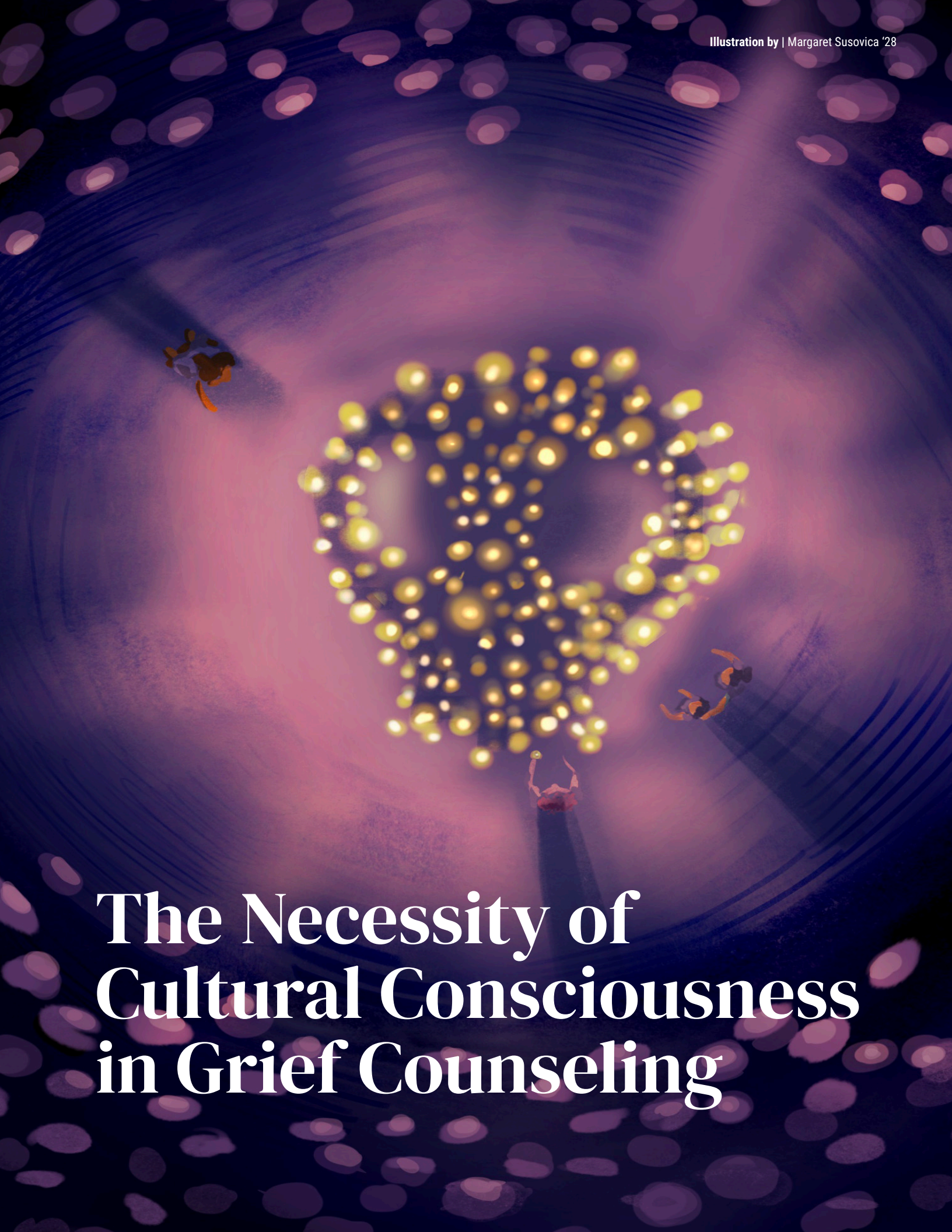




The Necessity of Cultural Consciousness in Grief Counseling

ORIGINAL RESEARCH

The Necessity of Cultural Consciousness in Grief Counseling

Hannah Dorval '29

Washington University in St. Louis

This study explores the intersection of cultural traditions and grief counseling through a thorough examination of funerary practices and the psychology field's current inclusion of culturally diverse coping mechanisms. Using an ethnographic approach, the research presented analyzes publicly available accounts of funerary rituals across various cultures. Recurring themes, such as communal versus individualistic grieving, religious coping mechanisms, and symbolic continuity with the deceased, are identified in these accounts to further understand the funerary practices' effect on coping mechanisms. A secondary quantitative analysis assesses the extent to which widely used psychology textbooks incorporate cultural consciousness in grief counselor training. Findings reveal drastic differences in the coping mechanisms of various cultures, including that collectivist cultures often partake in communal mourning rituals that encourage social support, while individualistic societies typically prioritize private grieving. Additionally, many psychology textbooks dedicate less than 2% of their content to the cultural aspects of grief, highlighting a gap in psychological education. Challenges included limited access to primary ethnographic data, which was mitigated by a focus on documented ceremonies and scholarly accounts and limited access to textbooks used worldwide. The results of the thematic coding for the qualitative data and a statistical analysis for textbook representation highlighted a need for the psychology curricula to integrate cultural awareness in grief counseling teachings. This would not only improve therapeutic accuracy but make it a more just and effective practice. Ultimately, this research demonstrates that grief is not merely a psychological experience but one that is deeply influenced by culture, thus necessitating a more inclusive approach in both academic study and professional practice.

Throughout human history, grief has remained an indelible part of the human experience. And while extensively written about, explored, and described, it is without a doubt that this aspect of human emotion is yet to be fully disclosed. Historically, death and mourning have been marked by culturally specific rituals, funerary practices, and social norms varying greatly across cultures and regions. Grieving and bereavement practices are curated by beliefs, religions, and perspectives about the afterlife. In ancient Egypt, for example, elaborate burial rituals and mummification practices were designed to aid the deceased in the afterlife. In Mexico, *Día de los Muertos*, or the Day of the Dead, has been an honored tradition for centuries. These traditions around death and mourning often embody religious beliefs and social values that provide structure, meaning, and a sense of