant loss by relying on their spiritual connection and relationship with God. As part of dealing with complicated grief, there is a need for a safe space where significant loss can be expressed, and faith-based institutions should provide more support, interventions, and treatments.

Implications

The findings of this study presented the viewpoints and lived experiences of African American women who demonstrated resilience when impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss. This study provides the opportunity for faith-based institutions and organizations, mental health practitioners, and grief communities to develop treatments, resources/supports, and interventions to ensure the mental health and emotional stability of African American women. Considering the lived experience of coping with complicated grief and resiliency following significant loss, this study offers a framework for developing treatments, resources, and interventions. Significant impact of maintaining and emotional balance and stability is a positive social change that would affect the community as a whole. Implementing the option to develop treatments, resources/supports, and interventions will present increased potential to ensure mental health and emotional ability among the African

American female population based on the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss.

The reality is that no matter what treatment or interventions are in place, there is no fool proof plan or resource that can prevent the loss of a significant loved one. Providing resources and support through faith-based organizations and the mental health industry may prevent or reduce the impact of complicated grief and improve coping skills that promote resilience. There is a large percentage of the African American population that does not want or believe that they need such treatments, interventions, or support.

To better facilitate the process of providing treatments, interventions, or support, those who interact with the African American female grieving population should ensure that this population is to increase the awareness of treatments, interventions, or support as well as having a plan in place. The implications for practice based on the findings, include the following:

- Programs need to be in place on how to properly provide grief support to identify and cope with the range of emotions and behaviors when balancing complicated grief after a significant loss of a loved one.

- Support resources need to develop to appropriately encourage resiliency while adapting and navigating life demands while impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss of a loved one.

- To help the African American female population with complicated grief after a significant loss strengthen their coping skills, opportunities to encourage prayer and meditation should be provided.

All mental health professionals and religious personnel need to be included in development training in the mental health industry and at faith-based institutions/organizations. This training

puts everyone at the same level and understanding of what support is needed and when. Practice of different scenarios should occur during training sessions so that mental health professionals and religious personnel can adapt their skills to vary scenarios by seeing a solution to the form of grief that has been presented. Religious leadership and personnel must understand that collaboration with mental health professionals is important in developing and maintaining a comprehensive support plan.

Limitations

This research study had two limitations. The first limitation was that although data were collected from participants associated with faith-based institutions, these institutions were not predominantly Christian based. The second limitation of this study was that it was not generalizable. Limiting participants from one geographic location in the United States limited the ability to generalize results to represent the African American women population.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study concerned the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. Future research on the development and implementations of treatments, resources/supports, and interventions needs to be conducted which will present increased potential to ensure mental health and emotional stability among the African American female population based on the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss. The idea is to increase awareness of the lack of resources and supports while providing treatments and interventions for the African American women experiencing resiliency and coping with complicated grief after a significant loss of a loved one.

There are many concerns with the lack of resources and supports for the African American female population experiencing resiliency and coping with complicated grief after a

significant loss of a loved one. Though most faith-based institutions/organizations have religious leaders in place, the scarcity of collaboration with medical health professionals is an obstacle in helping African American women experiencing resiliency and coping with complicated grief after a significant loss of a loved one. Future research that investigates the efficacy of partnerships between faith-based institutions/organizations and professionals in the medical health industry could provide additional grief supports.

Future research should consider expanding geographic locations throughout the United States among African American women who are experiencing complicated grief after a significant loss. In addition, future research should include surveying African American men's lived experiences of resiliency and coping with complicated grief after a significant loss to develop treatments, resources/supports, and interventions will present increased potential to ensure mental health and emotional stability. Understanding the lived experiences of resiliency and coping among the African American male population will contribute to providing an awareness of resiliency and coping when impacted by complicated grief among African American men. Adding this viewpoint could provide useful information for faith-based institutions/organizations, the field of psychology, and the mental health industry seeking to make provisions to provide resources/supports.

