MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS’ CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURAL WORLDVIEWS AFTER PARENTS’ DEATHS

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ABSTRACT

MIDDLE-AGED ADULTS’ CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AND CULTURAL WORLDVIEWS AFTER PARENTS’ DEATHS

Timea Farkas

The present research was guided by attachment theory and terror management theory to test how middle-aged adults’ attachment orientations, close relationship quality, and conservative worldviews may be related to losing parents in middle adulthood. I also tested how unmitigated agency (UA) and unmitigated communion (UC) may have interacted with bereavement status to predict these outcomes. Bereaved and non-bereaved adults ages 50-65 filled out online questionnaires. I hypothesized that UA would be positively related to attachment avoidance and conservative worldviews and negatively related to relationship quality with partner and children, and that these relations would be stronger in the bereaved group than the non-bereaved group. I hypothesized that UC would be positively related to attachment anxiety and conservative worldviews and negatively related to relationship quality with partner and children and that these relations would be stronger in the bereaved group than the non-bereaved group. Partially supporting expectations, results showed that UA was positively related to avoidance only among the bereaved group. Contrary to expectations, UC was positively related to anxiety only among the non-bereaved group. Bereaved participants (regardless of UA or UC) also reported significantly higher relationship quality with their children compared to non-bereaved participants. Results are discussed in the context of attachment theory and UA/UC.
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Middle-Aged Adults’ Close Relationships and Cultural Worldviews

After Parents’ Deaths

Middle adulthood is a time of family transitions when most people lose their parents. Anecdotal accounts and a few psychological studies have shown that parental death can be very disruptive to the lives of adult children (e.g., Douglas, 1990; Levy, 1999; Leopold & Lechner, 2015; Marks, Jun, & Song, 2009; Umberson, 1995; Umberson, 2003). For example, many adults experience worse physical and mental health after losing their parents (Marks et al., 2009). However, because parents are most often their children’s first attachment figures and continue to serve attachment functions into their children’s adult years (Fraley & Davis, 1997), their deaths may result in other important psychological changes as well. The present research seeks to illuminate any differences in adults’ close relationships (i.e., attachment orientations and relationship quality with romantic partner and children) and cultural worldviews (i.e., religiosity and need for cognitive closure) before and after the deaths of parents.

The present research is guided by attachment theory and terror management theory. According to attachment theory, caregivers in infancy play the crucial role of attachment figures who help shape individuals’ ideas of close relationships (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). Terror management theory proposes that in order to cope with reminders of mortality, individuals turn to attachment relationships or cultural worldviews (e.g., religiosity, intolerance of uncertainty) that lend a sense of predictability to the world (e.g., Hart, Shaver, & Goldenberg, 2005). For middle-aged adults, losing parents may signify both a reminder of mortality as
well as a loss of their first attachment relationships. According to terror management theory, some adults who lose a parent may experience changes in their close relationships and attachment orientations. Alternatively, they may come to favor worldviews that emphasize security and predictability such as becoming more religious and less comfortable with ambiguity (need for cognitive closure).

Thus, in the present study, I conducted a cross-sectional study by comparing middle-aged adults in the U.S. who have not lost parents to those who have lost both parents. I investigated whether and how parental death may be related to changes in close relationships (i.e., attachment security and relationship quality with romantic partner and children) and conservative worldviews (i.e., religiosity and the need for cognitive closure). Furthermore, I examined how individual differences in self- and other-oriented goals (unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion) may relate differently to attachment, close relationship quality, and conservative worldviews among bereaved and non-bereaved adults.

In the following sections I first review attachment theory and changes in attachment in middle and late adulthood. I then discuss terror management theory and changes in close relationships and cultural worldviews in middle and late adulthood. Next, I review unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion, and I describe how these may combine with terror management effects to explain changes in attachment relationships and cultural worldviews in middle adulthood. Finally, I summarize the study design and my hypotheses.
Theoretical Background

Attachment theory. Attachment theory proposes that infants form their first attachments to their primary caregivers (Bowlby, 1969, 1988). As part of this process, they develop internal working models of attachment figures as responsive or unresponsive and of themselves as lovable or unlovable (Bowlby, 1969, 1988; Bretherton & Munholland, 2008). A secure attachment orientation results from viewing close others as responsive and oneself as lovable. An insecure attachment results from viewing close others as unreliable or oneself as unlovable. Empirical work with infants has shown that most insecure infants tend to fall into one of two categories, avoidant and anxious-ambivalent, based on how they respond to separations from the caregiver (Ainsworth, 1979; see Weinfield, Sroufe, Egeland, & Carlson, 2008). Avoidant infants tend to disconnect from the attachment relationship; anxious-ambivalent infants tend to have strong negative emotional reactions to separation from the caregiver.

Research on attachment has shown that attachment orientation tends to be moderately stable from infancy to adulthood, lending support to the idea that attachment to parents has a long-reaching influence in adults’ lives (see Fraley, 2002 for a meta-analysis; Waters, Merrick, Treboux, Crowell, & Albersheim, 2000). A wealth of research has highlighted the importance of attachment for relationship quality and coping among adolescents and adults (e.g., Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991; Collins & Read, 1990; Feeney & Noller, 1990; Hazan & Shaver, 1987; Kirkpatrick & Davis, 1994; Rholes, Simpson, & Stevens, 1998; see Simpson &
In adolescence, individuals begin to transfer attachment functions to peers, including romantic partners (Fraley & Davis, 1997). However, many adults continue to use parents as a secure base—people they know they can always turn to in times of need (Cox, Arndt, Pyszczynski, Greenberg, Abdollahi, & Solomon, 2008; Fraley & Davis, 1997). Many contemporary attachment researchers conceptualize attachment among adults in terms of two dimensions: avoidance and anxiety (see Brennan, Clark, & Shaver, 1998; Fraley & Waller, 1998). Individuals high in attachment avoidance tend to fear closeness in relationships, whereas individuals high in attachment anxiety tend to fear abandonment. Secure individuals tend to score low in both avoidance and anxiety. As reviewed next, past research has shown that attachment security can change in later adulthood.

**Attachment in middle and late adulthood.** One important change from earlier to later adulthood is that older adults tend to have higher rates of avoidant attachment compared to younger adults (e.g., Diehl, Elnick, Bourbeau, & Labouvie-Vief, 1998; Sorensen, Webster, & Roggman, 2002; Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004; see Magai, 2008 for a review). At the same time, some studies find that attachment security also tends to increase in older adults (e.g., Zhang & Labouvie-Vief, 2004). These age-related changes in attachment orientation in later adulthood may partly result from dealing with parents’ mortality. As explained later, experiencing the deaths of parents may lead some adults (but not others) to become more insecurely attached.

Research guided by terror management theory shows that some adults use close attachment relationships to cope with the potentially terror-inducing awareness
of mortality. In addition, the theory suggests that individuals may alternatively turn to conservative cultural worldviews to cope with the awareness of mortality induced by losing parents. This work is reviewed next.

**Terror management theory.** Becker’s (1973) terror management theory proposes that much of social behavior emerges from the human knowledge of inevitable personal death. He argued that as children become aware of this potentially terrifying reality, they develop defenses to cope with it. Specifically, they become socialized into cultural worldviews around them. Cultural worldviews refer to ideologies and ways of thinking that structure and give meaning to the world such as religious beliefs, nationalistic attitudes, and generally preferring clear answers to ambiguous ones. By feeling like important members of an enduring culture that will outlast their own finite lives, they find relief from a constant awareness of their mortality and can become functioning members of society. In addition to cultural worldviews, research on terror management theory has also shown that close relationships can function as terror management defenses (e.g., Hart et al., 2005).

According to research guided by terror management theory, individuals use close relationships and belief in conservative cultural worldviews as interchangeable defenses against reminders of mortality (Hart et al., 2005). That is, once one defense is used, another is less likely to be used (e.g., Cox et al., 2008). Specifically, this research shows that when individuals are reminded of their mortality, they may be more likely to strongly endorse specific conservative cultural worldviews that help make the world seem like a structured, safe, and meaningful place. For example, past
research has shown that compared to a control group, individuals primed with thoughts of their own mortality tended to endorse their religious views more strongly (see Vail, Rothschild, Weise, Solomon, Pyszczynski, & Greenberg, 2010 for a review) and to seek greater certainty (need for closure) in their lives (Proulx, Heine, & Vohs, 2010). These results suggest that reminders of mortality trigger a preference for conservative worldviews, which serve as defenses against such reminders.