continuity for the bereaved. Considering this, the prevalence of various cultural practices is due to grief being undeniably universal. Psychology's focus on grief, primarily emerging in Western contexts, diverts attention to foundational models such as Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's five stages of grief and John Bowlby's attachment theory. These theories have greatly influenced our understanding of bereavement but have historically centered on individualistic perspectives, often overlooking the role of cultural beliefs and practices. As globalization has increased, individuals today are exposed to a wide range of culturally diverse traditions. This makes it essential to study how these practices influence the grieving process in various cultural contexts.

The field of psychology has begun to acknowledge the one-size-fits-all approach to grief and its limitations, recognizing that mourning and coping processes are deeply affected by cultural

background. While the factors of grief are vast and numerous, many of them can be attributed to culture as well. For instance, collective rituals, commonly found in collectivist cultures, often provide social support which are critical for the grieving process. On the other hand, cultures with more private mourning customs may emphasize personal reflection and solitary coping mechanisms. It's important to realize that culture establishes the types of relationships we make, how we treat people, how we feel about certain people, and so on and so forth. Culture plays an enormous role in the way we process and express feelings. And even more so in the presence of expression or lack thereof that also influences grief processing.

With this in mind, there remains a gap in psychological research about how these culturally specific practices succeed or fail to improve coping outcomes and mental health. While there are some acknowledgements of a need for cultural competence, much of bereavement psychology still lacks a systematic approach to addressing diverse grief responses.

This leads to the center of my investigation: How do culturally diverse funerary practices influence the grieving process and coping mechanisms of individuals who have lost a family member, and to what extent does the field of psychology account or need to account for these cultural variations in grief responses?

Throughout this investigation, I will compare and analyze different cultural mourning practices across various societies, with emphasis on both collectivist and individualistic approaches to grief. This information will aid in my study of how cultural background influences grief expression and coping mechanisms, in order to thoroughly and appropriately research the effectiveness of

the inclusion of cultural consciousness on mental health outcomes. By the end of the investigation, it will be abundantly clear the success or failure of cultural approaches to grief and the determination of whether there is a need for more culturally competent frameworks in bereavement psychology.

