

Note: This presentation was made in September 2018 while Dr. Christopher Layne was Program Director of Education in Evidence-Based Practice at the UCLA/Duke University National Center for Child Traumatic Stress, and a Research Psychologist in the UCLA Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral Sciences.

Fostering “Good Grief” in the Aftermath of Traumatic Death

Christopher M. Layne, Ph.D.

Director of Education in Evidence-Based Practice, UCLA/Duke University
National Center for Child Traumatic Stress;
& Research Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral
Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles

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Primary Research Collaborators on this Presentation

- Julie B. Kaplow, Ph.D., ABPP
- Robert S. Pynoos, MD, MPH
- Members of the Trauma and Grief Clinic Staff at Baylor College of Medicine

Why do we need a theory that can explicitly address both adaptive “good grief” and maladaptive grief reactions?

Isn't grief...well, grief?

Why Good Grief in Diagnosis? Treatment? Theory?

These are timely questions, given:

- Persistent Complex Bereavement Disorder (provisional disorder in DSM-5)
- Prolonged Grief Disorder (due in next edition of the DSM)
- ICD-11 (due in forthcoming ICD-11)
- Complicated Grief
- Traumatic Grief
- Childhood Traumatic Grief

A rose may be a rose by any other name, but grief is not. Names matter. It is important to call grief by its correct names, especially adaptive grief.

Bereavement carries a
unique challenge:

**The Charlie Brown Problem
(Good Grief!)**

Charlie Brown Was Right!

- There is such a thing as “good grief”.
- Adaptive grief is not studied nearly as much as “maladaptive” grief—a major shortcoming in the literature.
- However, “good grief” is the norm.
- The Shared Grief Project highlights important examples of “good grieving”.

Grief differs from:

- Depression,
- Schizophrenia,
- Manic Depressive Disorder
- Tic Disorder

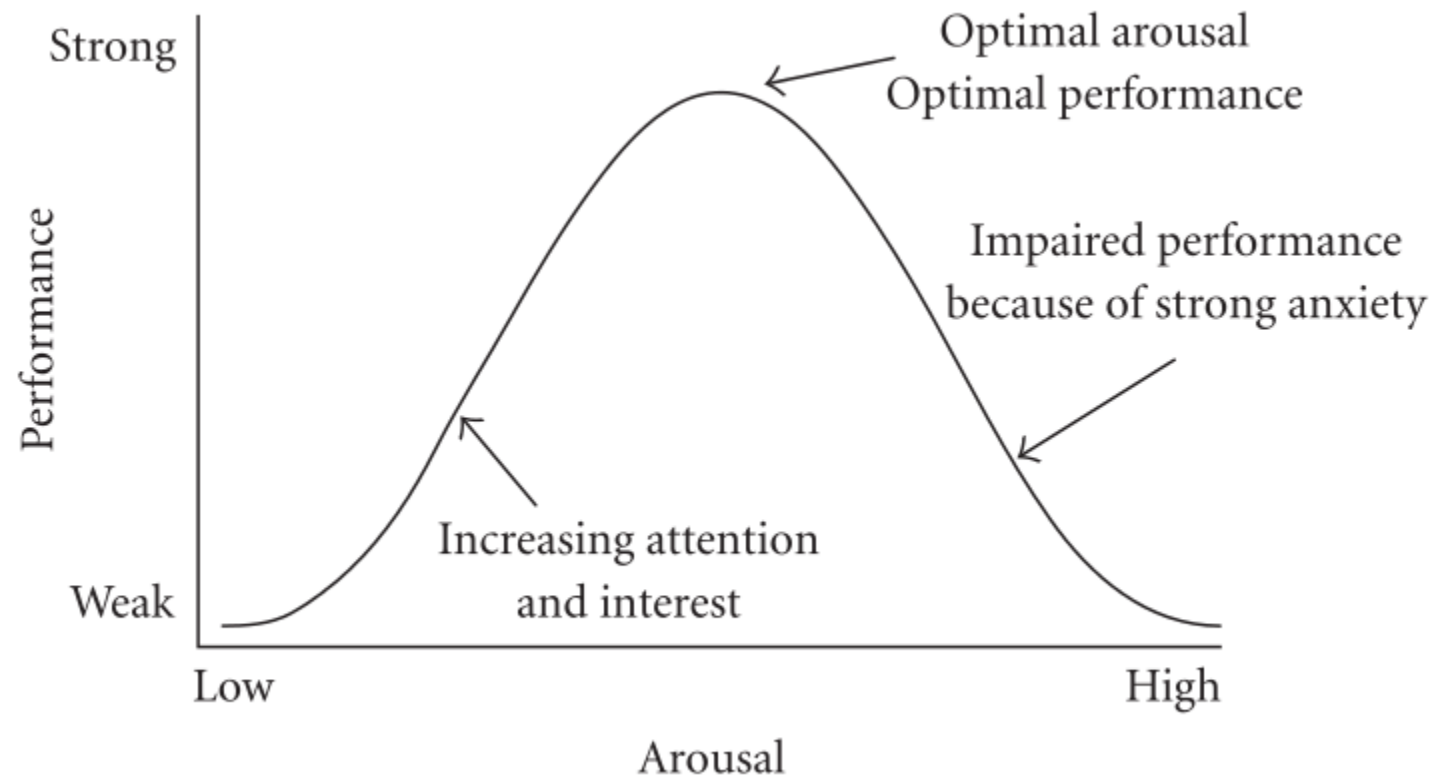
Closest relative (from an “adaptive vs. maladaptive” standpoint):

- Anxiety (let’s turn to a 110 year old principle to learn why)

Is “Good Grief” Unique as a Diagnostic Challenge? A Lesson from the Anxiety Field

Yerkes-Dodson Law (1908):

- Performance increases with physiological or mental arousal, but only up to a point.
- When levels of arousal become too high, performance decreases.
- Under-arousal and over-arousal are both unhelpful.
- The optimal level of arousal depends on the task (Football? Studying? Socializing?)