Individuals also tend to turn to close relationships after being reminded of their mortality. After being reminded of their own deaths, participants tend to express higher commitment to a romantic relationship than do control participants (Florian, Mikulincer, & Hirschberger, 2002). For example, in some studies, the experimental group was asked to think about problems within their romantic relationship or about separation from a relationship partner, while the control group was asked to think about non-relationship-related problems or about separation from an acquaintance, respectively (Florian et al., 2002; Mikulincer, Florian, Birnbaum, & Malishkevich, 2002). Participants in the experimental groups exhibited higher death-thought accessibility than did those in the control groups. This research suggests that close relationships tended to serve as a defense against thoughts of mortality; and when this defense was threatened, thoughts of mortality tended to become more prominent.

The death of an attachment figure may lead to especially strong feelings of insecurity because it involves both a reminder of mortality and a potential loss of a defense against the insecurity caused by such reminders. Thus, when individuals lose an important attachment relationship, they may experience feelings of insecurity in
the world, which may lead them to turn to other close relationships or to various ideologies that organize the world into a seemingly safe place. In fact, research has shown that close relationships with parents serve as a defense against reminders of mortality. One study showed that after thinking about their own death, adults who were allowed to plan a phone call with their parents were less likely to engage in the endorsement of rigid worldviews compared to adults who did not plan such a phone call (Cox et al., 2008). Thus, relationships with parents functioned as a defense that helped manage the participants’ feelings of insecurity, and they did not need to turn to conservative worldviews as a defense. By extension, the question under investigation in the present study is, what happens when parents pass away and thereby remind their adult children of mortality as well as potentially depriving them of a defense against fears of mortality? Parent death may be related to changes in other close relationships or changes in conservative cultural worldviews.

**Close relationships in middle and late adulthood.** Research indicates that close relationships with significant others and children remain important in middle and late adults’ lives and in many ways tend to be similar to close relationships at earlier life stages (e.g., Fingerman, 1996; Montgomery & Sorell, 1997; Reedy, Birren, & Schaie, 1981; Thornton, Orbuch, & Axinn, 1995). However, there are also some important differences between this life stage and earlier adulthood.

Some research shows that marital satisfaction tends to be lower during middle age compared to earlier and later adulthood (Levenson, Cartensen, & Gottman, 1993; Steinberg & Silverberg, 1987; Story, Berg, Smith, Beveridge, Henry, & Pearce,
2007). These middle-adult years are also the years when spouses may be dealing with older parents’ declining health and mortality, which may place strains on the marital relationship. Umberson (1995) found that parental death was related to higher levels of marital relationship problems. Women who had recently lost their mothers reported feeling less support and more negative behaviors from their partners than did women who had not recently experienced the death of a parent and who had at least one living parent. However, it may be that some people experience better marital relationships after the death of a parent. A qualitative study of six participants who had recently lost their parents found that positive support from their romantic partner was an important part of the participants’ bereavement experience (Petersen & Rafuls, 1998). As with changes in attachment, experiencing the deaths of parents may lead some adults to have better relationships and lead other adults to have worse relationships.

Relationships with children usually remain close in middle and older adulthood when children are emerging and young adults (Thornton et al., 1995). However, transitions in either the parents’ or the adult children’s lives may result in changes in the quality of the parent-child relationship (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). For example, parents’ divorce or widowhood tends to lead to more negative relationships between adult children and their parents (with the exception of mother-daughter relationships, which tend to improve after these transitions) (Kaufman & Uhlenberg, 1998). Interviews with bereaved adults showed that adults had closer relationships with their children after losing their parents (Umberson, 2003). Again,
experiencing the deaths of parents may lead some adults to have better relationships with their children and lead other adults to have worse relationships.

*Cultural worldviews in middle and late adulthood.* In the present study, I consider religiosity and need for cognitive closure after parents’ deaths. Research has shown that religiosity tends to increase with age across adulthood (Cornelis, Van Hiel, Roets, & Kossowska, 2009; Fiori, Brown, Cortina, & Antonucci, 2006; Gallup, 2002). The need for cognitive closure is a cognitive style that refers to individuals’ lack of comfort with ambiguity and a preference for order and predictability (Webster & Kruglanski, 1994), and it also has been shown to increase with age in adulthood. Furthermore, this age-related increase in need for cognitive closure may be responsible for increases in social conservatism (Cornelis et al., 2009; Czarnek, Kossowska, & Sedek, 2015).

Confronting the deaths of parents in middle age may be related to increasing religiosity and need for cognitive closure in some adults but not others. Religions serve the purpose of ordering the world in a meaningful way. Many religions also provide believers with an afterlife that can mitigate death anxiety. In fact, one study found that reading possible evidence for an afterlife mitigated terror management effects for religious, atheist, and agnostic participants alike (Heflick & Goldenberg, 2012). Furthermore, being reminded of one’s own mortality has been shown to increase religiosity among Christian, Jewish, and Muslim (but not atheist) study participants (Pirutinsky, 2009; Vail, Arndt, & Abdollahi, 2012; see Vail et al., 2010 for a review).
Need for cognitive closure has been investigated less often in the context of terror management. A few studies have shown that it may moderate the type and strength of terror management effects (Dechesne, Janssen, & van Kippenberg, 2000; Schimel et al., 1999). One study found that participants scored higher in personal need for structure (similar to need for closure) after being reminded of mortality (Proulx et al., 2010). In addition, need for cognitive closure tends to be positively related to valuing security, conformity, and tradition (Calogero, Bardi, & Sutton, 2009). As reviewed previously, research on terror management theory has shown that reminders of mortality increase attitudes and behaviors that are in line with these values.

Next, I discuss how individual differences may contribute to the types of changes adults experience after their parents’ deaths. Specifically, I examine the effects of self-oriented and other-oriented goals on whether and how individuals experience changes in their relationships and worldviews. As reviewed next, individuals who over-focus on either self-oriented goals or other-oriented goals may choose to turn to different worldviews after parents’ deaths, thus experiencing different changes in relationships and worldviews compared to adults who have more balanced goals.

**Unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion.** An important factor that may be related to how negatively an individual reacts to the death of parents is her or his general orientation toward relationships. One way to conceptualize orientation toward relationships is through the concepts of agency and communion (Bakan, 1966;
Spence & Helmreich, 1978). Agency refers to individuals’ traits—such as assertiveness—that support self-oriented goals. Communion refers to traits—such as helpfulness and expressivity—that support relationship-related goals. Past research has shown that balancing these two types of traits/goals tends to be related to higher well-being and higher quality relationships (e.g., Helgeson, 1994). Focusing too much on agentic goals at the expense of communal goals may lead to exhibiting a negative form of agency referred to as unmitigated agency (e.g., over-valuing power and competition). Focusing too much on communal goals at the expense of agentic goals may similarly lead to a negative form of communion referred to as unmitigated communion (e.g., overly focusing on the problems of close others).

Both unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion tend to be associated with more difficulties in close relationships such as higher hostility and more negative interactions (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999, 2000). Thus, people who report high unmitigated agency or high unmitigated communion may experience more negative changes in their continuing relationships after the deaths of parents compared to other people. Accordingly, I expect unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion to predict attachment and relationship qualities—and that bereavement status will moderate these associations.

First, I expect that unmitigated agency and bereavement status will predict attachment avoidance. Because individuals high in unmitigated agency undervalue close relationships, they may not know how to turn toward them even when they need the support. Thus, although unmitigated agency will be positively related to
attachment avoidance among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, this relationship will be stronger in the bereaved group (Hypothesis 1). This pattern is expected in attachment relationships in general, with romantic partners, and with the adults’ own children.

Second, bereaved adults who are high in unmitigated communion may turn to their relationships. Thus, although unmitigated communion will be positively related to attachment anxiety among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, this relationship will be stronger in the bereaved group (Hypothesis 2). I expect this pattern will occur regarding attachment relationships in general, with romantic partners, and with the adults’ children.

Third, I expect that unmitigated agency will be negatively related to relationship quality with romantic partner and with children among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals—yet these relations will be stronger in the bereaved group (Hypothesis 3). Fourth, I expect that although unmitigated communion will be negatively related to relationship quality with romantic partner and with child among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, these relations will be stronger in the bereaved group (Hypothesis 4).

Finally, because individuals high in unmitigated agency tend to have difficulty finding security in close relationships, they may more strongly endorse conservative worldviews; and this pattern will be especially likely among bereaved adults. Thus, I predict that although unmitigated agency will be positively related to need for closure and religiosity among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, these relations
will be stronger in the bereaved group (Hypothesis 5). Individuals high in unmitigated communion also tend to have difficulty in close relationships, and I predict that unmitigated communion will be positively related to need for closure and religiosity—especially in the bereaved group (Hypothesis 6).