Review of Literature

I. THE SEVERITY OF GRIEF AND ITS DETRIMENT

Many associate grief with the feeling of sadness. While this is true to a certain extent, grief holds very real implications, not only psychologically but somatically. Understanding grief's effect on one's psychological and physiological health was imperative to my research in order to demonstrate a need for effective treatment to bereaved individuals and therefore understanding cultural implications to the current study of grief and the adjustments needed to accommodate these implications. Taking this into account, I ini-

tially researched with the intent of adding the causes, effects, and severities of grief to my body of knowledge. In doing this, I found that extensive research has been done on the human psychological response to grief but finding somatic responses appeared to be more difficult. Mary Frances O'Connor, doctorate professor of psychology at the University of Arizona, thought this way as well and in her "Grief: A Brief History of Research on How Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt", she argues that there is not enough discussion within the psychology community to understand the body's somatic response to psychological trauma. The author provides a thorough synopsis of what is known about the human reaction to grief, including the most influential research developments and the physiological changes that accompany severe grief.

The paper discusses how the loss of a close attachment figure will trigger physiological changes in the cardiovascular, endocrine, or immune systems. These changes are thought to contribute to elevated morbidity and mortality rates in bereaved individu-

	Origin	Explanation	Influence on Treatment
The Attachment Theory	Developed by John Bowlby in the mid-20th century, this theory originally aimed to explain the bonds between infants and their primary caregivers.	The quality and security of early attachments influence how individuals respond to loss. Those with secure attachments may adapt better while those with insecure attachments can lead to complicated grief reactions.	Treatment based on the theory involves understanding a person's attachment style in order to predict their grief responses- helping clients process the feelings of loss by fostering secure connections, exploring relational patterns, and addressing attachment-related anxieties.
Dual Process Model	Developed by Stroebe and Schut in the 1990s, this model was designed to describe grief as a dynamic process.	This model describes grief as an oscillation between loss oriented and restoration-oriented stressors.	The model encourages clients to engage in both grief focused and restorative activities in order to recognize the need for both grieving and life adaptation. This could involve addressing loss-related feelings while also encouraging practical adjustments in daily routine.
Meaning Reconstruction	Developed by Robert Neimeyer, this approach emphasizes the personal creation of meaning as a response to loss. This holds bearings in constructivist psychology.	This approach suggests that grieving involves deriving a sense of meaning and purpose after a loss, as death can challenge previously held beliefs and values.	Therapists utilize this approach by focusing on helping clients reconstruct their understanding of the world and their place in it after a loss. This is supported by techniques like narrative therapy, a process in which individuals see themselves as the "author" of their own lives.
Adaptive Grieving Styles*	Developed by Martin and Doka, this model highlights the different ways individuals process grief based on personality and cultural influences.	This model identifies two grieving styles: <i>intuitive</i> which is emotionally expressive and <i>instrumental</i> which involves problem solving and is more cognitively focused. Some patience is categorized as having a mix of both.	The application of this in treatment involves identifying which the client is and adapting treatment based on these differences. Intuitive grievers would be encouraged to express their emotions freely while intuitive grievers would benefit from a discussion of practical adjustments.
*It is important to note that this is one of the only grief models that acknowledge a necessity to personalized grief counseling, proving to be something not well studied or accounted for.			

Table 1 | Theories, frameworks, and understandings identified by Doughty Horn [2].

als, known as the “broken heart phenomenon” or “widowhood effect” [6]. These rates have more specific bodily causes incited by grief’s effect on the various systems. The cardiovascular system, for instance, shows increased risk when encountered with bereavement and stressful situations as a whole. Research shows that grief can lead to increased heart rate and higher blood pressure. This is accompanied by reduced heart rate variability which is a measure of anatomic flexibility and resilience. These effects indicate how a heightened sympathetic nervous system response, such as the reaction to losing a loved one, can put considerable strain on the heart and blood vessels [6]. Specific studies demonstrate this excess morbidity and mortality as a result of grief. For example, a study of 1.5 million Finns showed that the risk of heart disease was two times higher than normal in men in the six months after the death of their wife [6]. Grief’s relation to the endocrine system is of great importance. The endocrine system is imperative to bodily function as it is a network of glands that create hormones that carry information to the cells in the body, holding great influence in every organ and organ system. Grief is known to dysregulate the Hypothalamic-Pituitary-Adrenal (HPA) axis. This causes an uncontrolled release of cortisol, a stress hormone. These levels, typically starting high and gradually decreasing, show irregular levels in those experiencing prolonged or complicated grief. These irregularities can contribute to various health issues and complications in the endocrine system, such as metabolic disturbances and immune suppression. In bereaved individuals, studies have observed two proinflammatory cytokines, characterized by the name Interleukin-1 and Interleukin-6. These inflammatory markers are commonly associated with increased risk of chronic illnesses like cancer. Interestingly and important to note for the purposes of this investigation, specific proinflammatory genetic variants show higher inflammatory responses during bereavement. This goes to show that there may be a distinct difference in the grief responses of some and the responses of others. Nonetheless, in a correlational study of bereavement and antibody response to influenza vaccination, it was found there was a lower lymphocyte proliferation and impaired antibody response in bereaved individuals [7]. This demonstrates how grief can impair the body’s ability to defend against pathogens, an important and necessary ability.

