Loss, Grief & Mourning
Cal Poly is located in tiłhini, the Place of the Full Moon. We gratefully acknowledge, respect, and thank yak titʸu titʸu yak tiłhini, Northern Chumash Tribe of San Luis Obispo County and Region in whose homelands we are guests.
Agenda

What we will cover:

• Types of Loss
• Bereavement, Grief, & Mourning Meanings
• Grief Among College Students
• The Loss Line
• Mourning Models
• Q & A
Facilitator Background
What is Loss?

**Loss**: The realized experience that something is no longer present in the way that it has been in the past. (If a non-death loss, manifestation often is identified as depression, anxiety, or stress, not grief.)

**Non-death Related Loss**: Grieving is a natural, adaptive process and reaction to all kinds of losses, not just death. In a lifetime, individuals grieve non-death losses which may include, loss of one's health and abilities through aging, illness or disability, loss of a relationship or marriage through separation or divorce, loss of identity and social role through infertility, unemployment, immigration/migration retrenchment, retirement, loss of freedoms and time through incarceration, loss of community through natural and man-made disasters, etc.

Other examples of non-death losses:

- Loss of perceived talent to play professional sports.
- Eviction, homelessness
- Living with HIV/AIDS
- Loss of a familiar place (e.g., through leaving home, foster care placement)
- Loss of precious time and lost opportunities (e.g., through delayed coming out, delayed medical attention if cancerous)
Other Variables in Loss

These variables add to the unpredictability of grief and underscore just how many ways loss is experienced.

Avoidable & Unavoidable Loss

Temporary & Permanent Loss

Actual & Imagined Loss

Anticipated & Unanticipated Loss

Leaving & Being Left
Material Loss: The loss of a physical object or of familiar surroundings to which one has an important attachment. (Example: Sell home)

Relationship Loss: The ending of opportunities to relate oneself to, talk with, share experiences with, make love to, touch, settle issues with, fight with, and otherwise be in the emotional and physical presence of a particular other human being. (Example: A break up or divorce)

Intrapsychic Loss: The experience of losing an important image of oneself, losing the possibilities of “what might have been,” abandonment of plans for a particular future, the dying of a dream. Although often related to external experiences, it is itself an entirely inward experience. (Example: Not completing a long-sought-for task, like graduating from college)

Functional Loss: When we lose some of the muscular or neurological functions of the body. Can evoke powerful grief. (Example: Aging)

Role Loss: The loss of a specific social role or of one’s accustomed place in a social network. (Example: Retirement, or a promotion)

Systemic Loss: To understand it, we must first recall that human beings usually belong to some interactional system in which patterns of behavior develop over time. (Example: Someone transitions out of living at home, so the family system must adapt to the loss.)
Bereavement refers to the state of having experienced the loss of a loved one [not a non-death-related loss]. It most often refers to the time after a loss when emotions are at their most profound. This time is marked by intense grief and tremendous sorrow.
The college community and bereavement

2008 statistics:
N=1600 bereaved college students, including 650 African Americans
- 25% have lost a significant family member or friend in the past year
- 50% have suffered a loss in the past 2 years
- 11% of African American college students experienced more frequent bereavement from homicide vs. 2% of their White peers, but lower levels of suicide and accidents.
  - African Americans described higher levels of grief, but greater continuing connections with the deceased, and a stronger sense of support.

2015 statistics:
N=3,416 racially diverse college students from multiple institutions
- 30-36% have lost a significant family member or friend in the past year
- 60% have suffered a loss by the end of college
- Nearly 1 in 4 reported experiencing multiple losses
- 17.7% reported seeking counseling (deterrent = stigma)
- 10-15% of bereaved individuals will experience complicated grief (Prolonged Grief Disorder), yet seeking help in counseling centers on college campuses remains low

among family and friends
What is grief?

AN INTERNAL RESPONSE (biopsychosocial)

A state of being in “deep sorrow” as evidenced by some of these examples:

Confusion (brain processing loss)

Possible guilt (anger prolonged inward)

Regressive behaviors

Somatic responses

Time distortion
What is mourning?