Why Distinguish between Bereavement and Grief?

Studying, assessing, conceptualizing, treating bereavement without **grief reactions**.

is like

Studying, assessing, conceptualizing, treating trauma without **posttraumatic stress reactions**.



Why Distinguish between Bereavement and Grief?

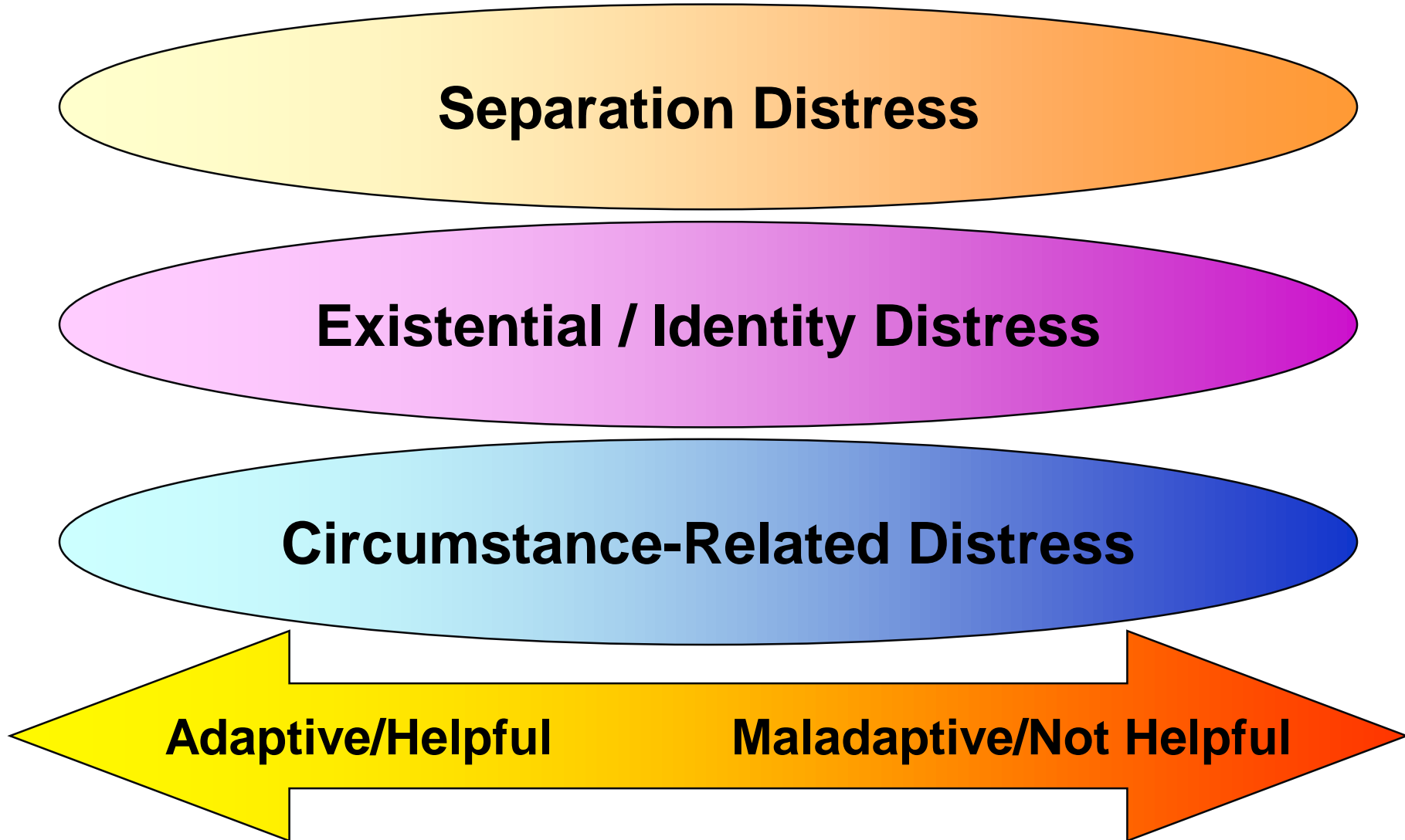
- Bereavement is both a highly prevalent, and highly stressful, life adversity.
- Bereavement *per se* is associated with significant risk for impaired school functioning (Oosterhoff et al., in press), and suicide risk (Hill et al., under review).
- Grief adds incremental prediction above and beyond bereavement alone

Why is a Multidimensional Grief Framework Useful?

What Does it Help Us to Do?

Multidimensional Grief Model

(Layne, Kaplow, & Pynoos, 2011, 2012; Layne, Kaplow, Oosterhoff, Hill, & Pynoos, 2017)