II. THEORIES, FRAMEWORKS, AND UNDERSTANDINGS OF GRIEF IN THE PSYCHOTHERAPEUTIC COMMUNITY

My research requires a thorough understanding of the current body of knowledge to understand cultural applications to grief therapy. Luckily, Doughty Horn, a doctorate Department Associate Chair and Professor of Counseling at Idaho State University, details in her Recommendations for Curricular Inclusion, the current relevant theories and frameworks being taught and applied in therapeutic interventions. In reading, I’ve noticed a saturation of Western viewpoints and studies, without inclusion of their relevance in other societies. Rather than being a limitation, I’ve found this essential to identify my gap, as an overabundance of psychological study in the US without this inclusion may lead to misunderstandings in other societies. This is further explained by the failed humanitarian efforts of the US during the 2004 Tsunami in India, present in the Specific Representations of the Necessity of Cultural Consciousness.

III. THE NECESSITY OF CULTURAL COMPETENCE IN GENERAL THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTIONS

In the Case for Cultural Competence, Stanley Sue, founder of

the Asian American Psychological Association and receiver of a doctorate in Psychology at UCLA, advocates for cultural competence in psychotherapeutic interventions. He, with others, discusses the importance of cultural competence in mental health care, particularly for ethnic groups who face disparities in access and quality. Cultural competence is characterized by the appreciation, understanding, and incorporation of cultural backgrounds of clients into treatment. This has been identified as a way of improving therapeutic outcomes by addressing culturally specific needs. Cultural competency is argued as being ethically imperative in mitigating health disparities. Cultural competency is seen as an ethical responsibility to ensure fair access to quality care, regardless of cultural background. The paper argues that it is essential to include an awareness of one’s own cultural biases and an understanding of clients’ cultural backgrounds, values, and worldviews. These are recognized as skills that practitioners should work on and develop in order to work sensitively and effectively work with diverse cultural groups.



Cultural competence is characterized by the appreciation, understanding, and incorporation of cultural backgrounds of clients into treatment.

The paper discusses ways of cultural adaptations in therapy. One of relevance is the Method of Delivery, which includes using the client’s language and adapting communication styles. This is the start to integrating cultural practices in therapeutic methods. Content adaptation is another way to apply cultural competency. It involves the discussion of cultural patterns, immigration challenges and experiences with discrimination. This, however, has faced criticism. Some argue that this method can unintentionally reinforce stereotypes or overlook individual differences within ethnic groups. Despite this, a few studies have shown there are moderate positive effects of culturally competent interventions on treatment outcomes. However, more thorough research is required to confirm its specific benefits and appropriate purposes.

IV. EXISTING DIRECT COMPARISONS OF CULTURALLY DISTINCT GRIEVING PRACTICES

These studies are thorough comparative ethnographic cases that provide distinctions between varied cultures and their grief practices and traditions. The incorporation of these specific cases give precedent to the idea that behaviors and factors surrounding grief vary by culture.

A. MAYAN AND SWEDISH [5]

This study explores the views and behaviors toward death of two separate cultures [5]. They interviewed 10 participants from each culture and determined based on the most prevalent themes, an overall view of each cultures’ approach to death.

In Mayan culture, death is a communal experience. Elders play an important role in mourning and guiding families. They believe in communication with the dead through rituals and dreams. In general, death is seen as a continuation rather than an end. Its funerary practices are a celebration, equipped with music, food,

and gatherings. It is viewed as an essential and non-fearful process. The Mayan people believe death is integrated into the natural life cycle.

