

The Integration of Belonging and Grief: A New Framework for Understanding Loss and Healing

A research brief adapted for the Center for Research and Evaluation

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Why this study?

Grief has been a prevalent concept throughout history, rooted in experiences including loss, isolation, and changes in circumstances. The relevance of grief in today's society is emphasized by current events, as we live in the uncertainty of post-pandemic life and deep divisions exist between political and social groups. Previous research has developed models for understanding grief and belonging, but defined each as a separate entity rather than intertwined concepts. The purpose of this study was to examine the connection between grief and belonging for 10+ participants who experienced grief in their lives and described their stories in interviews.

What are the research questions?

- How are grief and belonging connected in the context of healing and loss?
- How can integrating opportunities for belonging into grief experiences contribute to healing?
- What model demonstrates the interaction and connectedness between grief and belonging?

What are the key findings?

- Analysis of interviews found that participant grief was always accompanied by thwarted belonging while participant healing was always accompanied by belonging.
- Four processes of healing through an integration of grief and belonging were identified throughout participant interviews: somatic practices and care, emotional support, reframing loss with story and reflection, and meaning making.
- Separate analyses of grief and belonging could not be identified in interviews due to the connectedness of the concepts in the experiences of participants.

Implications of the study

- The author's adapted model of grief and belonging points to possible healing processes utilizing the interconnectedness of the two concepts.
- Belonging can now be seen as both a casualty of grief as well as a contributing factor in the healing process.