Summary

According to Bottomley (2014), more than half of the African American adult female population experiences complicated grief after a significant loss. The goal of this qualitative phenomenological study was to examine and gather data based on the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. Though this may be an added responsibility of faith-based institutions/organizations and

the mental health industry, it could be an option that provides additional treatments and interventions. According to the survey results, managing and balancing a range of emotions after experiencing complicated grief, and utilizing various coping skills such as support from family, friends, and God through prayer and meditation, contribute to demonstrating resilience. When overseeing daily routines, demonstrating resilience is not an option.

This study was not designed for a particular outcome, but rather to allow contribution to the literature, the field of psychology, social change, and the mental health industry to decide what options are available for the faith-base and mental health institutions. In providing additional grief support for African American women experiencing resiliency and coping impacted with complicated grief after a significant loss will show that future research still needs to be undertaken to determine in hopes to increase support among this specific population. Future research should consider expanding geographic locations throughout the United States among African American women who are experiencing complicated grief after a significant loss to support the ability to generalize results to represent the African American women population within the United States as a whole. In addition, future studies should be conducted to evaluate the lived experiences of resiliency and coping with complicated grief after a significant loss among African American men to develop treatments, resources/supports, and interventions will present increased potential to ensure mental health and emotional stability. Understanding the lived experiences of resiliency and coping among the African American male population will contribute to providing an awareness of resiliency and coping when impacted by complicated grief among African American men. Adding this viewpoint could provide useful information for faith-based institutions/organizations, the field of psychology, and the mental health industry seeking to make provisions to provide resources/supports.

This research was conducted to examine the lived experience of resiliency and coping with complicated grief following significant loss among African American women. This study provides valuable information about the utilization of coping skills after a significant loss and exhibiting resiliency among African American women when experiencing complicated grief after a significant loss. The emergent themes identified African American women experience a range of emotions and behaviors when balancing complicated grief after losing a significant loved one. Many felt that grief was a catalyst that strengthened their spiritual connection with God and that resiliency is not a choice or option, but a standard expectation among the African American women population. Another theme that arose was that African American women mainly seek support from family, friends, and God through prayer and meditation. Thus, the results of this study further support the need for increasing resources, supports, and treatments/interventions for the African American women impacted by complicated grief after a significant loss. Developing partnerships with faith-based organizations and increasing supports within the mental health industry increases the potential to provide treatments /interventions for the African American women population.

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APPENDIX A: PERMISSION LETTERS

January 23, 2023

Dear

 As a graduate student in the Behavioral Sciences department/School of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the lived experiences among African American women who demonstrate resiliency when impacted by complicated grief. The title of my research project is Understanding Complicated Grief, Resilience, and Coping Skills of African American Women: A Phenomenological Study, and the purpose of my research is to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women.

 I am writing to request your permission to distribute the attached recruitment. Participants will be asked to complete the attached survey. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time. Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to

Sincerely,

Gyna M. Grant

Doctoral Student, Liberty University

January 23, 2023

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As a graduate student in the Behavioral Sciences department/School of Psychology at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand the lived experiences among African American women who demonstrate resiliency when impacted by complicated grief. The title of my research project is Understanding Complicated Grief, Resilience, and Coping Skills of African American Women: A Phenomenological Study, and the purpose of my research is to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women.

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Sincerely,

Gyna M. Grant

Doctoral Student, Liberty University

APPENDIX B: PERMISSION GRANTED

[External] Re: Requesting your support to conduct my dissertation study (Gyna Grant)

Mon 1/23/2023 12:31 PM

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am currently in preparation to conduct my study for my dissertation. My dissertation is studying The Impact Complicated Grief has on Resiliency and Coping Skills Among African American Women. This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women.

I need your help and support by granting permission to help me spread the word. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my school Liberty University, prefers to have documented permission granted before granting me permission to conduct my study. After reading the information provided in the attached file, I would greatly appreciate your support by responding in granting your permission via email.

