

Loss and grief

[Life](#), [Emotions](#)



What is loss? What is grief? Loss is most often equated to death but generally, “ loss occurs when an event is perceived to be negative by individuals involved, and it results in long-term changes in one's social situations, relationships, or way of viewing the world and oneself” (Marriage and Family Encyclopedia 2008). One tends to experience loss in one's lifetime. Children usually experience loss through a death of a pet or a parent. Adults likewise experience loss through death of a spouse or because of divorce; they may also experience job or health losses.

When we value something or someone that we lost, we experience grief. “ Grief is the psyche's natural healing response when faced with change and loss” (PsychCentral 2008). This suggests that grief is a normal and natural experience to a person who has experienced personal loss. Furthermore, it is said to be a “ process, not an event” (PsychCentral 2008) which means that grief should be allowed and given time to completely take place. Strayhorn enumerates the characteristics of grief (PsychCentral 2008). First, he says that pain is a natural part of grieving.

One may choose to repress or ignore the pain but he says that further losses in life can always trigger it and eventually, the hurt only doubles. Second, he maintains that ‘ grieving is a highly individualized process’ (PsychCentral 2008). This demonstrates how different each person is while in grief. Though grief is said to be a universal and a natural occurrence, the way one person grieves differs from another. Furthermore, being aware of the five stages of grief: “ shock, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance” (PsychCentral 2008) helps one to cope with grief.

Lastly, Strayhom states that “ grief has no timetable” (PsychCentral 2008). Grief therefore should be allowed to take its own course. However, each individual in the process of grieving should also do activities to help them heal. Constantly sharing ones deepest sentiments to a trusted friend is always beneficial to a person in grief. There have been known grief responses, “ such as a yearning for the lost person or state of affairs, a need to think repeatedly about past events, a sense of guilt, or even thoughts of suicide.

(Death Reference 2008)” According to the Death Reference website (2008), Terry Martin and Kenneth Doka formulated 3 basic patterns of grief. First is the Intuitive Pattern, where the griever freely manifests his/her feelings. He/She can display intense emotions such as outbursts and crying. Any means to allow the griever to vent out his/her emotions is beneficial for coping. Second is the Instrumental Pattern where the griever would recall memories of the dead person and doing something in relation to those thoughts.

An example cited by Martin and Doka (1999) where a man who has lost his daughter in a vehicular accident fixed the fence which his daughter has ruined during the accident. He said that it was the only thing he could repair. Third is the Dissonant Pattern. “ Dissonant grievers are those who experience grief in one pattern but who are inhibited from finding compatible ways to express or adapt to grief that are compatible with their experience” (Death Reference 2008). For instance, when a man loses his wife, he can feel the urge to cry with his daughters and to show weakness.

However, he chooses to keep it, as it is inappropriate for a man to do so. Women who lose spouses can experience the same situation, when she inhibits emotions and puts up a strong stance to protect her children. Loss and Grief on Different Perspectives There have been various studies about grief and prove that its characteristics are individualized and unique. On the one hand, children, grieve differently from adults (PsychCentral 2008). Young kids often think that the person who died will soon come back as seen in cartoon shows.

Meanwhile, there are signs which tell whether the child is experiencing significant grief. He/She tends to become immature for his/her age and there is also a considerable decrease in school performance. When these are present, Cohen advises the child be seen by a child psychologist (PsychCentral 2008). On the other hand, men and women also have distinct characteristics of grief. In an article written by Karen Carney in PsychCentral (2008), she enumerates the key points on how men grieve basing from Tom Golden's book entitled ' Swallowed by a Snake: The Gift of the Masculine Side of Healing' (1997).

Golden mentions that counselors tend to use approaches similar to what they use towards women, which was later on found to be ineffective to men. Men usually cope by busying themselves with any activity that would either use the mind or the body (PsychCentral 2008). Moreover, men try to go on living their lives as normal as possible like going on their usual routine. In contrast, women are attached to their feelings. They have the tendency to recall memories of the loved one who died (Linda-Angel 2005).

It is significant to note that there are differences between the characteristics of the male and female human brain, which can be a cause of the distinction on how each sex grieves (PsychCentral 2008). In a study by Buchebner-Ferstl (2002), she mentions the differences between how a woman and a man deal with loss of a loved one (death). She said that women have broader social networks than men, and that women are often the source of social support between the couple. Being the case, she says that some experts would conclude that because of this, women cope better with loss.