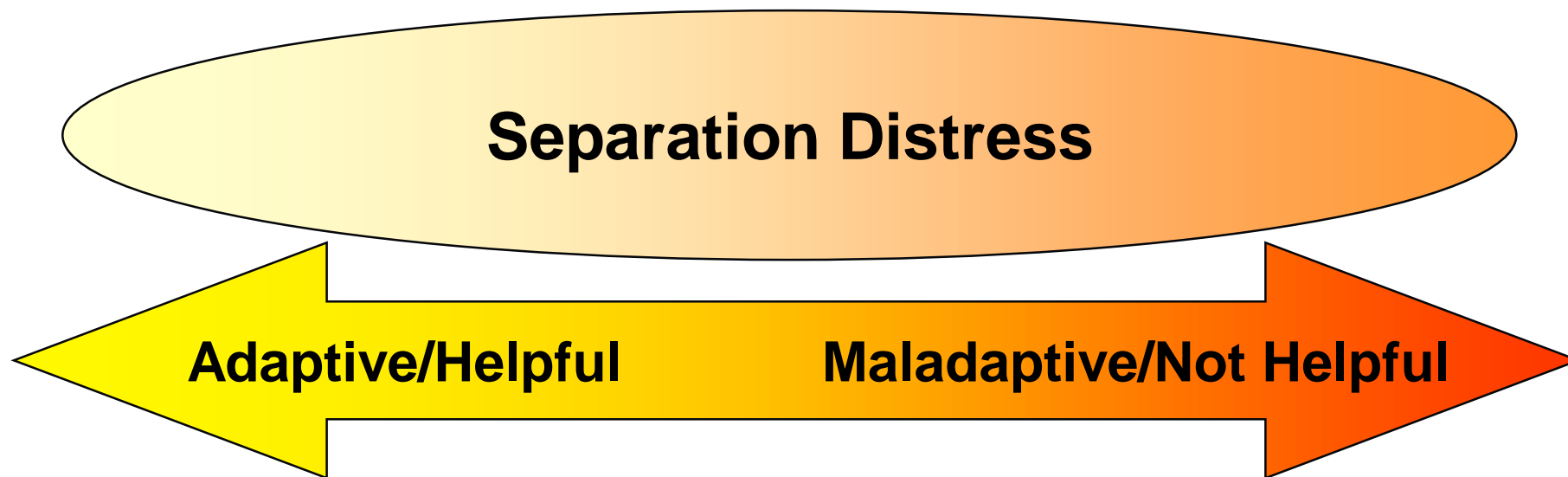
Central Coping Challenge of Each Grief Primary Conceptual Domain

1. Separation Distress
2. Existential/Identity Distress
3. Circumstance-Related Distress

Central Challenge of Separation Distress

(Layne et al., 2017)

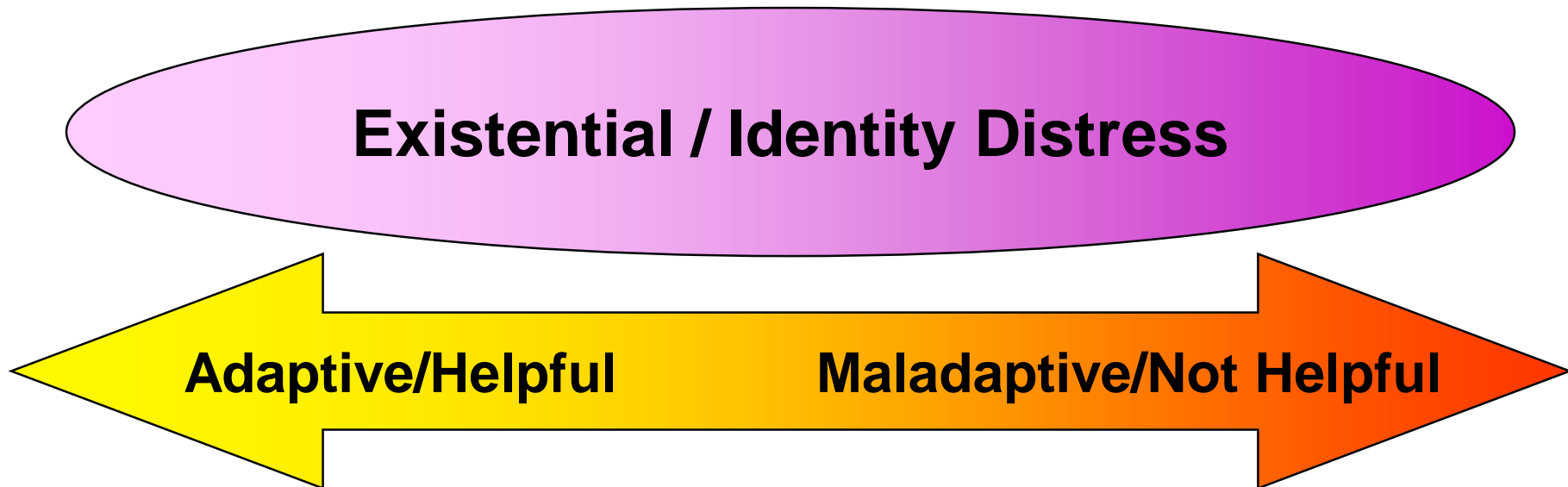
“How can I continue to feel connected to the person who died, so that they remain an important part of my life?”



Challenge of Existential/Identity Distress

(Layne et al., 2017)

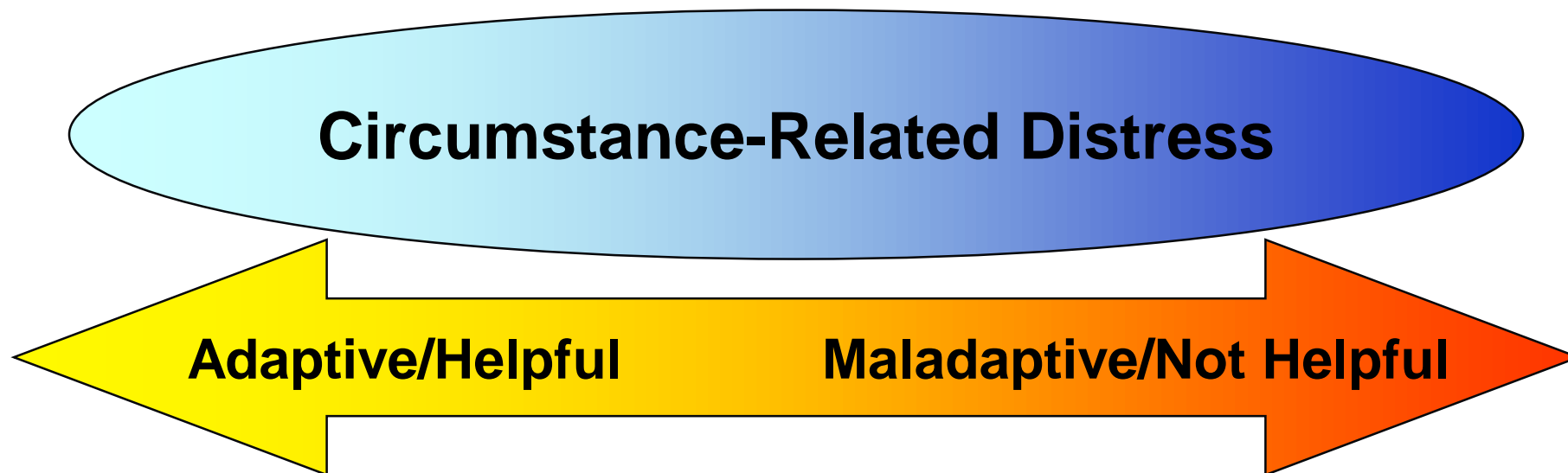
“Who am I as a person, and what is the purpose of my existence, now that this loved one is physically absent from my life?”