AN EXTERNAL RESPONSE (biopsychosocial)

Intentional “acts of sorrowing” via:

Activities done physically, mentally, socially

Must be done to heal

Best done slowly (e.g., nap as need, done over time)

Crying it out, for example, when need

Rituals

Journaling
What is *disenfranchised* grief?

Others minimize or don’t acknowledge the impact of the loss. Examples: Someone experiences a decline in health and others don’t understand or acknowledge the loss; divorce; inability to breastfeed; death of an ex-partner.

- The loss isn’t acknowledged
- Relationships aren’t acknowledged
- The griever or the way one grieves isn’t acknowledged
- How the death occurs isn’t openly acknowledged
- Also, the griever may minimize their own grief
Studies suggest that non-death losses have the propensity to produce distressing physical and psychological consequences affecting academic performance. However, this grief is often disenfranchised in that students perceive a lack of social support, social recognition and entitlement to seek counseling and support services. Examples:

- Break up of a relationship
- Being unfriended by a friend group
- Being out from an athletic team
- Leaving home and community grew up in
- Losing a job
The Loss Line:
UNDERSTANDING YOUR LOSSES & GRIEVING

Loss is cumulative and that impacts our grief.

When you experience a loss, you grieve all the other losses that you have not mourned completely. The intensity of the grief can catch some people by surprise.
Loss Categories

Material Loss: The loss of a physical object or of familiar surroundings to which one has an important attachment. (Example: Sell home)

Relationship Loss: The ending of opportunities to relate oneself to, talk with, share experiences with, make love to, touch, settle issues with, fight with, and otherwise be in the emotional and physical presence of a particular other human being. (Example: A break up or divorce)

Intrapsychic Loss: The experience of losing an important image of oneself, losing the possibilities of “what might have been,” abandonment of plans for a particular future, the dying of a dream. Although often related to external experiences, it is itself an entirely inward experience. (Example: Not completing a long-sought-for task, like graduating from college)

Functional Loss: When we lose some of the muscular or neurological functions of the body. Can evoke powerful grief. (Example: Aging)

Role Loss: The loss of a specific social role or of one’s accustomed place in a social network. (Example: Retirement, or a promotion)

Systemic Loss: To understand it, we must first recall that human beings usually belong to some interactional system in which patterns of behavior develop over time. (Example: Someone transitions out of living at home, so the family system must adapt to the loss.)
The Loss Line:
UNDERSTANDING YOUR LOSSES & GRIEVING

SIGNIFICANCE OF GRIEF/LOSS
5 = extreme; 1 = minimal

Role Loss
Systemic Loss
Relationship Loss
Intrapsychic Loss

Primary Loss:

Age 5
Role Loss
Material Loss
Systemic Loss

Age 10
Role Loss
Material Loss
Systemic Loss
Relationship Loss
Intrapsychic Loss

Age 18

Age 20

Age 23

Lose pet
Parents divorce
Leave home
Breakup
Graduate

Age / LOSSES
Mourning Needs / Tasks

AN (Intentional)  EXTERNALRESPONSE

Time doesn’t heal wounds, it’s what we do with the time.
In this model, mourning is not a linear process. The tasks are done with intention and are often completed in order, but not always. Also, a task may be revisited many times before it is completed. Which task are you working on?

1. **Accept the Reality of the Loss:**
   To complete this task, the reality of the loss must be fully accepted, both intellectually and emotionally.

2. **Process the Pain of the Grief**

3. **Adjust to a World Without the Deceased or Lost Item**

   - Internal Adjustments (Who am I?)
   - External Adjustments (New roles)
   - Spiritual Adjustments (Worldview)

4. **Find a Way To Remember the Deceased/Lost Item While Still Moving Forward in Life**
   Completing this task means finding a healthy balance between cherishing the memory (through “continuing bonds”) and moving forward in life.
In this model, mourning is viewed as a unique and individualized process (i.e., being exposed to stressors and responding to the stressors) that oscillates between two orientations.

1. **Loss Orientation:** Solely focus on the loss, such as looking at old photographs, talking to the deceased in one’s mind, or hesitating to think of life without the loved one or lost item.

