

Title:

## **Complicated Spiritual Grief and Bereavement Distress**

Author:

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### **Content:**

Aim(s) of the presentation:

*Presentation attendees will be able to:*

- a) describe symptoms of both complicated grief and complicated spiritual grief
- b) understand the relation between bereavement distress and spiritual crisis
- c) consider the clinical importance of our findings in relation to various types of grievers

*Summary of the presentation:*

Few studies have explored spiritual crisis within bereavement. Research indicates that bereavement distress in the form of complicated grief (CG) can precipitate a crisis of faith, which Shear et al., (2006) termed complicated spiritual grief (CSG)—a spiritual crisis following loss that includes the collapse or erosion of the bereaved’s sense of relationship to God, and/or a distancing from his/her faith community. Studies with African American homicide survivors suggest that CG predicts CSG, both globally and on an item-by-item level (Burke et al. in press), and does so even when controlling for PTSD and depression (Neimeyer & Burke, in press; CSG was assessed using the Brief RCOPE’s negative religious coping, NRC, subscale). Our study’s aim was to replicate these findings in a sample of grievers who are diverse in terms of demographics, type of loss, and church affiliation. Consistent with prior results, although positive religious coping was unrelated to bereavement outcome, CSG was positively related to CG, PTSD, and depression. However, in our study, CG, PTSD, and depression—all three—predicted CSG, when controlling for demographic variables and time since loss. Likewise, these findings held true in relation to CSG at the item-by-item level. Overall, in both samples, scoring high on the CG measure itself and, specifically, in terms of yearning/longing for the deceased loved one—the theoretically central symptom of CG—predicted that the griever would feel abandoned by his/her church and would question what he/she did to receive God’s punishment. Clinical and research implications also will be discussed.

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