In prior research, average gender differences have been observed in unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Consistent with traditional gender roles, unmitigated agency was more common among men concerned with power and success goals; conversely, unmitigated communion was more likely among women concerned with relationship goals. Psychological research has also indicated that there may be some average gender differences in the use of terror management defenses. Most relevant to the present study is a study that found that when reminded of mortality, women tended to be more likely to use a relationship defense (i.e., seek others), whereas men tended to be more likely to use a conservative worldview defense (Arndt, Greenberg, & Cook, 2002). However, it is reasonable to expect that this average gender difference is in large part due to average gender differences in unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion (e.g., Helgeson & Fritz, 1999). Thus, I expect that after unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion are taken into account in a model predicting the relationship and worldview differences between bereaved and non-bereaved participants, gender will not be a significant predictor.
Present Study

In summary, I am investigating whether unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion moderate individuals’ relationship outcomes and worldviews after parents’ deaths. To test this, I compare two groups of 50- to 65-year-old adults: one group of adults who have lost both parents between the last 1 and 4 years (bereaved group) and one group of adults who have two living parents (non-bereaved group). I hypothesize the following:

1) Unmitigated agency will be positively related to attachment avoidance, but especially among those in the bereaved group. I expect this pattern for attachment avoidance (a) in general, (b) with their romantic partner, and (c) with their children.

2) Unmitigated communion will be positively related to attachment anxiety, but especially among those in the bereaved group. I expect this pattern for attachment anxiety (a) in general, (b) with their romantic partner, and (c) with their children.

3) Unmitigated agency will be negatively related to relationship quality, but especially among those in the bereaved group. I expect this pattern for relationship quality (a) with their romantic partner and (b) with their children.

4) Unmitigated communion will be negatively related to relationship quality, but especially among those in the bereaved group. I expect this pattern for relationship quality (a) with their romantic partner and (b) with their children.
5) Unmitigated agency will be positively related to conservative worldviews, but especially among those in the bereaved group. I expect this pattern with (a) need for closure and (b) religiosity.

6) Unmitigated communion will be positively related to conservative worldviews, but especially among those in the bereaved group. I expect this pattern for (a) need for closure and (b) religiosity.

**Method**

**Participants**

The sample consisted of two groups of 50 to 65-year-old adults who were married or in a domestic partnership ($N = 191$). The bereaved group was comprised of adults who had lost both parents ($n = 84$), with the last one having died between 12 and 50 months ago ($M = 26.17$, $SD = 8.63$). The comparison group included adults whose parents were both alive ($n = 105$). The majority of participants were women (68%) and European American (85%). The largest religious group represented in the sample was Christian Protestant (44%), followed by Catholic (21%); 16% of participants chose Atheist, Agnostic, or “none” as their religious identification. A full demographic breakdown of the sample by group (bereaved vs. non-bereaved) is presented in Table 1.

The initial full sample consisted of 202 participants, but 11 participants were excluded from the analyses because of the following reasons: Four participants had missed one or both of the attention-check questions (described later), five non-bereaved participants answered the questions about grief after parents’ deaths after
being directed to skip them, and two participants reported that they had recently lost a child.

**Procedure**

The survey was presented to participants as a study of family relationships, with a special interest in whether the participants’ parents were living or not. Most participants were recruited through Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk website (92%); a small portion of the sample was recruited using flyers posted in various locations across California and on Facebook (8%). Participants recruited through Mechanical Turk completed a qualification test that asked them—in multiple choice answer format—their country of residence, their age, which of their parents were still alive or had passed away, and the date of their last parents’ death (if any). Individuals who fit all criteria were directed to an online survey and were compensated $7 for participation. Participants recruited through flyers called or emailed the author to confirm participation criteria and were compensated with a $10 Amazon gift card. All participants gave informed consent prior to participation and were debriefed at the end of the survey.

**Measures**

Participants completed online survey questionnaires, which typically took around 30 minutes to complete. First, they provided background information (e.g., age, gender) and answered questions about whether their parents had passed away and if yes, the approximate date of the deaths. Next, they responded to scale measures in the following order: religiosity, attachment anxiety and avoidance (separately for:
general, romantic partner, children), unmitigated agency (measured as adherence to a traditionally masculine role), unmitigated communion, quality of relationship to romantic partner, quality of relationship to children, and need for cognitive closure. Two attention check questions were included in the survey, one toward the middle and one toward the end of the survey (e.g., For this question please choose 5 [very much]). Each of these questions asked participants to select a specific answer option for that question.

**Background information.** Participants reported their gender; age; occupation; occupation status (employed, unemployed, homemaker, retired, other); city and state of residence; highest education level (1 = *attended some high school* to 7 = *professional degree or PhD*); yearly income (1 = *less that $20,000* to 10 = $140,000+); ethnic group with which they primarily identify; religious identification (“When it comes to religion, how do you identify?”); number of biological, adopted, and step children; children with partner (“Do you and your current partner have a child or children together?”); number of grandchildren; current relationship status (married, legal domestic partnership, other); gender of romantic partner; whether they are currently living with their partner, length of relationship with partner in years and months; number of times married including current partner; and current health quality (1 = *very poor* to 9 = *excellent*).

**Bereavement status.** Participants indicated whether their mother and father (separately) were alive or not (or that they did not know). They were also asked to indicate whether they were thinking of their biological, adoptive, or step mother
The majority of participants reported information about their biological mother and biological father (96% and 94%, respectively)—and this did not differ significantly by group. Participants were asked to answer all subsequent questions about their mother and father in relation to the people they had thought of for these initial questions. Participants were also asked the following: “Are there other people in your life you consider parental figures?” A minority of participants in both the bereaved and non-bereaved groups indicated that they had other parental figures in their lives (12% and 13%, respectively).

**Other deaths.** To take into account whether participants recently experienced non-parental deaths, they were asked “Have you experienced another death of someone in your life within the past three years?” and “If yes, who was the person who passed away?” Answers to the second question were coded for whether the reported death was that of a person with whom the participant had a likely close relationship. Answers that were coded as a close relationship included immediate family members (i.e., siblings) and friends or relatives explicitly described as close. As mentioned previously, participants who reported the death of a child were excluded from the sample.

**Other major life crises.** To check for any group differences in likelihood of having experienced a life crisis other than parent death, participants were asked, “Please describe any major crisis you are dealing with now. (If you are not dealing with a major crisis, please write N/A).” Each participant was given a code for whether or not they described a current crisis (1 = yes, 0 = no).
**Unmitigated agency.** Unmitigated agency refers to individuals’ tendency to endorse self-oriented goals at the expense of other-oriented goals. This construct has been used to conceptualize traditionally masculine norms (Wester, Vogel, O’Neil, & Danforth, 2012). Accordingly, I measured unmitigated agency using the Success, Power, and Competition subscale of the Gender Role Conflict Scale--Short Form (Wester et al., 2012), which includes 4 items; e.g., “I strive to be more successful than others”; $\alpha = .80$. All items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Unmitigated communion.** Unmitigated communion refers to individuals’ tendency to endorse other-oriented goals at the expense of self-oriented goals. It was measured using the Revised Unmitigated Communion Scale (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998), which is comprised of 9 items (e.g., “I always place the needs of others above my own”; $\alpha = .77$) measured on a 7-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*).

**Attachment orientation.** Attachment anxiety and avoidance in romantic relationships were measured using the Experiences in Close Relationships Scale-Short Form (Wei, Russell, Mallinckrodt, & Vogel, 2007). Anxiety (e.g., “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner”) and avoidance (e.g., “I try to avoid getting too close to my partner”) were each measured using six items on a seven-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*). The same items were adapted and used to measure attachment orientation in relationships with children (e.g., “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my children”) and in relationships in general.
(e.g., “I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by others”). Scale reliability estimates for general avoidance ($\alpha = .69$), general anxiety ($\alpha = .77$), avoidance with partner ($\alpha = .83$), anxiety with partner ($\alpha = .74$), avoidance with child ($\alpha = .74$), and anxiety with child ($\alpha = .74$) were all acceptable or better.