Challenge of Circumstance-Related Distress

(Layne et al., 2017)

“How do I manage my distressing thoughts, beliefs, wishes, fantasies, emotions, and impulses evoked by how this person died?”



Multidimensional Grief Theory

Based on the core assumptions that:

- Both maladjustment and positive adjustment can manifest within each domain.
- Positive and negative adjustment processes can and frequently do co-occur within a given domain.
- The theory is agnostic about the nature of central tasks in each domain—they simply “are.” **How bereaved individuals cope with those challenges, and their consequences**, influences how they grieve and adjust over time.
- Each of the three grief conceptual domains encompasses both **adaptive** and **maladaptive** responses to a central challenge specific to that domain.
- The **extent** to which a given bereaved person engages in specific grief responses—both adaptive and maladaptive—within each domain, and across domains, makes up their individual grief profile.

(Sources: Layne et al., 2012; Layne et al., 2017; Saltzman et al., 2017)

A Multidimensional Framework is Useful

Different dimensions of grief may:

- be more prominent at different developmental stages (child vs. adolescent vs. adult)
- Relate differently to different risk & protective factors (e.g., manner of death, exposure to the death, relationship to the deceased)
- be more **prominent in some groups** than others (e.g., type of death, culture, SES)
- differentially relate to different consequences
 - maladaptive grief relates more strongly & positively with: depression, PTSD, suicide ideation, functional impairment, risky behavior, developmental disruption
 - adaptive grief relates more strongly & positively with: prosocial behavior, life ambitions, future plans
- produce **different grief profiles** (which support individually-tailored intervention)
- **call for different intervention components**—assessment-driven, flexibly-tailored treatment that both **promotes adaptive grieving, reduces maladaptive grieving**.

(sources: Kaplow & Layne, 2014; Layne et al., 2012; Layne et al., 2014; Layne et al., 2017; Saltzman et al., 2017)

Q: Why do we need a theory that can explicitly address both adaptive “good grief” and maladaptive grief reactions?

A: A strength-based theory helps us to therapeutically facilitate and leverage good grief

Good Grieving

Examples from History of Adaptive Responses to Grief-Related Challenges

- Challenge of ongoing separation from a loved one
- Existential/Identity-related challenges (who I am, why I am here)
- Challenges arising from circumstances of the death

Circumstance-Related Distress: Iroquois Theater Disaster (1903)

- Killed 602+ people, mostly women and children
- No criminal liability (!!)
- **Their deaths led to:**
 - **lighting of exits, aisles and corridors**
 - **adoption of crash bars on exit doors**
 - **improvements in fire alarms, non-flammable materials in theatres**



Circumstance-Related Distress: Positive Societal (Policy) Impacts (1915)

Henry Moseley

1887-1915 (aged 27)

Organized Periodic Table by Atomic Number

His death led to:

- Nobel Prize for Physics left vacant in 1916 out of respect to his contributions (Nobel Prize is given only to a living person)
- Government policy: No prominent scientists may serve on the front lines in armed conflict



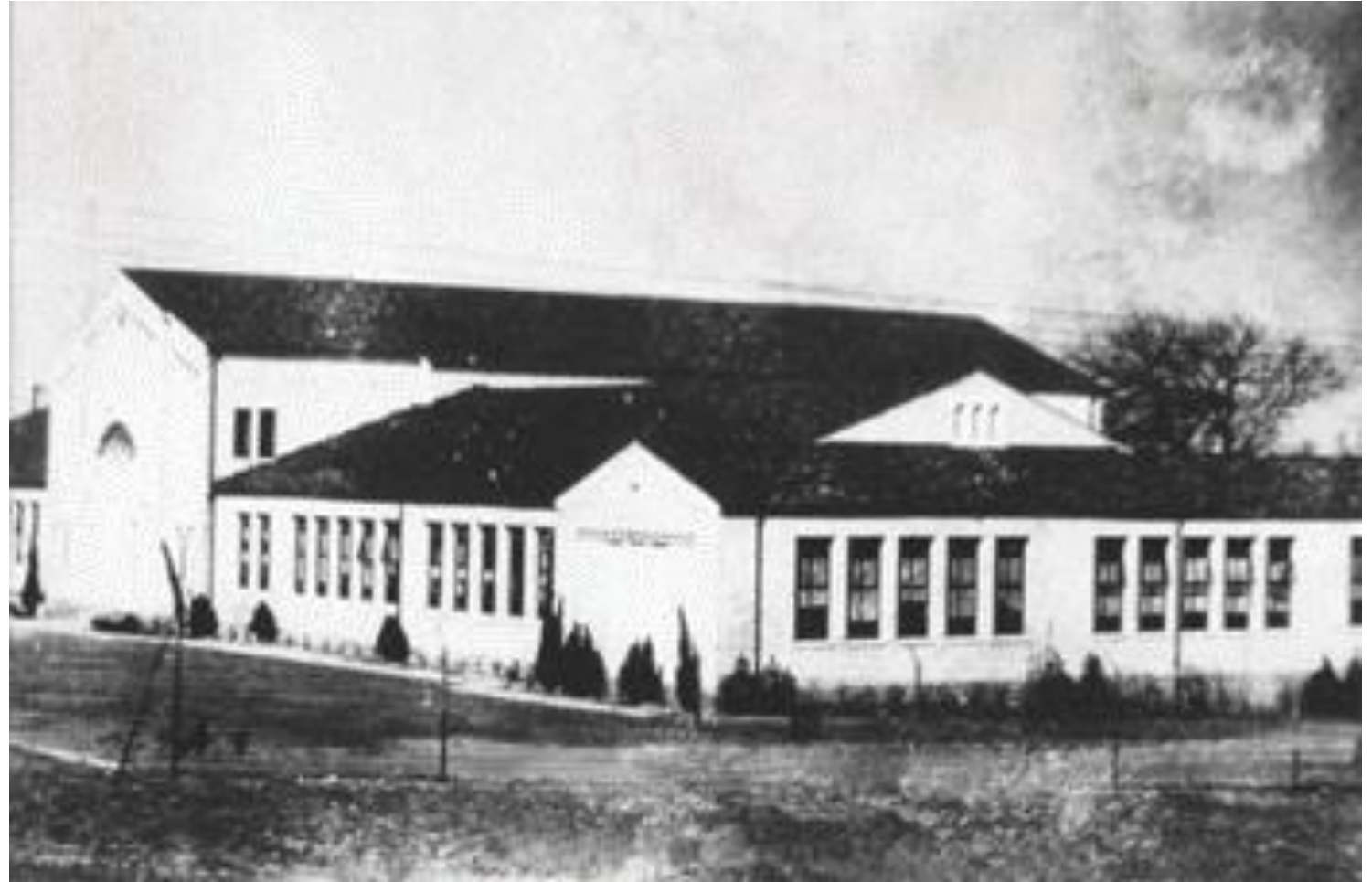
Circumstance-Related Distress:

