

The Grieving Self

Tracy Santos GANZ 2024



In and of the field

Acknowledgment of Country



Welcome to all



‘Where there is Sorrow, there is holy ground’ – Oscar Wilde

Where we will go and what we will grow

- Grow relationship with the terrain of grief and sorrow
- Grow awareness and deepen understanding of how grief lives in and between us, in our clients and as a collective phenomena
- Grow awareness and deepen understanding of context/field conditions that influence the experience of grief and bereavement
- Experience and practice meeting each other in places and spaces of grieving, to allow integration and metabolization of loss
- Contribute to the radical inclusion of grief in a pain/suffering avoidant culture and as an act of social change



“The river of grief might pulse inside us, hidden from our view, but its presence informs our lives at every turn”.

Joan Halifax



Essential condition of being, includes grieving

We are wired for attachment in a world of change and impermanence

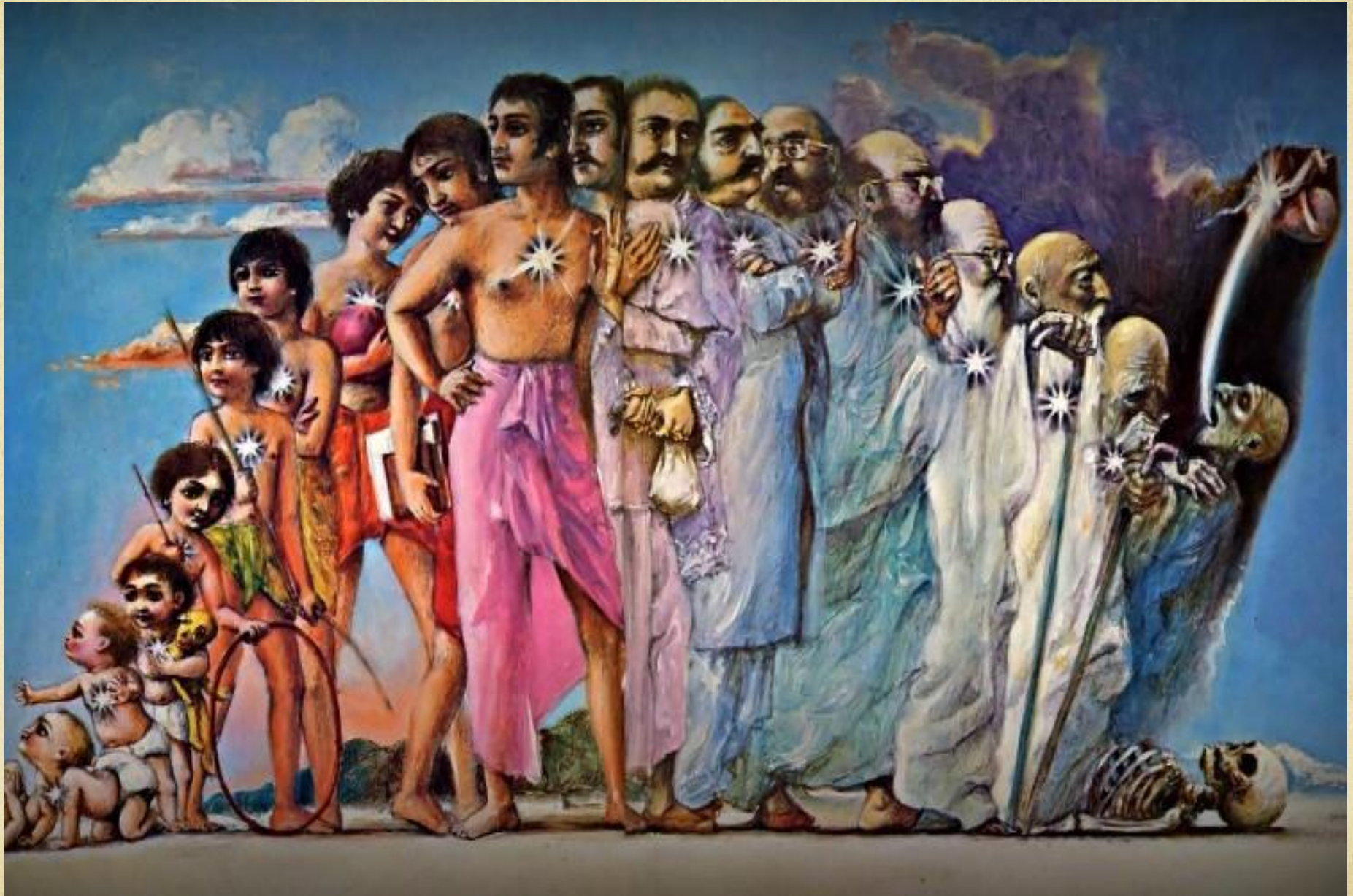
Everything and everyone we love, we will lose

Every client will arrive with grief and sorrow

Grief is woven into the fabric of life

Grief struggles to find places and spaces of expression when suffering, pain and sorrow are problematised and avoided





The impermanence of this floating world

I feel over and over

It is hardest to be the one left behind

Zen Nun Rengetsu



Definitions and their origins

Grief - The subjective experience of loss. Instinctive and biopsychosocial reaction to loss. Broad range of behaviours, cognitions and feelings after significant loss.