**Quality of romantic relationship.** Quality of relationship to romantic partner was measured using the Relationship Rating Form (Davis & Todd, 1985). The form measures several subscales, which are combined to represent six higher-order categories of relationship characteristics. The following subscales were combined to measure romantic relationship quality: **Viability** comprises acceptance/tolerance (4 items; e.g., “Do you accept this person as s/he is?”), respect (4 items; e.g., “Do you respect this person?”), and trust (4 items; e.g., “Can you count on this person in times of need?”). **Intimacy** includes confiding (4 items; e.g., “Do you and this person openly discuss personal matters?”) and understanding (4 items; e.g., “Do you know what kind of person s/he is?”); **Care** includes give utmost (4 items; e.g., “Can you count on this person to give the utmost on your behalf?”), championing (3 items; e.g., “Can you count on this person to support you in an argument or dispute with others?”), and assistance (4 items; e.g., “Can you count on this person to come to your aid when you need help?”); **Passion** comprises fascination (3 items; e.g., “Does this person dominate your thoughts?”), exclusiveness (4 items; e.g., “Are there things that you do only with this person?”), and sexual intimacy (3 items; e.g., “Are you sexually intimate with this person?”); **Satisfaction** comprises success (3 items; e.g., “Are you happy in your relationship with this person?”), enjoyment (3 items; e.g.,
“Do you enjoy doing things with this person more than with others?”), reciprocity (3 items; e.g., “Does your partner share the same feeling for you that you have for him/her?”), and esteem (2 items; e.g., “Does your partner make you feel worthwhile and special?”); Conflict/ambivalence includes conflict (3 items; e.g., “Do you fight and argue with this person?”) and ambivalent (3 items; e.g., “Are you confused or unsure of your feelings toward this person?”). All items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree). Because of the very high correlations among the six subscales, one composite scale was created for analyses in the present study (α = .92).

**Quality of relationship with children.** To measure the quality of relationships with children, I used questions adapted from Umberson (1992). Participants were asked to answer items separately for each child. If participants had more than two children, they were asked to choose the two children to whom they feel closest. **Contact** was measured using one question: “How often have you had contact with this child in person, through phone, or through email?” Answer options ranged from 1 (never) to 6 (more than once a week). **Social Support** was measured using two questions: “How often does your relationship with this child make you feel loved and cared for?” and “How much is this child willing to listen when you need to talk about your worries and problems?” **Relationship strains** was measured using two questions: “How much is this child critical of you or what you do?” and “How much do you feel that this child makes too many demands on you?” These last four questions were rated from 1 (not at all) to 7 (a great deal). The subscales were
averaged for each child to create one relationship quality score. A higher score indicates higher relationship quality. Because of the limited sample of participants who rated relationships with two children, all analyses were conducted with relationship quality with the first child rated. The scale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .70$).

**Need for cognitive closure.** Need for cognitive closure refers to individuals’ desire for order in their lives and their discomfort with ambiguity. It was measured using Roets and van Hiel’s (2011) 15-item Need for Closure Scale. An example of an item is, “I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.” Items were measured on a 6-point scale ($1 = strongly disagree$ to $6 = strongly agree$). The scale had good internal reliability ($\alpha = .86$).

**Religiosity.** Religiosity was measured using one item (“How important is religious practice in your life?”) on a 9-point scale ($1 = not at all important$ to $9 = extremely important$).

**Results**

**Preliminary Analyses**

Descriptive statistics by bereavement group are displayed in Table 2. Correlations are displayed separately for the non-bereaved and bereaved groups in Table 3.

The average age of the bereaved group ($M = 56.29, SD = 3.74$) was somewhat higher than that of the non-bereaved group ($M = 53.52, SD = 3.24$), $t(187) = 5.44, p < .001, d = .79$. Therefore, I controlled for age in all regression analyses. The two
groups did not differ significantly on any of the following: gender, ethnicity, religious identification, religiosity, highest education level, occupation status, annual household income, length of current romantic relationship, number of children, and number of times married. Furthermore, the two groups did not differ on whether they had experienced a close (non-parent) death recently or were experiencing something (other than death of parents) they considered a crisis.

\( T \)-test analyses showed that the bereaved group scored significantly higher on quality of relationship with child (\( M = 5.79, SD = 1.12 \)) compared to the non-bereaved group (\( M = 5.28, SD = 1.37 \)), \( t(164) = 2.65, p = .009, d = .41 \).

I conducted \( t \)-test analyses to assess any significant gender differences on any of the predictor or outcome variables. Significant gender differences occurred with two variables. Men scored significantly higher on unmitigated agency (\( M = 3.20, SD = 1.49 \)) compared to women (\( M = 3.82, SD = 1.27 \)), \( t(187) = 2.75, p = .002, d = .45 \). Men also scored significantly higher (\( M = 3.24, SD = 1.08 \)) than did women (\( M = 2.75, SD = 1.07 \)) on avoidance with children, \( t(168) = 2.79, p = .008, d = .46 \). Thus, I included gender as a control variable in the models (described below).

**Bereavement, Unmitigated Agency, Unmitigated Communion, and Outcomes**

To test my hypotheses, I conducted hierarchical regression analyses for the following outcome variables: general attachment orientation (avoidance and anxiety), attachment (avoidance and anxiety) to romantic partner, attachment (avoidance and anxiety) to child/children, romantic relationship quality, relationship quality with child, need for cognitive closure, and religiosity. In the first step, I controlled for age
and participant gender; in the second step, I entered the bereavement group variable (BG); in the third step, I entered unmitigated agency (UA) and unmitigated communion (UC); in the fourth step I entered two-way interaction terms for BG x UA and for BG x UC.

In all analyses, all continuous predictors were centered. Tests of multicollinearity showed adequate tolerance levels (all above the recommended cutoff of .10; Tabachnik & Fidell, 2001). Thus, multicollinearity was not a problem in any of the analyses.

**Attachment orientation.** First, I hypothesized that unmitigated agency will be positively related to attachment avoidance among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but in the bereaved group this relationship will be stronger. I expected this pattern in relation to general attachment, attachment to romantic partner, and attachment to adults’ children (Hypotheses 1a, 1b, 1c).

The final model predicting general attachment avoidance was significant (see Table 4). As expected, the interaction between bereavement group and unmitigated agency was a significant predictor. To explore the interaction effect, I conducted simple slopes analyses. Specifically, among non-bereaved adults a relation between unmitigated agency and avoidance was not detected, $B = .03, t(181) = .413, p = .680$; but among bereaved adults these were positively related, $B = .29, t(181) = 3.77, p < .001$. For easier interpretation, I represent the data at 1 standard deviation above the mean and 1 standard deviation below the mean in UA for bereaved and non-bereaved individuals (Figure 1). Adults high in unmitigated agency scored higher on avoidance
in the bereaved group than in the non-bereaved group (see Figure 1). Thus, Hypothesis 1a was partially supported. No other variables in the model predicted general attachment avoidance.

The final models predicting avoidance with romantic partner and avoidance with children were not significant (see Table 4). Thus Hypotheses 1b and 1c were not supported.

Second, I hypothesized that unmitigated communion will be positively related to attachment anxiety among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but in the bereaved group this relationship will be stronger. This was expected in relation to general attachment, attachment to romantic partner, and attachment to children (Hypothesis 2a, 2b, 2c). The final model predicting general attachment anxiety was significant (see Table 5). Significant effects in the final model were seen with age, bereavement group, unmitigated communion, and the BG x UC interaction. To understand the interaction effect, I conducted simple slopes analyses. Although bereavement group moderated the relationship between unmitigated communion and anxiety, the pattern of this relationship was unexpected. Unmitigated communion was positively related to attachment anxiety among the non-bereaved group, $B = .40$, $t(180) = 3.40, p < .001$; but it was not related to anxiety among the bereaved group, $B = .00$, $t(180) = -.022, p = .983$. Thus, bereaved adults low in unmitigated communion scored higher on anxiety than their non-bereaved counterparts; adults high in unmitigated communion scored similarly on anxiety in the bereaved and non-bereaved groups (see Figure 2). Thus, Hypothesis 2a was not supported.
The final models predicting attachment anxiety with romantic partner and attachment anxiety with children were each significant (see Table 5). However, contrary to expectations, the BG x UC interaction was not significant in either model. Thus, Hypothesis 2b and Hypothesis 2c were not supported.

**Relationship quality with spouse and child.** Third, I hypothesized that unmitigated agency will be negatively related to relationship quality with romantic partner and with child among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but among the bereaved group this relation will be stronger (Hypotheses 3a and 3b). The final model predicting relationship quality with romantic partner was not significant (see Table 6). Although the final model predicting relationship quality with child was significant, the BG x UA interaction was not significant. Only bereavement group predicted relationship quality with child; bereaved adults had significantly higher relationship quality with their child \((M = 5.79, SD = 1.12)\) than did non-bereaved adults \((M = 5.28, SD = 1.37), d = .42\). Thus, Hypotheses 3a and 3b were not supported.