Mon 1/23/2023 12:47 PM

content.]

This email confirms my support for your research project entitled: Complicated Grief Impacts Resilience and Coping Skills of African American Women. Permission is granted to survey willing participants within our congregation. Prayerfully, this research will make a valuable contribution to this area of mental health study.
Blessings,

Sent from my iPad

On Jan 23, 2023, at 12:31 PM, Grant, Gyna M <gmgrant@liberty.edu> wrote:

...

Mon 1/23/2023 12:54 PM

Thank you for your limitless support and prayers as I walk through my dissertation journey.

Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

Requesting your support to conduct my dissertation study (Gyna Grant)

Sun 1/22/2023 6:47 PM

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am currently in preparation to conduct my study for my dissertation. My dissertation is studying The Impact Complicated Grief has on Resiliency and Coping Skills Among African American Women. This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women.

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Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

↩ Reply   ↪ Forward

[External] Support in getting volunteers

Mon 1/23/2023 6:34 AM

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

I Evangelist   , who also holds the positions of Pastors Aide Leader, Financial Secretary and Administration Assistant will give my support to Gyna M Grant in her search for volunteers.

Sincerely,

Sent from Yahoo Mail on Android

Mon 1/23/2023 12:54 PM

Thank you for your limitless support and prayers as I walk through my dissertation journey.

Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

[External] Re: Requesting your support to conduct my dissertation study (Gyna Grant)

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Mon 1/23/2023 10:31 AM

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Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

[External] Re: Requesting your support to conduct my dissertation study (Gyna Grant)

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😊 📩 ↩ ↩ ↪ ▦ ⋯

Mon 1/23/2023 1:56 PM

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

My name is   and I'm the Head Deaconess at the Mount Zion SDA Church in Hamden, CT.
I am very proud of Gyna Grant's accomplishments so. She is dedicated in whatever she does. I am more than willing to support her in whatever endeavors she undertakes.

Sent from my iPhone

On Jan 23, 2023, at 10:31 AM

Please see the following

...

😊 ↩ ↩ ↪ ⋯

Tue 1/24/2023 5:55 PM

Thank you for your limitless support and prayers as I walk through my dissertation journey.

Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

↩ Reply   ↪ Forward

Mon 1/23/2023 4:41 PM

Subject: Re: Requesting your support to conduct my dissertation study (Gyna Grant)

Greetings to you in the name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I am currently in preparation to conduct my study for my dissertation. My dissertation is studying The Impact Complicated Grief has on Resiliency and Coping Skills Among African American Women. This study seeks to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women.

I need your help and support by granting permission to help me spread the word. The Institutional Review Board (IRB) at my school Liberty University, prefers to have documented permission granted before granting me permission to conduct my study. After reading the information provided in the attached file, I would greatly appreciate your support by responding in granting your permission via email.

Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

[External] Re: Fw: Requesting your support to conduct my dissertation study (Gyna Grant)

Mon 1/23/2023 5:39 PM

[EXTERNAL EMAIL: Do not click any links or open attachments unless you know the sender and trust the content.]

I am pleased to support your study for your dissertation on "The Impact Complicated Grief has on Resiliency and Coping Skills Among African American Women." I have reviewed the information provided in this email and I am eager to fully support this research study, and you are permitted to request support from the members of Rising Intercessors who believe this study will positively impact the community and beyond.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if there is additional support needed, we fully support you in your endeavors.

Grace and peace,

...

Mon 1/23/2023 5:44 PM

Thank you for your limitless support and prayers as I walk through my dissertation journey.

Thank you,
Have a Blessed and Wonderful Day,

APPENDIX C: RECRUITMENT FLYER

Research Participants Needed

Understanding Complicated Grief, Resilience, and Coping Skills in African American Women: A Phenomenological Study

- Do you identify as female?
- Do you identify as African American?
- Are you 18 years of age or older?
- Do you live within the Southern area of Connecticut?
- Have you experienced a significant loss that occurred within 2 years?