New London School explosion (1937)

- 1937 (295 children & adults killed)

Their deaths led to:

- Texas Legislature quickly mandated that [thiols](#) be added to natural gas, making gas leaks quickly detectable. The practice quickly spread worldwide.
- Enacted Engineering Registration Act to regulate practice of engineering.



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Circumstance-Related Distress: Coconut Grove Fire (1942)

- Killed 492 people
- Single revolving door
- Inward-opening emergency exits
- Some exits chained shut
- Highly flammable materials burst into flame

Their deaths led to:

- Outward-opening emergency exits
- Improvements in treating severe burns
- First study of traumatic grief (Lindemann, 1944)



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Circumstance-Related Distress: Crusades for Prevention

Cari Lightner
(1966-1980)

- Cari Lightner, a 13-year-old girl, was killed by a drunken hit-and-run driver.
- Drunk driver had record of arrests for intoxication, had been arrested on another hit-and-run drunk-driving charge less than a week earlier.
- Mother Candy Lightner learned from a policeman that drunk driving was rarely prosecuted harshly.

Her death led to:

- Furious, Candy Lightner took action against “the only socially accepted form of homicide,” founded **Mothers Against Drunk Driving (MADD)**.
- **Led to the National Minimum Drinking Age Act (21)**

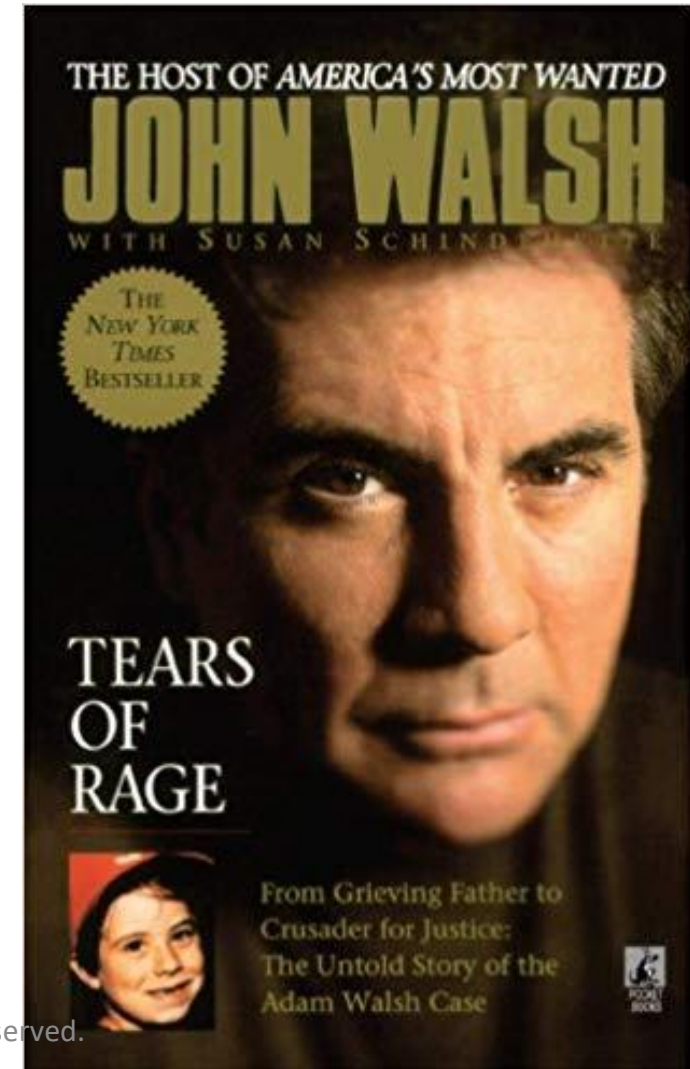


Circumstance-Related Distress: Crusades for Justice/Prevention

Adam Walsh
1974-1981 (aged 6)

His death led to:

- In 1984, the U.S. Congress passed the Missing Children's Assistance Act
- Formation of National Center for Missing & Exploited Children
- U.S. Congress passed the [Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act](#) in 2006. Institutes a national database of convicted child molesters, increases penalties for sexual and violent offenses against children.
- Television shows *America's Most Wanted*, *The Hunt* focus on hunting down predators