Fourth, I hypothesized that unmitigated communion will be negatively related to relationship quality with romantic partner and with child among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but among the bereaved group this relation will be stronger (Hypotheses 4a and 4b). The final model predicting relationship quality with romantic partner was not significant. Although the final model predicting relationship quality with child was significant, the BG x UC interaction was not significant. Hence, Hypotheses 4a and 4b were not supported.
Worldviews. In my fifth and sixth set of hypotheses, I hypothesized that unmitigated communion and unmitigated agency, respectively, would be positively related to conservative worldviews, but these relations would be stronger among the bereaved group. I expected these effects for need for closure and religiosity. The final models testing these predictors were not significant (see Table 7). Thus, Hypotheses 5a and 5b as well as Hypotheses 6a and 6b were not supported.

Discussion

In the present study I investigated how middle-aged adults who have lost both parents may differ from those who have both parents alive on the following: attachment orientation, close relationship quality, and cultural worldviews. I hypothesized that differences between these groups would depend on individuals’ levels of unmitigated agency or unmitigated communion.

Effects of Bereavement on Attachment

Attachment avoidance. First, I hypothesized that unmitigated agency will be positively related to attachment avoidance among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but in the bereaved group this relationship will be stronger. The results partially supported this prediction for general avoidance but not for avoidance with romantic partners or avoidance with children. Adults high in unmitigated agency scored higher on general avoidance in the bereaved group than in the non-bereaved group. The quasi-experimental nature of the study suggests that this difference in avoidance may be due to adults’ losing their parents. This finding may also suggest that when middle-aged adults lose their parents, the loss of these important
attachment figures may negatively impact their attachment security; however, this may be particularly likely if they over-focus on self-oriented goals. These individuals who reported placing substantial value on power, success, and competition motives seemed to withdraw from relationships in general even more in the bereaved group.

These findings make sense according to terror management theory. The deaths of parents may act as a mortality reminder for many individuals; they may also signal the loss of a close relationship defense against the awareness of mortality (Cox et al., 2008; Florian et al., 2002). This may lead these adults to search for other terror management defenses. Because individuals high in unmitigated agency tend to place more value on power and success goals than relationship goals, they may turn to non-relationship defenses. They may, for example, delve more deeply into work to enhance their self-esteem and ensure that their personal legacy lives on (Greenberg et al., 1992; Harmon-Jones, Simon, Greenberg, Pyszczynski, Solomon, & McGregor, 1997). In the process, they may withdraw from close relationships.

I had similarly hypothesized that those high in unmitigated agency in the bereaved group would report higher avoidance with romantic partner and avoidance with child compared to the non-bereaved group. However, avoidance in these specific relationships was not predicted by bereavement, by unmitigated agency, or by their interaction. Thus, if losing parents has an effect on attachment avoidance, it seems that it is only for general avoidance rather than avoidance in specific relationships (partners or children).
Prior studies have found that avoidant attachment tends to increase in middle and late adulthood (see Magai, 2008 for a review). As I had predicted, it seems that some individuals—those high in unmitigated agency—experience higher avoidance after bereavement compared to before. However, one study with elderly mothers showed that the typically higher prevalence of avoidant attachment in later adulthood was not present with regard to participants’ attachment to their children (Barnas, Pollina, & Cummings, 1991). The results of the present study support this past finding.

Middle-aged adults’ attachment avoidance to their romantic partner may not have differed between the bereaved and non-bereaved groups because the long-term, committed nature of this relationship may make partners less susceptible to feeling avoidant. Past studies show that married adults tend to be more securely attached than dating adults (e.g., Kobak & Hazan, 1991). Indeed, in the present study in both the bereaved and non-bereaved groups avoidance with romantic partner was significantly lower than was general avoidance. Thus, a long-term close romantic relationship may foster attachment security that is not easily shaken by losing parents.

Thus far, this first finding linking bereavement and unmitigated agency to attachment avoidance supports the notion that terror management effects may drive outcomes in relationships after bereavement. However, the rest of the findings, which I discuss below, do not. Next, I discuss the findings pertaining to Hypotheses 2 to 6 and then summarize what these findings collectively suggest about the links
between terror management, attachment, unmitigated agency/unmitigated communion, and bereavement.

**Attachment anxiety.** Second, I hypothesized that unmitigated communion will be positively related to attachment anxiety among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but in the bereaved group this relationship will be stronger. As expected, there was a significant effect of the interaction between bereavement group and unmitigated communion on general attachment anxiety, but the direction of this effect was unexpected. Unmitigated communion and attachment anxiety were positively related in the non-bereaved group but were unrelated in the bereaved group. In the bereaved group this relationship was not present; individuals low on unmitigated communion tended to score as high on attachment anxiety after bereavement as those high in unmitigated communion. This suggests that losing parents may be related to more anxious attachment even among those who do not over-focus on relationships.

The positive association between attachment anxiety and unmitigated communion among non-bereaved but not bereaved adults is somewhat puzzling. There may be something about the way in which individuals low in unmitigated communion experience the deaths of their parents that relates to higher attachment anxiety. Although individuals low in unmitigated communion tend to have fewer negative interactions with close others, they also report providing less support to close others (Helgeson & Fritz, 1999, 2000). Thus, it could be that these individuals experience guilt after their elderly parents have passed away, which could lead them
to become preoccupied with remaining relationships. However, because this effect was not hypothesized, future research should investigate these relations further.

I had also expected that bereavement and unmitigated communion would have similar effects on attachment anxiety in specific relationships with romantic partner and with child. There was no evidence for the expected effect for either. As with avoidance (discussed previously), these long-term close relationships may be less susceptible to the effects of bereavement compared to general attachment (Barnas et al., 1991; Kobak & Hazan, 1991).

**Relationship quality.** In my third and fourth set of hypotheses, I had predicted that unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion, respectively, would be negatively related to relationship quality with romantic partner or with child among both the bereaved and non-bereaved groups, but in the bereaved group these relations would be stronger. Contrary to expectations, none of the variables under study were significant predictors of romantic relationship quality. This result does not support past research findings, which have shown a relation between bereavement and relationship quality with romantic partner. Umberson (1995) found that women who had lost a parent within the last three years reported declines in relationship quality with their spouses. In a small-scale qualitative study, Petersen and Rafuls (1998) found that recently bereaved individuals discussed the positive ways in which close others helped them cope during bereavement. However, both of these studies included individuals who had lost parents within the past year. It may be that during the year immediately after bereavement, individuals experience
changes in their relationships, but these subside after the initial intense grieving period.

Regarding relationship quality with child, contrary to expectations, unmitigated agency, unmitigated communion, and their interactions with bereavement group were not significant predictors. Only bereavement group was a significant predictor. On average, bereaved adults reported better relationship quality with their children than did non-bereaved adults. This finding is in line with past research that showed that losing parents may relate to positive changes in adults’ relationships with their adult children (Umberson, 2003). As adults lose their parents, they may become more aware of the passing of time, and as the oldest generation, feel a greater need for high quality relationships with their children (Cartensen, Isaacowitz, & Charles, 1999).

**Cultural worldviews.** In my fifth and sixth set of hypotheses, I predicted that unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion, respectively, will be positively related to need for closure and religiosity among both bereaved and non-bereaved individuals, but in the bereaved group these relationships will be stronger. According to terror management theory, if the deaths of parents reminded individuals of their own mortality, they would turn toward close relationships or cultural worldviews. Because individuals high in unmitigated communion or unmitigated agency cannot successfully turn toward relationships, they would be expected to increase their endorsement of worldviews instead. However, these hypotheses were not supported. None of the predicted effects were present for either
need for cognitive closure or religiosity. One possibility is that the deaths of parents do not act as reminders of one’s own mortality. Below, I discuss the implications of the findings collectively for understanding parental death in the context of terror management theory, attachment theory, and unmitigated agency/unmitigated communion.

**Implications for Theoretical Underpinnings of Bereavement Effects**

Taken together, the findings do not lend adequate support to hypotheses generated by terror management theory. Although expected differences between bereaved and non-bereaved individuals occurred for attachment avoidance, other variables (i.e., attachment anxiety, relationship quality with romantic partner and with child, need for cognitive closure, and religiosity) did not differ in predicted ways between the two groups.

Effects of parental death may be better explained by attachment theory. Bowlby (1980) suggested that the death of an attachment figure leads to a reorganization of attachment. The grieving process itself has been described as including both hyperactivation (i.e., anxiety) and deactivation (i.e., avoidance) of the attachment system (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). Individuals oscillate between yearning for the lost person and detachment from painful thoughts and feelings. Although this occurs with respect to the lost person, it is also likely that the loss results in more general reorganization of attachment orientation. The larger proportion of avoidant older adults may reflect the effects of losses of close others in later life including the loss of parents (Diehl et al., 1998). The result of the present
study regarding differences in avoidant attachment between bereaved and non-bereaved participants high in unmitigated agency supports this interpretation.