In Swedish culture, on the other hand, death is largely seen as the end of existence, leading to feelings of uncertainty. There is a great emphasis on making life meaningful. Death is also considered taboo, serving as a private matter that is often avoided in conversations. It is only discussed in intimate or unavoidable situations. Few funerary traditions exist in Swedish society. It is said that death practices are more individualized. These cultural contrasts show a significant difference in grieving practices and approaches, hinting at a need to differentiate treatments for various cultures.

B. FRENCH AND TOGOLESE [4]

Upon an increase in Prolonged Grief Disorder (PGD), the author found a need to explore cultural differences in grief experiences. In a comparative study between French and Togolese widowed adults, 235 participants were derived from the two countries (73 French, 162 Togolese). Upon completing the Prolonged Grief Scale, it was found that French PGD prevalence ranged from 21.9% to 26% while Togolese PGD prevalence ranged from 15.4% to 17.3%. While there were not drastic differences in Prolonged Grief Disorder's prevalence, the risk factors were found to be very different.

The severity of PGD among the French sample was linked to low education, unemployment, and traumatic death. While the Togolese sample's higher PGD severity was attributed to being male and traumatic death. These risk factors differing culturally show implications for clinicians to consider cultural contexts in diagnosis and treatment.

V. SPECIFIC REPRESENTATIONS OF THE NECESSITY OF CULTURAL CONSCIOUSNESS

A. 2004 ASIAN TSUNAMI

Christopher et. al begin their argument advocating for critical cultural awareness by pointing attention to the humanitarian relief of the 2004 Asian Tsunami [39]. The tsunami in Sri Lanka caused massive destruction. This included over 36,000 deaths and 300,000 homes lost. Survivors prioritized securing basic needs and daily essentials whilst reuniting families and performing funeral rites. Western psychologists quickly arrived, assuming high levels of PTSD and mental health issues. However, Western interventions during relief efforts often conflicted with local norms, such as group-based therapy, which violated caste, religion, and gender norms. Practices like public emotional expression were culturally inappropriate but encouraged by the well-intentioned psychologists. The local customs emphasized maintaining dignity, communal support, and composure, rooted in Buddhist teachings. Local views on suffering were surrounded by bearing it gracefully as a path to peace.

Some interventions exacerbated stress rather than alleviated it. Some cultural missteps led to gossip, family conflicts, or inter-community tensions. It was clear that the Western approaches were not fit for this very distinct cultural society and yielded serious consequences. The foreign helpers were viewed as "the second tsunami" by local media, deemed as doing more harm than good [39].

This situation reflects a notable oversight. It is clear that psychologists could have benefited from collaborating with local experts to align efforts with community practices. This is a clear ex-

ample of the US psychology's narrow perspective and insufficient inclusion of culturally specific understandings, calling for greater cultural sensitivity and integration.

VI. IDENTIFIED GAP

The research proposed here seeks to fill the gap of limited understanding in the utilization of cultural consciousness in psychological grief interventions. I seek to do this by investigating how different cultural mourning practices influence grief and coping processes and evaluating the extent to which current psychological models and interventions address these cultural distinctions. This is proved through recent literature for more culturally sensitive approaches in mental health care. For instance, Zane emphasizes the importance of cultural competence in therapeutic settings, while Bonanno and Kokou-Kpolou highlight cultural variances in grief expression that contradict a universal model [4,8,23].

Methods

The purpose of this study is to recognize the necessity of cultural competence in grief therapeutic practices. This aim requires a comprehensive review of existing scholarship and a thorough observation of the cultural differences in grieving/coping mechanisms. With this being said, I have chosen to utilize Ethnography and Quantitative Content Analysis in my study. The research question "How do culturally diverse funerary practices influence the grieving process and coping mechanisms of individuals who have lost a loved one, and to what extent does the field of psychology account or need to account for these cultural variations in grief responses?" contains sub questions that require a mixed methods approach in this study. The ethnographic aspect of this study sought to uncover exactly how culturally diverse funerary practices impact coping methods. The choice to use this research method lies in its comprehensive nature. Grief and coping methods are hard to observe on a generalized level as they are deeply complex and contains many layers. Ethnography provides a comprehensive understanding of a cultural practice and its meaning through direct observation, allowing researchers to observe cultural customs and tendencies authentically. Ethnography captures all aspects of cultural practices including unspoken rules, emotional expressions, etc.