Latin verb - gravare/ to burden, gravis/ heavy

Bereavement - The state of having experienced someone of significance die. *Root word reave/ being torn apart.*

Old English - reafian/ to be deprived of or robbed of

Mourning - Public process involving recognition of the loss by others. Behavioural and social manifestations/aspects of grief. Expression of grief following a loss. Act of lamenting. *Proto-Germanic murnan/ to remember sorrowfully*

Grief is a natural process

Grief is not a pathology of an individual, but a natural response to a significant loss

A relational process which has separation central to situation

An emphasis in practice is on continuing bonds, not 'letting go' as a goal but how to continue the relationship in a new way

People die, relationships don't

In most, if not all, traditional cultures, talking directly and regularly with ancestors is/was a normal practice. Some peoples spoke as often to ancestors as to people alive.

Ursula Bowlby – creative adjustment, the relational field, embodiment and meaning

“Instead of being shattered, I felt suddenly comforted. He seemed secure in my heart and I knew that I could carry him about with me for the rest of my life. I have this sense of continuous companionship. I am never alone. I feel that John has both expanded – into the world of total freedom, together with the winds, the sea, the hills, the flowers – and contracted into my heart.” (1991)





Grief is an adaptive journey of meaning making

It is a non-linear process – linear models are reductive and risk constraining grief rather than allowing emergence and diversity

It is a unique experience for each being and there are common themes throughout the stories of grief

Grief and loss involves a dis-organisation of the field – change in systemic constellation of the world

Losses along the path of life

Transitions - Endings - Deaths - Turning Points - Accidents - Trauma



The only cure for grief is grieving –

Trent Dalton



Breakout rooms – share stories of your grief, 5 mins each. Be with the sharer/s and notice how it is to listen and share. Offer one piece each of what was impactful for you as you listened

We need and rely on each other



The bonds we form in our struggle do not disappear (Fairfield, 2018:27)

Dialogical relating as a balm for Grief



“The world is not
comprehensible,
but it is embraceable:
through the
embracing of one
of its beings.”
—Martin Buber

Common grief phenomenology

- Feeling states – sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, shock, relief
- Somatic – respiratory conditions, fatigue, weakness
- Cognitive – disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, hallucinations
- Behaviours – sleep, appetite, dreaming, searching, avoiding, crying, visiting
- Beliefs – ceremony, ritual, practices, meaning making
- Social – gather, food, isolation, mourning practices

These experiences do not live in isolation, but in relationship, and the nature and quality of this relating makes all the difference to the griever. Let the relating be dialogical and curious, not reductive.

The grieving self as a function of the field

A person's behaviour and personality are a function of the field.

Therefore, a person's grief responses are field determined



Existential psychodynamics

Conflict that inescapably arises and flows from the individual's confrontation with the givens of existence

**AWARENESS OF
ULTIMATE CONCERN → ANXIETY → DEFENCE
MECHANISM**

The dominant cultures orientation towards accumulation, control, power, status and competition can be seen as part of this defensive strategy – to ward off vulnerability associated with our human condition

(Kubler-Ross, 1970; Becker,1973; Yalom, 2008; Jenkinson, 2015)

Central aspects of field theory

- The interconnection of person and environment
- Relational rather than object concepts
- Systemic rather than historical concepts of causality

(Deutsch, 1992)

What are some field conditions that may influence grief responses in mainstream culture in Australia and the western industrialised world?



The weave of relationality and field theory

Recognise we are not separate selves but utterly interdependent.

Practice in accord with a movement away from reductionist, individualism which dominates culture, perceptual and linguistic frames.

Remember that we are born into, and live in relation to, contexts/ field conditions (historical, cultural, language etc.) which form ground, from which our figural experience emerges, including our experience of grief and opportunities to grieve



Lynne Jacobs (2009)

As depicted in the SOS Model

A Relational Model for Social Inclusion



Sally Denham-Vaughan and Marie-Anne Chidiac (2013)

Culture, Power and Grief

The present moment and lived story is constantly moulded by the wider context as a ground for the unfolding experience of self-other, other-situation and self-situation. Instead of preferencing the individual experience as the normative priority, allow our curiosity and perceptual field to stretch.

Our theory base tells us that being powerful (or powerless) is always a function of the field, and so any behaviour or feeling emerges from a given context and a set of relationships in the moment.

Marie-Anne Chidiac (2023)

Grief and sorrow constrained by normative culture

Perception and awareness is organised by field conditions which foreground normative beliefs and narratives

- including grief denial, disenfranchisement, pain-avoidance. Control and power being preferenced over surrender and liminality
- ‘positive psychology’ and strategies of defense structured into the ground for client and therapist

Radical Inclusion and Grief – a path to social change

We need to learn to carry our grief and that of others, and not collapse and turn away in denial.