The findings of this study also suggest that general orientations toward the self or toward others may play a role in how losing parents is related to attachment in later adulthood. It was only adults high in unmitigated agency whose avoidance was related to bereavement; and it was only adults low in unmitigated communion whose anxiety was related to bereavement. Conceptually, attachment orientations on the one hand and unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion on the other are related constructs (Shaver et al., 1996). Both attachment avoidance and unmitigated agency are related to undervaluing relationships. These constructs may become especially related after individuals lose their parents. This finding may reflect the tendency for people who have a hard time focusing on and creating positive relationships to have even more difficulty in relationships after the deaths of parents.

Attachment anxiety and unmitigated communion are also related constructs (Shaver et al., 1996). Both reflect a tendency to over-focus on relationships. I expected them to be more strongly related among adults who have experienced the loss of their parents, whereby adults higher in unmitigated communion would respond to the deaths of parents by being even more vigilant in their relationships. Thus, the finding that these two constructs were only related among non-bereaved individuals is hard to interpret. Bereaved low UC adults scored similarly highly to high UC adults on anxiety. As described previously, this may reflect low unmitigated communion individuals’ anxious reactions to feeling that they were not
supportive enough of their aging parents before they died (Helgeson & Fritz, 1998). This unexpected finding should be investigated further.

**Limitations and Future Directions**

The findings of the present study show some of the possible effects of bereavement on middle-aged adults’ attachment orientations; in addition, they highlight how adults who focused on self-oriented goals and other-oriented goals can experience different effects after bereavement. The quasi-experimental design of the study suggests that these effects may be causal. However, a longitudinal investigation is needed for stronger evidence of a causal relationship between experiencing bereavement and changes in attachment and relationship quality. For example, it is impossible to know in the present study whether and how individuals’ unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion changed after losing parents. In interpreting the results, I assumed that unmitigated agency and unmitigated communion moderated bereavement effects; this interpretation assumes a constant level of these factors. However, unmitigated communion and unmitigated agency may also have changed for some adults but not others over the course of experiencing parents’ deaths.

The present study also relied on quantitative data to understand adults’ experiences after bereavement. Future qualitative work such as in-depth interviews may help shed light on the kinds of processes that I speculated about in this study. For example, it may allow a better understanding of how individuals’ goals and foci
change in the years after losing parents. It may also shed light on the hopes and fears different bereaved adults have within their relationships.

Finally, this study was of adults who were married or in a domestic partnership. Future research may consider how bereavement affects the attachment orientations and relationships of individuals who are not in a long-term committed relationship. It may be that these individuals become more motivated to seek out and commit to a long-term relationship after bereavement. However, those high in unmitigated agency, who have not focused on relationships as much, may have more difficulty doing this compared to other adults.

**Conclusion**

The present study investigated how individuals’ relationships may differ after losing parents compared to before. Findings showed that middle adulthood is a time when many adults may experience changes in their attachment security and their relationships and that the changes experienced may depend on adults’ self- and other-oriented goals. Taken together, the findings suggest that focusing too much on self-oriented goals tends to be related to worse outcomes (i.e., higher attachment avoidance) after parent death whereas focusing too much on other-oriented goals does not. Given that isolation and lack of social support tend to predict worse mental and physical health outcomes after bereavement (Stroebe, Folkman, Hansson, & Schut, 2006), decreases in attachment security—especially higher avoidance—in middle and late adulthood are important psychological phenomena for researchers and mental health practitioners. Mental health professionals working with
individuals who have lost their parents in middle adulthood may find it helpful to consider the individuals’ self- versus other-oriented goals in order to better understand the changes and difficulties they may be experiencing in their relationships.
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Table 1

*Background Characteristics By Bereavement Group*

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Table 1 con’t

**Background Characteristics By Bereavement Group**

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## Table 2

**Descriptive Statistics By Bereavement Group**

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Table 3

Correlations By Bereavement Group

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Table 4
Final Regression Models for Attachment Avoidance

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<th>R²Δ</th>
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Note. UA = Unmitigated Agency, UC = Unmitigated communion.
*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001
Table 5

Final Regression Models for Attachment Anxiety

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Note. UA = Unmitigated Agency, UC = Unmitigated communion.

\*\(p < .05\).  \**\(p < .01\).  \***\(p < .001\)
Table 6

**Final Regression Models for Romantic Relationship Quality and Child Relationship Quality**

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**Note.** UA = Unmitigated Agency, UC = Unmitigated communion.

*p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001
Table 7

Final Regression Models for Need for Cognitive Closure and Religiosity

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**Note.** UC = Unmitigated communion, UA = Unmitigated Agency.

*p < .05.  **p < .01.  ***p < .001
*Figure 1.* Predicted avoidance scores by bereavement group and unmitigated agency.
Figure 2. Predicted anxiety scores by bereavement group and unmitigated communion.
APPENDIX

Survey

Demographic Information

1. Your gender:
   - female
   - male
   - other

2. Your age: _________

3. Your occupation: _________

4. What is your current occupation status?
   - employed
   - unemployed
   - homemaker
   - retired
   - other:_____________

5. What is the highest level of education that you have completed?
   - Attended some high school
   - Graduated high school/GED
   - Attended some college
   - Graduated from two year college
   - Graduated from four year college
   - Master’s degree
   - Professional degree/PhD

6. What is your yearly household income?
   - Less than 20,000
   - 20,000-34,999
   - 35,000-49,999
   - 50,000-64,999
   - 65,000-79,999
   - 80,000-94,999
   - 95,000-109,999
   - 110,000-124,999
   - 125,000-139,999
   - 140,000+
7. Which ethnicity do you **primarily** identify with?
   - Pacific Islander
   - Indian (Asian)
   - Middle Eastern
   - Native American/American Indian
   - Black/African American
   - Asian/Asian American
   - Latino/Hispanic
   - White/European/European American
   - Mixed (please describe): _____________

8. What city and state do you live in? __________________________

9. How important is religious practice in your life?
   1 (not at all)…2…3…4…5…6…7…8…9 (extremely)

10. How spiritual do you consider yourself to be?
    1 (not at all)…2…3…4…5…6…7…8…9 (extremely)

11. When it comes to religion, how do you identify?
    - Protestant (Christian)
    - Catholic (Christian)
    - Mormon (Christian)
    - Christian-other: _________
    - Jewish
    - Muslim
    - Buddhist
    - Hindu
    - Atheist
    - Agnostic
    - Other: _______
    - None

12. How many biological children do you have? ___________

13. How many stepchildren do you have? ___________

14. How many adopted children do you have? ___________

15. Do you and your current partner have a child or children together?
    - Yes
    - No

16. How many grandchildren do you have? ________
17. What is your current relationship status?
   o married
   o legal domestic partnership
   o other:_____________

18. What is the gender of your partner?
   o female
   o male
   o other:_____________

19. Are you and your current partner living together?
   o Yes
   o No

20. How long have you been married to your current partner? __________

21. How many times have you been married or in a domestic partnership? _______

22. Please list all people who live with you full time, OTHER THAN your partner.
   __________________________
   __________________________

23. How do you identify your sexual orientation?
   o heterosexual only
   o heterosexual mostly
   o heterosexual more
   o heterosexual/homosexual equally
   o homosexual more
   o homosexual mostly
   o homosexual only

24. How would you rate your current health?

   Very poor    Moderate    Excellent
   1 ......2 ......3 ......4 ......5 ......6 ......7 ......8 ......9

25. Are you dealing with any significant health problems currently?
   o yes
   o no

26. If you answered "yes" above, please describe the health problems you are dealing with._____________________________
27. Is your mother still alive?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don’t know

28. What month and year did your mother pass away? (If not applicable, please write N/A): ______________

29. If your mother is alive, is she terminally ill?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Possibly
   - Not Applicable

30. For the above questions, the mother I thought of was my:
   - biological mother
   - adoptive mother
   - stepmother
   - other: ____________

31. Is your father still alive?
   - Yes
   - No
   - I don’t know

32. What month and year did your father pass away? (If not applicable, please write N/A): ______________

33. If your father is alive, is he terminally ill?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Possibly
   - Not Applicable

34. For the above questions, the father I thought of was my:
   - biological father
   - adoptive father
   - stepfather
   - other: ____________

*Please answer all future questions about parents in this survey with these parents in mind.*

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35. Are there other people in your life whom you consider parental figures?
   o Yes
   o No

36. If yes, please list anyone who fills this role in your life: ____________________

37. Have you experienced another death of someone in your life recently?
   o Yes
   o No

38. If yes, who was the person who passed away? ____________________

39. What year and month did this person pass away? ____________________

40. Please describe any major crisis you are dealing with now. (If you are not dealing with a major crisis, please write N/A.) ____________________

Your Relationships

The following statements concern how you feel in close relationships. We are interested in how you generally experience relationships, not just in what is happening in a specific relationship. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1. It helps to turn to others in times of need.
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by close others.
3. I want to get close to other people, but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that other people don’t want to get as close as I would like.
5. I turn to other people for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares people away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to others.
8. I do not often worry about being abandoned.
9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with close others.
10. I get frustrated if other people are not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when other people get too close to me.
12. I worry that other people won’t care about me as much as I care about them.
The following statements concern how you feel in your current romantic relationships. Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1. It helps to turn to my romantic partner in times of need.
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my partner.
3. I want to get close to my partner, but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that my partner doesn’t want to get as close as I would like.
5. I turn to my partner for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares my partner away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to my partner.
8. I do not often worry about being abandoned by my partner.
9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my partner.
10. I get frustrated if my partner is not available when I need her/him.
11. I am nervous when my partner gets too close to me.
12. I worry that my partner won’t care about me as much as I care about her/him.