Ethnography provides a comprehensive understanding of a cultural practice and its meaning through direct observation, allowing researchers to observe cultural customs and tendencies authentically.

For these reasons, I used ethnography to observe these culturally diverse funerary practices through videos, diary entries, interviews, and other primary sources. To evaluate the extent that the field of psychology accounts for this or should account for this, I gathered six psychology textbooks used by Florida accredited universities, counted the amount of pages that discussed any form of cultural consciousness, calculated its percentage within the textbook, and performed a statistical analysis to determine a trend.

Ethnographic Component

This ethnographic approach was essential to this study as it allowed for a comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the cultural layers within grieving and coping practices.

Through ethnography, this study sought to capture the cultural variations in funerary rituals and their impact on grief. To select the cultural practices, I tried to obtain cultural practices from at least all seven continents. From this, I narrowed down my chosen practices through available resources.

Data Coding Analysis

A thematic analysis was used for the ethnographic component. The coding prioritizes identifying recurring patterns, symbols, and differences in emotional expressions. The data for this coding is derived from publicly available primary sources such as recorded rituals, funeral services, interviews, and written reflections. The collection of this data ensures variety for analysis of a broad spectrum of cultural practices. The thematic codes were established in advance, based on elements I anticipated encountering within funerary rituals.

Quantitative Study Component

This component involved examining the average proportion of cultural competency coverage in grief counseling materials. Additionally, Pearson’s R was applied to determine the correlation between textbook length and the percentage of content devoted to cultural considerations in grief counseling. This assessed whether longer textbooks dedicated more space to cultural perspectives or if cultural competency was consistently underrepresented, shining light on the degree to which cultural diversity is currently addressed in the field of psychology and identifying if and where there are areas of improvement.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the strict ethical guidelines established by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) and general researching community. Precautions were created throughout this methodology in order to ensure utmost respect for cultural practices. For the ethnographic component, only publicly accessible materials were used to avoid intruding upon private rituals. It is also important to note that an open and understanding mind was used to examine these rituals. This study is not meant to disrespect or infringe upon funerary rituals that may be considered different. In the Qualitative Content Analysis, the aim was not to discredit any of the psychology materials used but rather provide quantitative evidence of an overall lack of awareness and teaching of culturally diverse funerary practices and their effects on coping mechanisms.

Limitations and Delimitations

This study is limited to exploring a subset of culturally diverse funerary practices and may not represent all global traditions. The reliance on publicly available funerary rituals may limit the depth of the cultural insight of this study. The selection of textbooks was limited to those used in Florida accredited universities. It should also be considered that the study does not evaluate the percentage of content surrounding grief to the percentage of other psychological topics, discounting the possibility that the percentage is small because there is a lot of content to cover in a textbook. By combining the ethnographic and quantitative analysis methods, this study seeks to obtain a holistic understanding of how cultural variation impacts grief and the extent to which these variations are addressed within grief counseling and other psychological practices.

Results and Analysis

Analysis of Cultural Competence in Psychology Textbooks

The quantitative content analysis was selected to provide empiri-

Textbook	Total number of Pages	Number of Pages that mention the following: <i>cultural competence, grief, bereavement, mourning rituals, etc.</i>	%
"Psychology" by David G. Myers & C. Nathan DeWall	882	17	1.9%
"Psychology: Themes and Variations" by Wayne Weiten	567	7	1.2%
Introduction to Psychology" by James W. Kalat	608	6	0.9%
"Psychology" by Richard Gross	948	23	2.4%
Discovering Psychology by John Cacioppo and Richard E. Mayer	656	5	0.007%
Cognitive Psychology: Connecting Mind, Research, and Everyday Experience by E. Bruce Goldstein	496	13	0.026%

Table 2 | Coverage of Cultural Competence and Grief-Related Topics in Widely Used Psychology Textbooks.

cal evidence regarding the lack of cultural competency in mainstream psychological textbooks, resources, and curricula. The choice to calculate proportions and correlation coefficients allowed for an objective evaluation trend, which reinforced the idea that psychology as a discipline must improve its cultural inclusivity.

