



# One Year to Mourn

*Should grief be considered a medical disorder?*

**Paul Lauritzen and Mathew A. Crawford**

JULY/AUGUST 2024

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

---

1. Lauritzen and Crawford ask whether prolonged grief should be categorized as a mental disorder, noting that the symptoms of prolonged grief disorder (PGD) include “intense yearning and/or longing for the deceased or a preoccupation with thoughts or memories of the deceased.” What would it mean to regard such protracted longings or preoccupations as disordered? Should the process of mourning a loved one be ordered in a particular way?

---
2. Is there a clear line between a normal range of human emotion and a psychiatric condition? How do diagnostic criteria like the one-year time frame for PGD alter our sense of what our emotional lives should look like?

---
3. Lauritzen and Crawford describe a “looping effect” whereby new diagnostic categories encourage people to identify with particular conditions and encourage pharmaceutical companies to manufacture and market treatments to those people. How much does such marketing affect the way medical professionals and potential patients approach diagnoses in the United States, where health care is for-profit and direct-to-consumer pharmaceutical marketing is normalized? Should this cause us to be more skeptical of new medical diagnoses?

---
4. Lauritzen and Crawford quote Fr. Richard Rutherford, CSC: “[G]rief requires a holistic approach. Medicine offers one set of tools; spiritual practices another.” Can you envision a way of combining individual medical approaches to grief with spiritual and/or communal ones? What would a holistic toolkit for coping with grief look like?

---
5. Does expanding diagnostic categories empower us by allowing us to name the sources of our afflictions without guilt or shame? On the other hand, what are the limits or potential harms of expanded diagnoses? Can they foster in us a sense of dependence on medicalization, or make it harder for us to draw upon non-medicalized tools in conceptualizing our emotional lives?

---

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING:

Sheila Cavanaugh, “What Death Has Taught Me,” June 2023: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/what-death-has-taught-me>

Alexander Stern, “Beyond the Therapeutic,” December 2023:

<https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/therapeutic-mindset-freud-lasch-quinn-sandel-Edmundson-therapy-self-stern>

Agnes R. Howard, “Comforting Rachel,” November 15, 2013: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/comforting-rachel>

Nick Scrimenti, “No Man Is an Island,” August 2019: <https://www.commonwealmagazine.org/no-man-island>