

## Religion and Coping

Information summarized from:

Pargament, K.I. (1997). *The psychology of religion and coping: Theory, research, and practice*. New York: Guilford Press.

## What is “Coping?”

- How do you “cope” with problems?
- Coping occurs during an encounter between a person and a situation
  - “a transactional process between the individual and a situation.”
  - how we “deal” with difficulty

“Coping is a search for significance in times of stress.”

## What is "Coping?"

- Coping . . .
  - Is multidimensional.
    - successful coping engages many aspects of the person: emotions, thoughts, behaviors.
  - Often includes a social element.
  - Is filled with possibility and choice.  
(quote from Yalom, p.272)

## Ways of Coping

- Conservation of Significance
  - Tendency to preserve and maintain objects of value.  
E.g., Family, career, feelings of immortality, possessions
- Transformation of Significance
  - When conserving significance is no longer viable, transformation of significance must take place.
  - Can be painful and risky (failure is a possibility).

## Ways of Coping

### Conservation and Transformation:

– Both the objects of value (ends) and the ways those objects are sought (means).

- Preservation: Conserve Ends and Means
- Reconstruction: Conserve Ends, Transform Means
- Re-Valuation: Transform Ends, Conserve Means
- Re-Creation: Transform Ends and Means

## Outcomes of Religious Coping

- What types of religious coping are HELPFUL?
  - Spiritual Support: Relationship with Divine, support and guidance through difficulty
  - Collaborative Religious Coping: The belief that one is working with the Divine to solve the problem.
  - Congregational Support: Social support received through a religious group.
  - Benevolent Religious Reframing: Thinking of the difficulty in positive religious terms.

## Outcomes of Religious Coping

- What types are HARMFUL?
  - Discontent with Congregation and God: Upset with religious group or leaders, anger directed toward the universe or the Divine, and feelings of being let down or deserted.
  - Negative Religious Reframing: Negative religious explanations for the difficulty, particularly if the event is considered a Divine punishment. Also complicated more when Divine act is seen as capricious (i.e., "susceptible to sudden or freakish impulses").
  - NOTE: No longitudinal or interactional data available on the "harmful" effects of these variables.

## Outcomes of Religious Coping

- What types show MIXED RESULTS?
  - Religious Rituals in Response to Difficulty: Performing religious rituals in response to trouble (e.g., pilgrimage to Lourdes of the physically ill.)
    - Trouble with interpretation: healing effect vs consolation effect
  - Self-Directing, Deferring, and Pleading: Self-directed is seeking solutions free of help from the Divine, while Deferring is releasing all one's power to the Divine to intervene. Pleading is separate and is simply requesting help from the Divine.
  - Religious Conversion & Religious Switching

## Summary

- Coping can include the conservation or transformation of “means” and “ends”.
- Stereotypes of religion and coping are often simplistic or inaccurate.
- Using religion to cope with problems may be useful, harmful, or inert depending on the way religion is used.
- Related to religious orientation, the most religiously mature might balance “using” and “living” their religion.