The data shows a significant underrepresentation of cultural considerations in grief counseling materials. The highest observed proportion of cultural competency discussion was 2/4% in a textbook spanning 948 pages, with one as low as 0.007%.

$$r = \frac{n(\sum xy) - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[n\sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][n\sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Equation for Pearson's R Coefficient

<i>x</i>	<i>y</i>	$(x - \bar{x})$	$(y - \bar{y})$	$(x - \bar{x})(y - \bar{y})$	$(x - \bar{x})^2$	$(y - \bar{y})^2$
882	17	189.2	5.2	983.84	35797	27.04
567	7	-125.8	-4.8	603.84	15826	23.04
608	6	-84.8	-5.8	491.84	7191	33.64
948	23	255.2	11.2	2858.2	65127	125.44
656	5	-36.8	0.8	29.44	1354.2	46.24
496	13	-196.8	1.2	-236.2	38730	1.44
$\bar{x} = 692.8$	$\bar{y} = 11.8$	$\sum =$		4951.84	164024.84	256.84

Table 3 | Pearson's Correlation for Textbook Length and Percentage of Content Covering Cultural Perspectives in Grief Counseling.

$$r = \frac{4951.84}{\sqrt{(164024.84)(256.84)}} = 0.763$$

Pearson's Correlation Coefficient Equation and Key for Determination

Correlation Coefficient	Degree of Correlation
>0.8	Very high
0.6-0.8	High
0.4-0.6	Medium
0.2-0.4	Low
<0.2	Very low

A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated between the textbook length and the percentage of content devoted to cultural perspectives in grief counseling, which revealed a strong relationship. This suggests that textbook length correlates with a lower incorporation of cultural competence teachings. Clearly, cultural perspectives remain an overlooked aspect of mainstream psychological education, despite increasing recognition of its necessity in clinical practice.

Findings from the Ethnographic Study

The ethnographic analysis of this study sought to capture the lived experiences of grief across cultures, which was necessary due to the qualitative nature of mourning practices. The use of the thematic coding enabled the identification of recurring grief expressions and allowed for a specific categorization of coping mechanisms, ensuring a structured comparison across different cultural frameworks.

The ethnographic analysis of diverse funerary practices revealed recurring themes across cultural traditions. This study highlighted the profound impact of cultural mourning rituals on grief processing and coping mechanisms. A thematic coding of the ob-

served rituals identified seven major categories of grief expression:

- Religious and Spiritual Elements (RE)
- Emotional Expressions (EE)
- Ritual Practices (RP)
- Community and Social Roles (CS)
- Temporal Aspects (TA)
- Materials and Symbolic Objects (MS)
- Coping Mechanisms (CM)

See appendices for more information on constraints and qualifications (visit WUJUR.org).

One of the most prominent patterns that emerged from the study was the contrast between collectivist and individualistic mourning traditions. Cultures with collectivist values, like the Ashanti of Ghana or the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, exhibited features of communal grieving (EE4 and CS2), where extended families or entire communities participated in rituals that reinforced social bonds. Conversely, individualistic cultures, such as Sweden, demonstrated reserved mourning customs (EE2 and RP6) where grief was treated as a private experience.

Another notable distinction would be in the use of symbolic actions and post-funeral customs that served to aid emotional closure. New Orleans Jazz funerals and the Irish Wake emphasizes the role of celebration and communal support, in some cultures, as a way of facilitating the transition from mourning to acceptance. In contrast however, Japanese Kotsuage ceremonies, which involve carefully collecting the cremated remains of the deceased, highlights the symbolic continuity with the deceased.

The presence of religious and spiritual coping mechanisms is examined as a recurring pattern across cultures. Grief was often alleviated through religious practices, prayers, and rituals that facilitated meaning making. Meaning making being a prominent theory within the psychiatric community, serving as an understanding of how an individual understands and comprehends the events of their life, makes this observation vital to the understanding of culture's role in coping mechanisms. The Hindu Cremation rites focus on releasing the soul while Mayan tradition encourages continued communication with the deceased through dreams and offerings.

“

These findings indicate that grief is not only a psychological experience but is also a deeply embedded cultural process.

These findings indicate that grief is not only a psychological experience but is also a deeply embedded cultural process. These specific practices associated with bereavement provide insights into the mechanisms that either facilitate or complicate coping depending on how well they align with an individual's belief system and societal expectations.