Grief is subversive and undermines our societies quiet, systemic, agreement that we will behave and and be in control of our emotions.

Francis Weller (2015)

We grieve what we love, we also stand up and protect what we love.

Radical Loss can move Grief in the direction of Justice.

Malkia Devich Cyril (2023)

Be willing to witness and hold pain

Stretching perceptual frame of grief

Eco-psychologist, author and activist Chellis Glendinnings defines Earthgrief :

'To open our hearts to the sad history of humanity and the devastating state of the earth is the next step in the reclamation of our bodies, the body of our human connectivity and the body of the earth'.



Grief may also arise from the land. From the trees, the earth, other species. We may weep their tears mixed with our own.
Grieving the sorrows of the world.

Ecological Grief

As we remember what we had forgotten

We were embedded in matrix

Knew ourselves through this

Embeddedness

We will feel what we stopped

Feeling

And Grief will arise

To cry out in remembering

And rejoice in remembering



Remembering our ecological selves

Letting go of our structures, assumptions and certainties, re-imagining and telling new stories about the species, rivers, rocks and air we can call kin becomes a radical act of self-preservation.

Miriam Taylor (2022)

What is stirring in you? What is surfacing?

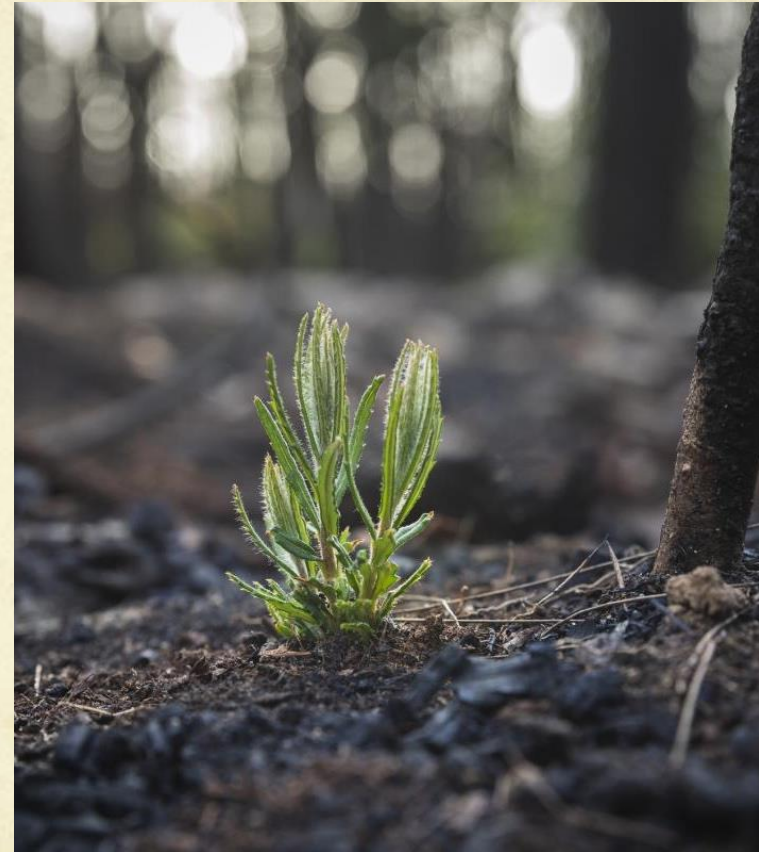
Share in groups of 3/4.

Allow all voices to be heard

And felt

Include gratitude

20 mins



Social constructivism and grieving

Advocate for a social constructivist model of grieving in which the narrative and meaning making processes are found, appropriated or assembled occur as fully between people, as within them. For grief to be perceived and enacted as a social, relational process rather than an intrapsychic one –

(Neimeyer, Klass and Dennis, 2014)

The emergence of new narratives and expressions of grieving and mourning, which may be dissonant with dominant cultural practices or ideologies, create the possibility for social change and inclusion – and grief to be able to flow freely in the cycle of life

Remediation and tips

- Invite and allow grief and its range of feeling realms into the space – witness and bring presence to pain **and** honour resistance as it shows up
- Explore your own relationship to grief/loss/change/pain/control to expand capacity and willingness
- Influence the culture and field relations through allowing grief to be metabolized and to mobilise
- Grow awareness of your own meaning making and interpretations influence your choice as therapist. Get interested in your clients meaning making processes around grieving and mourning - where they are supportive?
- Remember that our shared experience and differences enriches our ground and expands our shared humanity

Disenfranchised grief (Doka, 2002)

No sense of *right to grieve*. Grief is not supported or recognized by society as legitimate. Structured ground of rights/power distributes power/rights

Contexts:

1. Relationship not recognized – public figures, species...
2. Loss not recognized – miscarriage, animals...
3. Griever not recognized – children, less abled bodied...
4. Disenfranchised deaths – certain deaths, people who kill themselves..
5. Disenfranchised trauma – All grief is eventually disenfranchised

Double weave of; systemic marginalization of certain populations and sorrow and grief states

Thank you