Circumstance-Related Distress: Crusades for Prevention

Amber Rene Hagerman
(1986 –1996)

Her death led to:

- Amber Hagerman Child Protection Act led to creation of the National Sex Offender Registry.
- Amber Alerts nationwide



Circumstance & Existential Distress:

Alfred Nobel: Inventor, War Merchant, Founder of Nobel Prize

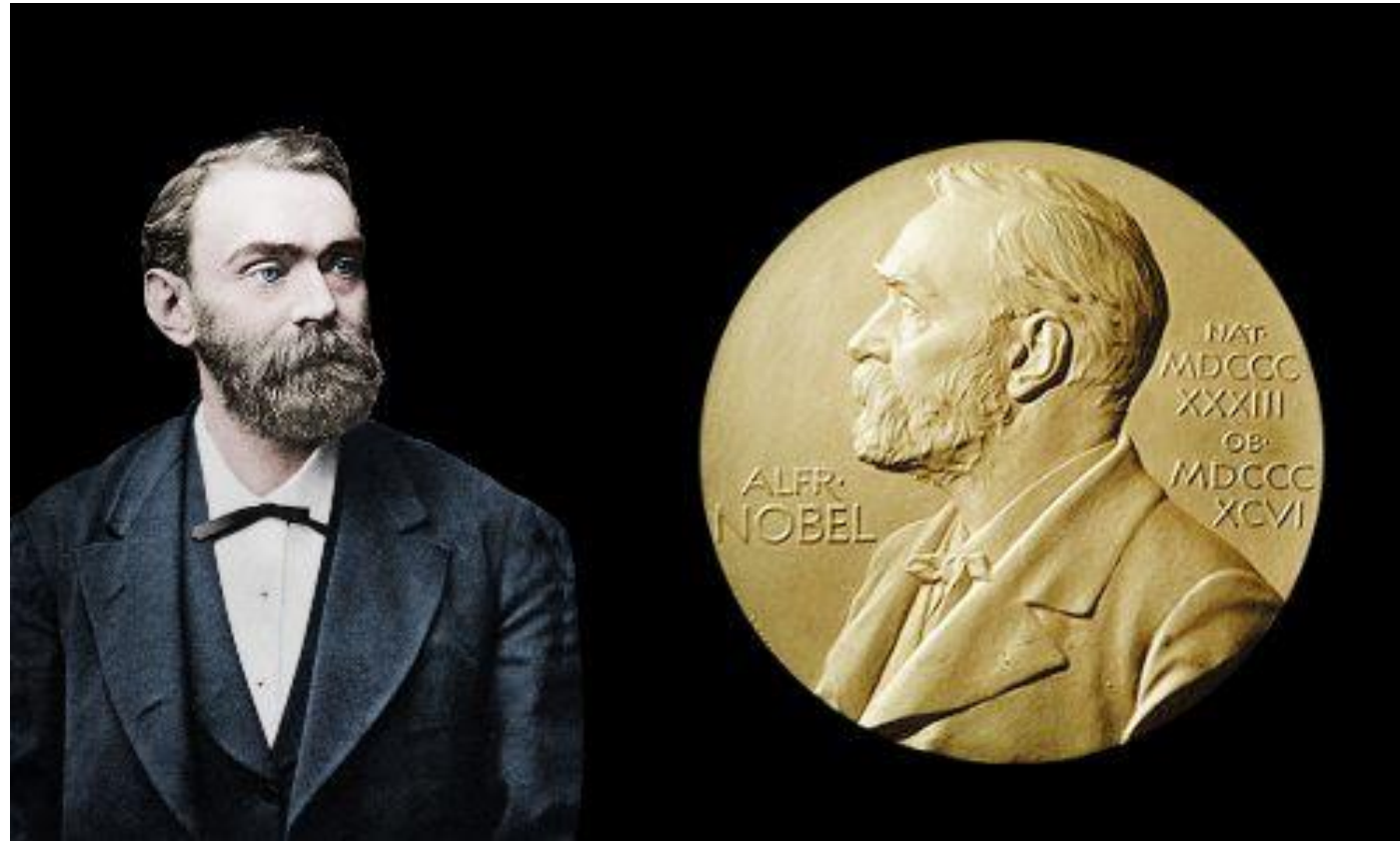
- Brother killed by lab explosion working with nitroglycerine (1864)

Led to:

- Developed **dynamite** (1867)
- Built over 90 arms factories
- 1888, newspaper mistakenly printed his obituary: "The merchant of death is dead. Dr. Alfred Nobel, who became rich by finding ways to kill more people faster than ever before, died yesterday."

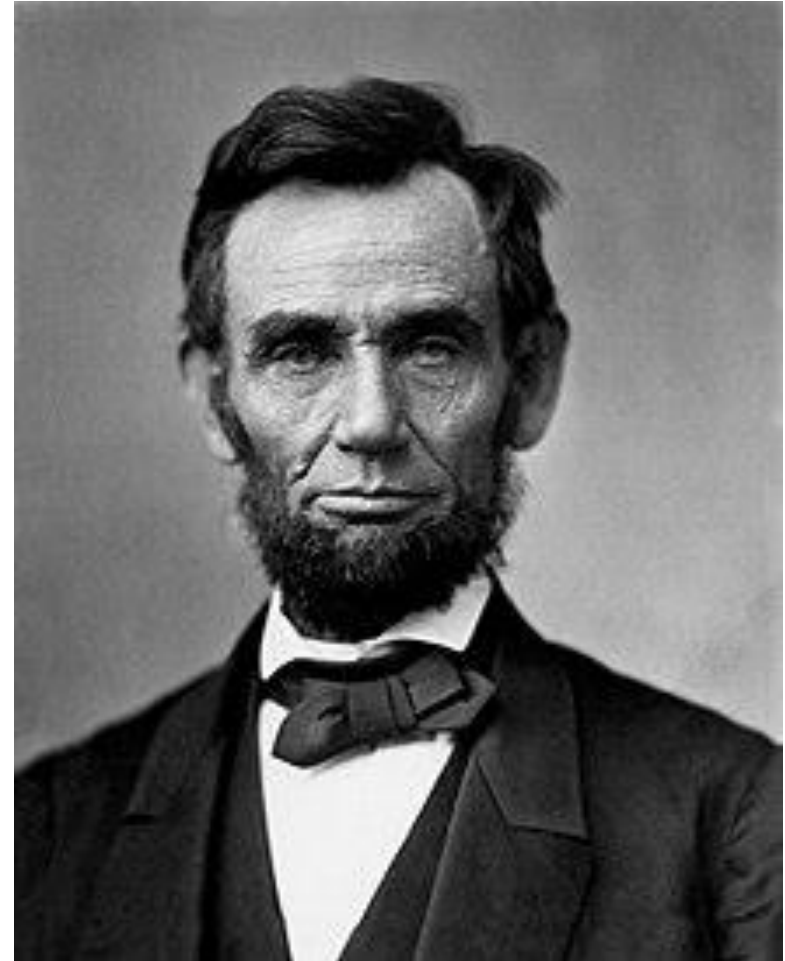
Led to:

- Appalled that he would be so remembered, created **Nobel Prize**.



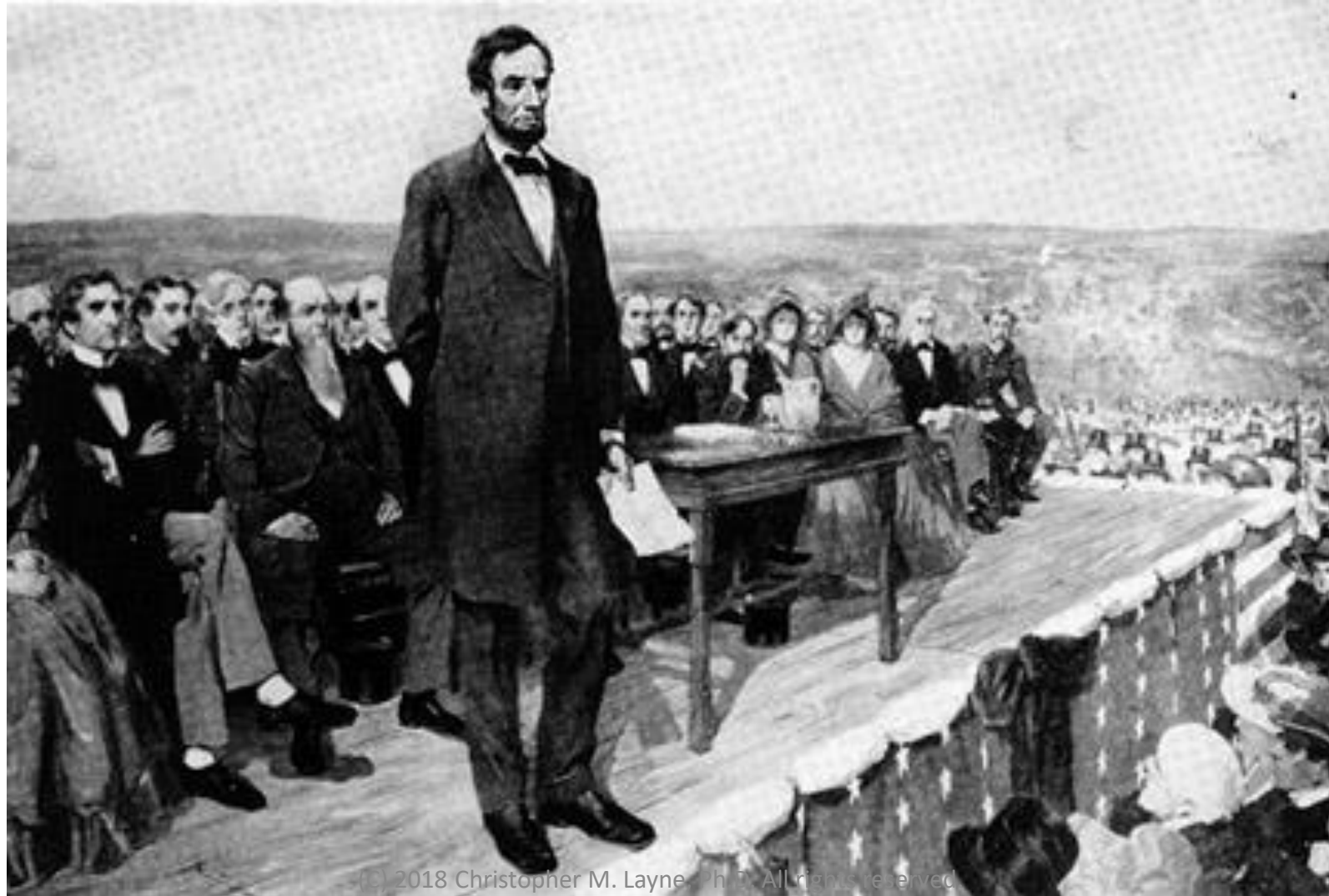
Comforting Existential Distress

- His father witnessed his own father being murdered
- Younger brother Thomas died in infancy
- Mother died of milk sickness when he was 9
- Older sister died giving birth to a stillborn son when Lincoln was 19
- First love, Anne Rutledge, died at age 22 of Typhoid
- Father of four sons, three of whom died; two while Lincoln was living
 - Eddie (age 4)
 - Willie (age 11)



The Gettysburg Address

19 November 1863



Comforting Existential Distress

- The war was still ongoing, the dead were still being buried at Gettysburg when Lincoln gave his address
- His address rededicated American to the vision of its founders, helped heal the nation



The Gettysburg Address

But, in a larger sense, we can not dedicate, we can not consecrate, we can not hallow this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, nor long remember what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here.

It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us—that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion—that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain—that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom—and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.