If you answered **yes** to each of the questions listed above, you may be eligible to participate in a research study.

The purpose of this research study is to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women. Participants will be asked to take no more than an hour to complete an online open-ended survey. If you would like to participate, please scan the QR Code below and complete the survey. A consent document is provided as the first page after the screening questions.

Gyna Grant, a doctoral candidate in the Behavioral Sciences Department School of Psychology at Liberty University, is conducting this study.
Please contact Gyna Grant for more information.

APPENDIX D: SCREENING QUESTIONS

Screening Questions

Please circle the response that applies to your answer.

1. Do you identify as female?   YES   NO

2. Are you 18 years of age or older?   YES   NO

3. Do you live within the Southern areas of Connecticut?   YES   NO

4. Do identify as African American?   YES   NO

5. Have you experienced a significant loss, to death, of an immediate family member, other relative, and/or close friend within the past 24 months?

   YES   NO

APPENDIX E: CONSENT FORM

Consent

Title of the Project: Understanding Complicated Grief, Resilience, and Coping Skills of

African American Women: A Phenomenological Study

Principal Investigator: Gyna M. Grant, Doctoral Candidate, School of Psychology,

Department of Behavioral Sciences – Social Psychology,

Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must (a) identify as

female (b) be 18 years of age or older (d) live within the Southern areas of Connecticut

(d) be African American (e) have experienced a significant loss, to death, of an

immediate family member, other relative, and/or close friend within the past 24 months.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary. Please take time to read this entire form

and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to examine the lived experiences of resiliency and

complicated grief following a significant loss among African American women.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

- Participants will complete a survey, which includes 5 screening questions, followed by 14 open-ended questions. The estimated time to complete the survey is one hour or less.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

- Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

- Benefits to society include adding to constructive social change by introducing explicit behaviors by which the African American women population could identify supports and therapies to be sustained while managing complicated grief in the field of social psychology, literature, and peer-reviewed journals.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The expected risks from participating in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Responses to the online survey version will be anonymous.

- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer for five years. After five years, all electronic records will be deleted.

How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting any relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please exit the survey and close your internet browser. Your responses will not be recorded or included in the study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Gyna M. Grant. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at

You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor,

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

Your Consent If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the IRB. Our physical address is Institutional Review Board,

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subjects research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

Before agreeing to be part of the research, please be sure that you understand what the study is about. You can print a copy of the document for your records. If you have any questions about the study later, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

APPENDIX F: SURVEY

Survey

This survey is meant to help gather information about how you are coping with complicated grief after your loss. We are interested in understanding the coping skills used to manifest resiliency through life experiences related to complicated grief after a significant loss among African American women. There are lots of ways to try to deal with stress. This questionnaire asks you to indicate what you generally do and feel, when you experience stressful events. Respond to each of the following open – ended questions.

Opened – Ended Questions

1. How "present" do you feel your grief is with you on a day-to-day basis?

2. How does your grief affect your ability to deal with financial obligations?

3. How does your grief affect your ability to deal with emotional balance?

4. How does your grief affect your spirituality?

5. How would you describe your relationship with God before while dealing with your grief?

6. How are you moving forward aka "still living" even with your grief?

7. How well have you been able to re-establish daily routines (e.g. personal care, etc.) in the midst of your grief?

8. In what ways do you feel you have recovered from your loss?

9. How do you try to cope with your grief?

10. Can you please describe how you cope emotionally with your grief?

11. What is your experience with how religion has helped or not helped you cope with your grief?

12. Can you share any ways that your thinking has helped you cope with your grief?

13. Please describe how your support system has helped or not helped you cope with your grief.

14. Can you tell a story about a time that you coped in a way you found helpful or unhelpful?