Moreover, “ women are said to have a more emotionally-oriented behaviour, and men are said to be more problem-oriented” (Buechbner-Ferstl 2002). This means that women are more geared than men to grieve and share their emotions with other people. In addition to this, she mentions that research shows that women are said to have a “ stronger sense of survivability ... [and] men are biologically more susceptible to the negative effects of stressors” (Buechbner-Ferstl 2002). This demonstrates that women are more apt to survive loss than men.

Also, it was mentioned in the Death Reference website (2007) that men were socially conditioned to hide their emotions. In contrast, women can openly share their feelings to other people, allowing grief to take its course. Further, Louis LeGrand states that the gender difference “ does not mean that men are not grieving; it does indicate that they may not accomplish the task as successfully as women” (LeGrand 1986: 31). In a research conducted by Martin and Doka (1999), the differences between how women and men grieve were tackled.

There are societies where the sight of a man crying in grief is as acceptable as when a woman does (Death Reference 2008). Additionally, cultures differ in valuing relationships and attachment towards people and things, thus they also differ in grief experiences. Models of Loss and Grief There have been a number of loss and grief models that is based on the notion that every person in grief goes more or less in ‘ the same sequence of stages in the recovery from grief, and at relatively the same speed’(Slap-Shelton 2008).

This model appears to define the stages of dying, phases of grief and is applicable not only to death but in other losses such as divorce or a break up. In the University of Kentucky website, Kastenbaum criticizes Kubler-Ross’s model, saying that these are not supposed to be stages as they do not happen chronologically (1998).

In addition, he says that all these five stages are not necessarily undergone by a person dying or grieving. He further maintains that grief is unique to every individual (University of Kentucky 1998). This demonstrates that these stages limit the process of grieving which is supposed to be individualized. Following this, various theoretical models on loss and grief were formulated. Charles Corr, specifically believed in the individuality of coping with death (University of Kentucky 1998). People differ in values therefore they also differ in need and coping mechanism for the same experience of loss.

Meanwhile, Worden, Leick & Davidsen-Nielson (1991) proposed four means to understand loss and help accept its reality. First, one should recognize the fact that someone died or left for good. Second, one should not suppress the emotions but let them take their course. According to Slap-Shelton, (1998) among the intense emotions that one can feel during loss include “ sadness,
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despair, anger, guilt, fear, loneliness, shame, jealousy. ” Furthermore, to allow feeling these and letting these manifest will help in recovering over the loss.

Third, it is advisable to let in something new in your life. For instance, one can learn a new skill or find a new set of friends. Through the process the person who experienced loss can grow despite the circumstance. Lastly, one ought to “ reinvest emotional energy into the present” (Slap-Shelton 1998). This means that the bereaved person should focus on what is ahead and what he/she can do to live this new life without the person who died. Some, for example, do activities that commemorate and celebrate the goodness of the dead person.

Furthermore, grief can be more understood in two other perspectives: psychoanalytic and attachment perspectives. Basing from psychoanalysis, grief stems out of the griever’s uncertainty of where his/her relationship stands, now that the partner died. At the same time, “ the psychological function of grief is to free the individual of the tie to the deceased and allow him or her to achieve a gradual detachment by means of a process of grief work” (Death Reference 2008). Many counselors and therapists have been influenced by this however such theory has also been criticized.

On the other hand, Bowlby’s theory was based on the biological aspects of grieving. He maintains “ that the biological function of grief was to regain proximity to the attachment figure, separation from which had caused anxiety” (Death Reference 2008). This means that when humans are separated from a figure whom or which they had attachment to, this results to reactions of grief. Conclusion According to the Marriage and Family

Encyclopedia (2008), more recent models on loss and grief are now focused on “ identifying symptoms [rather than] the process of grieving” (Marriage and Family Encyclopedia 2008).

Stroebe and Schut (1990) formulated the Dual Process Model of Coping. Humans cope with grief with a combination of both “ loss orientation” and “ restoration orientation”. Loss orientation is allowing grief to take place for instance crying and reaching out to others while restoration orientation is “ adjusting to the many changes triggered by loss” by engaging in new activities. Such dual model recognizes grief as a “ dynamic and fluctuating process, labeled ‘ oscillation,’ that incorporates confrontation and avoidance of different components at different times, and includes both positive and negative reappraisals” (Death Reference 2008).

For instance, a man who lost his wife learns how to paint and takes pleasure in the activity (restoration orientation). However in the process, he is asked to paint a memorable place and thus reminded of the wife who has died and feels sad about it (loss orientation). Basing from the literature reviewed, grief can be described as universal since all humans at one point in their lives experience grief. Grief is natural since it is said to be an inevitable response to loss. However, there has not been an encompassing theory that can gauge grief; perhaps due to its vastness and complexity.