The following statements concern how you feel in your relationship with your child(ren). Please respond to each statement by indicating how much you agree or disagree with it.

1. It helps to turn to my child(ren) in times of need.
2. I need a lot of reassurance that I am loved by my child(ren).
3. I want to get close to my child(ren), but I keep pulling back.
4. I find that my child(ren) don’t want to get as close as I would like.
5. I turn to my child(ren) for many things, including comfort and reassurance.
6. My desire to be very close sometimes scares my child(ren) away.
7. I try to avoid getting too close to my child(ren).
8. I do not often worry about being abandoned by my child(ren).
9. I usually discuss my problems and concerns with my child(ren).
10. I get frustrated if my child(ren) are not available when I need them.
11. I am nervous when my child(ren) want to get too close to me.
12. I worry that my child(ren) won’t care about me as much as I care about them.

About You

Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement about yourself.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Somewhat Disagree
3 = Slightly Disagree
4 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5 = Slightly Agree
6 = Somewhat Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

1. Talking about my feelings is difficult for me.
2. I have difficulty expressing my emotional needs.
3. I have difficulty expressing my tender feelings.
4. I do not like to show my emotions to other people.
5. Winning is a measure of my value and personal worth.
6. I strive to be more successful than others.
7. Being smarter or physically stronger than others is important to me.
8. I like to feel superior to other people.
9. Finding time to relax is difficult for me.
10. My needs to work or study keep me from my family or leisure more than I would like.
11. My work or school often disrupts other parts of my life (home, health, leisure, etc).
12. My life is harmed by overwork and stress, caused by my need to achieve on the job or in school.

Using the scale below, place a number in the blank beside each statement that indicates the extent to which you agree or disagree. Think of the people close to you—friends or family—in responding to each statement.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Somewhat Disagree
3 = Slightly Disagree
4 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5 = Slightly Agree
6 = Somewhat Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

1. I always place the needs of others above my own.
2. I never find myself getting overly involved in others’ problems.
3. For me to be happy, I need others to be happy.
4. I worry about how other people get along without me when I am not there.
   I have no trouble getting to sleep at night when other people are upset.
   It is hard for me to satisfy my own needs when they interfere with the needs of others.
5. I can't say no when someone asks me for help.
6. Even when exhausted, I will always help other people.
   I often worry about others’ problems.
About Your Relationship with Your Partner

Below you will find questions about your relationship with your current partner. For each question, please select the answer that best reflects your feelings about your relationship with this person.

1 = Not at all
2 = Slightly
3 = Somewhat
4 = A fair amount
5 = Very much
6 = Strongly (almost always)
7 = Completely or extremely

1. Do you accept this person as s/he is?
2. Are you willing to ignore this person’s small sins because of the way you feel about her/him?
3. Is it easy for you to forgive this person?
4. Does this person disappoint you?
5. Do you respect this person?
6. Does this person make bad judgments on important matters?
7. Does this person bring out the best in you?
8. Is this person a good sounding board for your ideas and plans?
9. Do you trust this person?
10. Can you count on this person in times of need?
11. Does this person ever forget your welfare?
12. Does this person use things against you that s/he shouldn’t?
13. Do you and this person openly discuss personal matters?
14. Do you confide in this person?
15. Do you feel that there are things about you that this person just would not understand?
16. Do you feel some things about yourself are none of this person’s business?
17. Do you know what kind of person s/he is?
18. Is this person’s behavior surprising or puzzling to you?
19. Do you know this person’s faults and shortcomings?
20. Do you know about this person’s past?
21. Does this person dominate your thoughts?
22. Does it give you pleasure just to watch or look at this person?
23. Do you think about this person even when you are not with him/her?
24. Are there things that you do only with this person?
25. Do you have feelings about this person that you couldn’t have about others?
26. Would you feel betrayed or hurt if this person had the same relationship with someone else that s/he now has with you?
27. Do you and this person have your own way of doing things?
28. Are you sexually intimate with this person?
29. Do you find this personal sexually attractive?
30. Do you enjoy being touched by this person and touching him/her?
31. Can you count on this person to lend you a substantial sum of money?
32. Can you count on this person to risk personal safety to help you if you were in danger?
33. Can you count on this person to give the utmost on your behalf?
34. Are you prepared to make a significant sacrifice on this person’s behalf?
35. Can you count on this person to let you know how others feel about you?
36. Can you count on this person to support you in an argument or dispute with others?
37. Can you count on this person to champion your interests where there is a conflict between your interests and those of others?
38. Can you count on this person to come to your aid when you need help?
39. Can this person count on you for help when s/he is in need?
40. Can you count on this person to tell you what s/he really thinks about issues regardless of whether he or she agrees with you?
41. Do you tell this person exactly what you think about important issues regardless of whether he or she agrees with you?
42. Are you happy in your relationship with this person?
43. Has your relationship with this person satisfied your needs?
44. Has your relationship with this person been a success?
45. Do you enjoy doing things with this person more than with others?
46. Do you enjoy doing things with this person that you otherwise would not enjoy?
47. Do you enjoy this person’s company?
48. Does your partner share the same feeling for you that you have for him/her?
49. Does this person really care about you as a person?
50. Do you feel that your partner cares for you as much as you care for him/her?
51. Does your partner make you feel worthwhile and special?
52. Does your partner make you feel proud of yourself?
53. Do you fight and argue with this person?
54. Does this person treat you in unfair ways?
55. Is there tension in your relationship with this person?
56. Are you confused or unsure of your feelings toward this person?
57. Do you feel that this person demands too much of your time?
58. Do you feel trapped in this relationship?

About Your Relationship with Your Parents

Below you will find questions about your relationship with your parents. For each question, please select the answer that best reflects your feelings about your relationship with your mother and your father [while they were still alive].
1=Strongly Disagree
2=Somewhat Disagree
3=Slightly Disagree
4=Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5=Slightly Agree
6=Somewhat Agree
7=Strongly Agree

In general, my MOTHER...
___ is someone I can count on to listen to me when I feel upset.
___ supports my goals and interests.
___ understands my problems and concerns.
___ has no idea what I am feeling or thinking.
___ is too busy to help me.
___ ignores what I have to say.
___ is sensitive to my feelings and needs.
___ is disappointed in me.
___ is someone whose expectations I feel I have to meet.

During time spent together, my MOTHER was someone...
___ I looked forward to seeing
___ with whom I argued.
___ with whom I felt comfortable.
___ who made me angry.
___ I wanted to be with all the time.
___ towards whom I felt cool and distant.
___ who got on my nerves.
___ who made me feel guilty and anxious.
___ I liked telling about what I have done recently.
___ for whom I felt feelings of love.
___ I tried to ignore.
___ I liked being with.
___ I didn't want to tell what has been going on in my life.

Following time spent together, I leave my MOTHER...
___ with warm and positive feelings.
___ feeling let down and disappointed.

When I go to my MOTHER for help ...
___ I continue to feel unsure of myself.
___ I feel that I would have gotten more understanding from a friend.

In general, my MOTHER...
___ is someone I can count on to listen to me when I feel upset.
supports my goals and interests.
understands my problems and concerns.
has no idea what I am feeling or thinking.
Is too busy to help me.
ignores what I have to say.
Is sensitive to my feelings and needs.
Is disappointed in me.
Is someone whose expectations I feel I have to meet.

During time spent together, my MOTHER was someone...
I looked forward to seeing
with whom I argued.
with whom I felt comfortable.
who made me angry.
I wanted to be with all the time.
towards whom I felt cool and distant.
who got on my nerves.
who made me feel guilty and anxious.
ilked telling about what I have done recently.
for whom I felt feelings of love.
I tried to ignore.
I liked being with.
I didn't want to tell what has been going on in my life.