Constructive Responses to Both Separation Distress, Existential Distress

Lou
Costello Jr.
1942-1943
(11 months)



Lou Costello Jr.
Recreation Center



Comforting Separation Distress

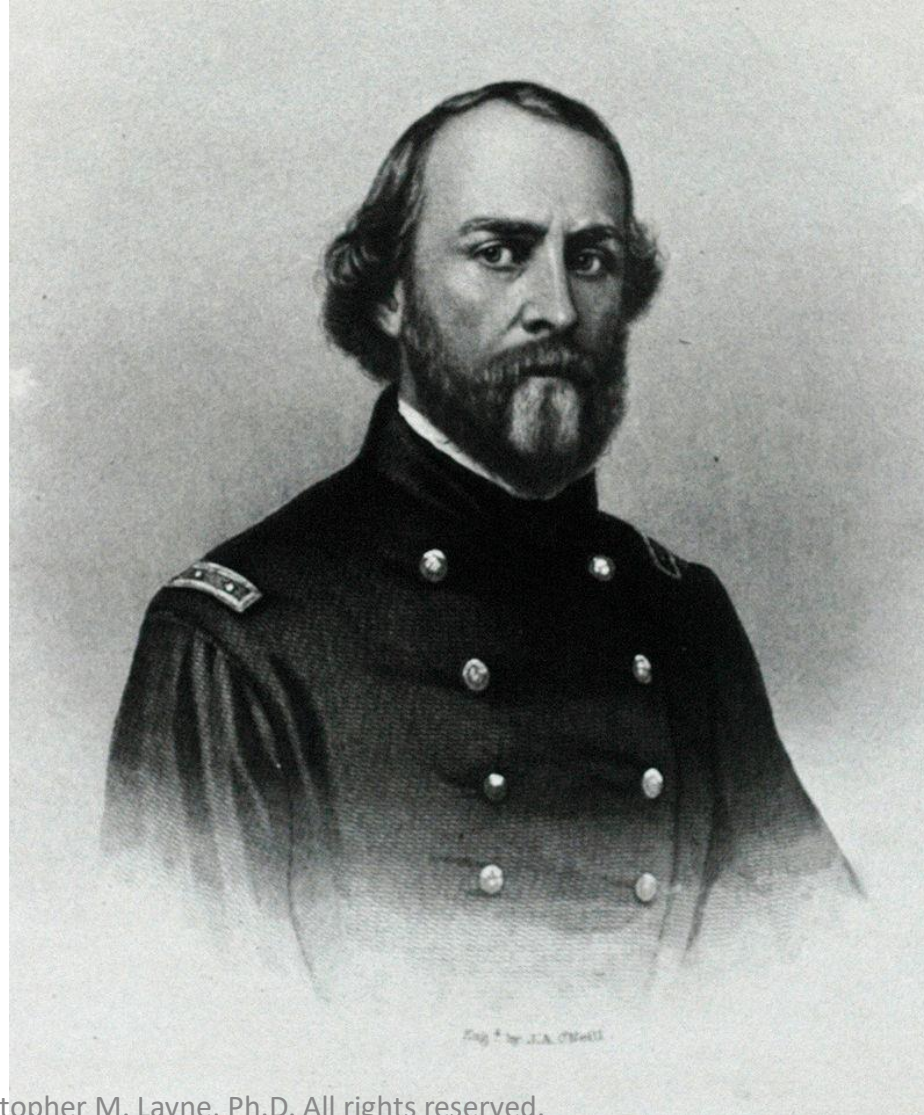
Sullivan Ballou

1829-1861 (aged 32)

Killed at first battle of Bull Run

Letter to Sarah Ballou

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1VK1KcZoDu0>



The Shared Grief Project

SharedGrief.org

Wes Moore: The Shared Grief Project

- <https://sharedgrief.org/stories/wes-moore/>

Wes Moore

Facing the Challenge of Separation Distress

“I still talk to him now... and I'll share things because I still feel very much like he's still very present in me, and I still feel like in many ways he's still guiding me. So I have no problem, if there's something I want to say, just having that conversation with him because I feel like he's still hearing what's going on and seeing what's going. So one of the ways that I really do try to deal with it... is have conversations with him... I feel like if I'm still and peaceful then I'll actually hear what he's trying to say back to me, in a way that I really need at that moment.”

Wes Moore

Facing the Challenge of Existential Distress

“I felt cheated. I thought that somehow I was wronged because I lost him. And I saw other people who are doing things with their parents and doing things with their father, and here I was... and I didn’t have a chance to do that.”

Wes Moore: Facing the Challenge of Existential Distress

“When I was 13 years old, she sent me away to military school. But it ended up becoming one of the most important places in my life because it actually gave me a chance to be surrounded by so many different male role models that gave me a sense of belonging in a way that I think was really helpful and really useful. It give me a chance to recreate myself differently and recreate myself in a way that actually started making more sense for me and my future, as well.”

Wes Moore: Facing the Challenge of Circumstance-Related Distress

“He started coming down the stairs, and I remember hearing him, and so I went to the stairs to go see him, and I just remember him collapsing down the stairs. And I’m kind of like just standing there, not sure what’s going on... what’s happening. And it’s just tough that one of the only memories I have of him is that moment... of watching his face, watching him fall.”

Wes Moore: Facing the Challenge of Circumstance-Related Distress

“My father had entered the hospital seeking help. But his face was unshaven, his clothes disheveled, his name unfamiliar, his address not in an affluent area. The hospital insulted him with ridiculous questions, and basically told him to fend for himself. Now, my mother had to plan his funeral.”

“We are products of our expectations, what we expect of ourselves and what we expect of others. Potential in this country is universal. Opportunity is not. Every single child has a place and we all have a vested interest in seeing them achieve that.”

The End

Christopher M. Layne, Ph.D.

Director of Education in Evidence-Based Practice, UCLA/Duke University
National Center for Child Traumatic Stress;
& Research Psychologist, Department of Psychiatry and Biobehavioral
Sciences, University of California, Los Angeles

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