2. **Restoration Orientation:** Make adaptations in one’s life due to the loss, such as socializing in new ways or finding other activities to distract oneself from thinking about the loss.
Meaning-Making Questions That Can Help Process A Loss in Both Mourning Models

1. How did you make sense of the loss at the time?

2. How do you interpret the loss now?

3. What philosophical or spiritual beliefs contributed to your adjustment to the loss? How were they affected by it?

4. Are there ways in which the loss disrupted the continuity of your life story? How, over time, have you dealt with this?

(Neimeyer, et al., 2008)
Other Implications to Assist with Loss in Both Mourning Models

- Validate the existence of the loss.
- Be intentional in identifying, managing, and working through death and non-death losses.
- Uncover feelings associated with the loss (e.g., anger, sadness, self-blame, guilt).
- Include an aspect of self-forgiveness, as needed, for feelings uncovered. (Self-forgiveness definition: Requires individuals to accept their imperfections and mistakes and move forward with a renewed sense of purpose and self-acceptance).
- Attain and include social support, including through group work for losses.

(Group work in Counseling Services currently: Romantic Relationships; Survivors of Sexual Trauma; Grief Group; LGBTQIA+ Group; Art Therapy-Based Process Group; Mental Health Support Group.)

(Gitterman & Knight, 2019)
Example of Using Mourning Models to Address A Non-Death Loss

A 20-year-old female student in her third year of college loses her job as an entry level software engineer three months ago. She had worked there 2 years, working her way up to her position, and hoped to stay at the company after she graduated from college. Her family has been supporting her financially and emotionally since the loss. She is seeking counseling because she can no longer cope with the loss on her own (she is consistently experiencing extreme sadness, anxiety, difficulty getting out of bed and a lack of interest in things that used to make her happy). She identified her losses as loss of income (material loss), loss of being a “productive member of society” (systemic loss), and loss of a dream job (intrapsychic loss).
Mourning Model Application:  
*Worden’s 4 Tasks of Mourning*

1. **Accept the Reality of the Loss:** Place the loss in the context of life and development. The hope is to help the student see the loss as a normal, albeit challenging, loss that occurs in the working world.

2. **Process the Pain of the Grief:** Explore the emotional pain of the job loss, while also balancing hope to get back into work.

3. **Adjust to a World Without the Job:** Explore internal, external, and spiritual adjustments that might be made as a result of the loss, and set small goals for adjustments to be made (e.g., setting time to socialize with former co-workers, seeking ways to supplement the family income).

4. **Find Ways To Retain Valuable Aspects of the Job While Still Moving Forward in Life:** Perhaps look for a similar job, or a job that instills the same personal values that the former job did.
Mourning Model Application:  
*Dual Process Model (DPM)*

1. **Loss Orientation:** Explore the importance of the loss, and the feelings that emerged from the loss.

2. **Restoration Orientation:** Focus on specific goals and tasks related to changes that occurred due to the loss (e.g., not being able to financially support family, facing a new relationship with family in that they support her, not feeling productive). Think through how to best respond to these changes (e.g., set a daily schedule for self, apply for new jobs).
Free Resources On Campus and In The Community To Help You Mourn

**Campus:**
Counseling Services in the Health Center (Building 27 by the Rec Center rock climbing pillars) has various groups. Go to Counseling Services website now to see different group information. Call to schedule a Brief Screening on the telephone. (805) 756-2511

**Community:**
1. Hospice of SLO support groups for those who lost a loved one or suffer from a life-limiting illness. Does not matter how long it has been since the person’s death. (805) 544-2266

2. County of SLO Behavioral Health has grief support groups. 1-800-838-1381
Q & A

(May use the Q&A feature in Zoom, or just speak up.)
Have Feedback?

Please scan this code or email us at counseling@calpoly.edu
References


Dilworth, T. (2022). Grief counseling and treatment certification training: Assessments and interventions to support healthy grieving and adaptation to death and loss. PESI.


(CONTINUED)


*World Psychiatry* 2021 Feb 20(1):9606 /Published online 2021 Jan 12doi: 10.1002/wps.20823