Following time spent together, I leave my MOTHER...
With warm and positive feelings.
feeling let down and disappointed.

When I go to my MOTHER for help ...
continue to feel unsure of myself.
I feel that I would have gotten more understanding from a friend.

In general, my FATHER...
someone I can count on to listen to me when I feel upset.
supports my goals and interests.
understands my problems and concerns.
has no idea what I am feeling or thinking.
is too busy to help me.
ignores what I have to say.
is sensitive to my feelings and needs.
is disappointed in me.
is someone whose expectations I feel I have to meet.

During time spent together, my FATHER was someone...
Following time spent together, I leave my FATHER...

- with warm and positive feelings.
- feeling let down and disappointed.

When I go to my FATHER for help ... 

- I continue to feel unsure of myself.
- I feel that I would have gotten more understanding from a friend.

In general, my FATHER...

- is someone I can count on to listen to me when I feel upset.
- supports my goals and interests.
- understands my problems and concerns.
- has no idea what I am feeling or thinking.
- is too busy to help me.
- ignores what I have to say.
- is sensitive to my feelings and needs.
- is disappointed in me.
- is someone whose expectations I feel I have to meet.

During time spent together, my FATHER was someone...

- I looked forward to seeing
- with whom I argued.
- with whom I felt comfortable.
- who made me angry.
- I wanted to be with all the time.
- towards whom I felt cool and distant.
- who got on my nerves.
- who made me feel guilty and anxious.
- I liked telling about what I have done recently.
- for whom I felt feelings of love.
- I tried to ignore.
- I liked being with.
- I didn't want to tell what has been going on in my life.
I tried to ignore.  
I liked being with.  
I didn't want to tell what has been going on in my life.

Following time spent together, I leave my FATHER...
With warm and positive feelings.  
feeling let down and disappointed.

When I go to my FATHER for help ...
I continue to feel unsure of myself.  
I feel that I would have gotten more understanding from a friend.

For each question, please select the answer that best reflects your feelings about your relationship with your mother and your father CURRENTLY.

1=Strongly Disagree  
2=Somewhat Disagree  
3=Slightly Disagree  
4=Neither Agree Nor Disagree  
5=Slightly Agree  
6=Somewhat Agree  
7=Strongly Agree

1. At times when I have some trouble or difficulty, my mother’s image seems to come to mind.
2. When I feel alone and feel anxious, my mother is the first person I think of.
3. If I am in trouble, the first person I wish I could talk to is my mother.
4. If I feel depressed, my mother is always a source of strength for me.

1. At times when I have some trouble or difficulty, my father’s image seems to come to mind.
2. When I feel alone and feel anxious, my father is the first person I think of.
3. If I am in trouble, the first person I wish I could talk to is my father.
4. If I feel depressed, my father is always a source of strength for me.

About Your Relationship with Your Children

For each question, please select the answer that best reflects your feelings about your relationship with your children currently. If you have more than two children, please choose the two children you feel closest to in order to answer these questions, first for one child, then for the other.
Child A

1. Gender of child:
   o Female
   o Male
   o Other: _________

2. Age of child: _________

3. Birth order of child:
   o First born
   o Second born
   o Third born
   o Other:

4. This child is my:
   o biological child
   o stepchild
   o adopted child
   o other:

5. How often do you have contact with your child either in person, by phone, or through email?
   __ More than once a week
   __ Once a week
   __ 2 or 3 times a month
   __ about once a month
   __ less than once a month
   __ never

For the next four statements, use the following answer options:
   7  A great deal
   6
   5
   4  Some
   3
   2
   1  Not at all

1. I feel loved and cared for by this child…
2. This child is willing to listen when I need to talk about my worries or problems…
3. This child is critical of me or what I do…
4. This child makes too many demands on me…
Child B

1. Gender of child:
   o Female
   o Male
   o Other: __________

2. Age of child: ________

3. Birth order of child:
   o First born
   o Second born
   o Third born
   o Other:

4. This child is my:
   o biological child
   o stepchild
   o adopted child
   o other:

5. How often do you have contact with your child either in person, by phone, or through email?

   ___More than once a week
   ___Once a week
   ___2 or 3 times a month
   ___about once a month
   ___less than once a month
   ___never

For the next four statements, use the following answer options:

1. I feel loved and cared for by this child…
2. This child is willing to listen when I need to talk about my worries or problems…
3. This child is critical of me or what I do…

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8. This child makes too many demands on me…

**About You and Your Opinion**

*Answer the following items about yourself with these answer options:*

1=Strongly Disagree  
2=Somewhat Disagree  
3=Slightly Disagree  
4=Slightly Agree  
5=Somewhat Agree  
6=Strongly Agree

1. I don't like situations that are uncertain.  
2. I dislike questions which could be answered in many different ways.  
3. I find that a well ordered life with regular hours suits my temperament.  
4. I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why an event occurred in my life.  
5. I feel irritated when one person disagrees with what everyone else in a group believes.  
6. I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I can expect from it.  
7. When I have made a decision, I feel relieved.  
8. When I am confronted with a problem, I’m dying to reach a solution very quickly.  
9. I would quickly become impatient and irritated if I would not find a solution to a problem immediately.  
10. I don't like to be with people who are capable of unexpected actions.  
11. I dislike it when a person's statement could mean many different things.  
12. I find that establishing a consistent routine enables me to enjoy life more.  
13. I enjoy having a clear and structured mode of life.  
14. I do not usually consult many different opinions before forming my own view.  
15. I dislike unpredictable situations.

1=Strongly Disagree  
2=Somewhat Disagree  
3=Slightly Disagree  
4=Slightly Agree  
5=Somewhat Agree  
6=Strongly Agree

1. People should develop their own personal standards about good and evil and pay less attention to traditional forms of religious guidance (ex: the Bible, the Koran, etc.).  
2. What our country really needs instead of more "civil rights" is a good stiff dose of law and order.
3. A "woman's place" in society should be wherever she wants to be.
4. The withdrawal from tradition will turn out to be a fatal fault one day.
5. There is no such crime to justify capital punishment.
6. Obedience and respect for authority are the most important values children should learn.
7. Homosexual long-term relationships should be treated as equivalent to marriage.
8. What our country really needs is a strong, determined leader who will set us on our right way again.
9. It is good that nowadays young people have greater freedom to make their own rules and to protest against things they don't like.
10. Being virtuous and law-abiding is in the long run better for us than permanently challenging the foundation of our society.
11. It is important to protect the rights of radical and nonconforming people in all ways.
12. The real keys to the "good life" are obedience, discipline, and virtue.

1=Strongly Disagree
2=Somewhat Disagree
3=Slightly Disagree
4=Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5=Slightly Agree
6=Somewhat Agree
7=Strongly Agree

1. I have little control over the things that happen to me.
2. There is really no way I can solve some of the problems I have.
3. There is little I can do to change many of the important things in my life.
4. I often feel helpless in dealing with the problems of life.
5. Sometimes I feel that I'm being pushed around in life.
6. What happens to me in the future mostly depends on me.
7. I can do just about anything I really set my mind to.

**Feeling about Parents Who Have Passed Away**

*Please answer the following questions with regard to your parents who have passed away. If both of your parents are still alive, please proceed to the next page.*

1=Strongly Disagree
2=Somewhat Disagree
3=Slightly Disagree
4=Neither Agree Nor Disagree
5=Slightly Agree
6=Somewhat Agree
7=Strongly Agree

1. I still cry when I think of my parents.
2. I still get upset when I think about my parents.
3. I cannot accept my parents’ death.
4. Sometimes I very much miss my parents.
5. Even now it’s painful to recall memories of my parents.
6. I am preoccupied with thoughts (often think) about my parents.
7. I hide my tears when I think about my parents.
8. No one will ever take the place in my life of my parents.
9. I can’t avoid thinking about my parents.
10. I feel it’s unfair that my parents died.
11. Things and people around me still remind me of my parents.
12. I am unable to accept the death of my parents.
13. At times I still feel the need to cry for my parents.

14. Do you feel you have changed since your parents’ deaths?
   - Yes
   - No

15. If yes, please describe in what ways you feel you have changed.
    __________________________________________

16. Do you feel your life has changed since your parents’ deaths?
   - Yes
   - No

17. If yes, please describe in what ways you feel your life has changed.

18. What do you miss most about your parents?

19. How would you feel if your parents were still around? How do you think they would fit in your life now?

**Feedback**

1. Is there any feedback you would like to give us about the experience of taking this survey?

2. Is there anything you would like to let us know that we didn’t ask about?