Connections to Research Question

The research question “How do culturally diverse funerary

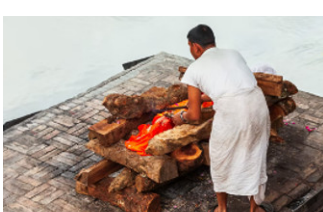
Case Study #1: Ghana Mediums: Videos, Online Exhibits, Personal Accounts Present Codes: RE1, RE2, EE4, RP2, RP4, CS2, MS1, CM2  [9]	Case Study #2: The Ashanti People Mediums: Videos, Academic Journals, Personal Accounts Present Codes: RE3, EE3, RP1, RP4, CS4, MS1  [14]
Case Study #3: Tibetan Funeral Rites Mediums: Videos, Video Documentaries, Personal Accounts, Academic Journals Present Codes: RE1, RE2, RE4, RP1, RP7, CM1  [17]	Case Study #4: The Iris Wake Mediums: Audio Documentaries, Academic Journals, Personal Accounts Present Codes: EE1, EE3, RP5, MS2, CM3  [21]
Case Study #5: New Orleans Funerals Mediums: Online Exhibits, Videos, Video Documentaries Present Codes: RE1, EE4, RP3, CS5, MS3, CM2  [25]	Case Study #6: Brazilian Finados Rituals Mediums: Personal Accounts Present Codes: RE3, RP4, CS2, TA1, MS3  [26]
Case Study #7: Yanomami Death Rituals Mediums: Academic Journals, Personal Accounts, Videos Present Codes: RE3, RE4, EE4, RP1, RP4, MS2  [30]	Case Study #8: Aboriginal/Yolngu Mourning Rituals Mediums: Personal Accounts, Academic Journals, News Reports, Videos Present Codes: RE3, EE4, RP3, RP6, CS4, CM1  [31]
Case Study #9: Hindu Cremation Rituals Mediums: Personal Accounts, Academic Journals, Images Present Codes: RE1, RE2, RE4, RP1, RP3, RP3, MS4, CM3  [36]	Case Study #10: Japanese Kotsuage and Butsidam Mediums: Academic Journals, Images, Videos Present Codes: RE1, RE2, RP1, RP3, RP4, TA1, MS3  [40]

Table 4 | The details of each case study, including mediums, present codes, and visual examples.

Religious and Spiritual Elements (RE)	Frequency	Ritual Practices (RP)	Frequency
RE1	7	RP1	9
RE2	7	RP2	2
RE3	5	RP3	6
RE4	6	RP4	7
Emotional Expressions (EE)		RP5	2
EE1	2	RP6	1
EE2	1	RP7	2
EE3	2	Community and Social Roles (CS)	
EE4	6	CS1	2
EE5	1	CS2	4
Temporal Aspects (TA)		CS3	1
TA1	3	CS4	2
TA2	0	CS5	2
TA3	1	Coping Mechanisms (CM)	
TA4	2	CM1	4
TA5	3	CM2	4
Material and Symbolic Objects (MS)		CM3	5
MS1	3	CM4	1
MS2	3	Meanings and descriptions can be found in the appendices at WUJUR.org	
MS3	4		
MS4	2		
MS5	1		

Table 5 | The frequency of each code found in the case studies examined.

practices influence the grieving process and coping mechanisms of individuals who have lost a loved one, and to what extent does the field of psychology account for these cultural variations in grief responses?" is addressed through two key insights from these findings: The first being that cultural funerary practices significantly shape grief processing- with communal traditions often fostering social support, while individualistic mourning customs may emphasize personal resilience and introspection is just one example of these practices having a profound impact on the way individuals cope. The second being that current psychological education largely neglects cultural nuances in grief counseling, indicating a shortcoming that if addressed could improve therapeutic interventions for diverse populations.

Challenges and Adaptations

One of the initial challenges encountered was the limited availability of firsthand ethnographic data due to privacy concerns surrounding funerary rituals. To address this, publicly available resources such as recorded funeral ceremonies and ethnographic documentaries were prioritized. Additionally, the original research scope aimed to analyze a broader range of psychology textbooks but was later refined to focus on those used in Florida-accredited universities to ensure feasibility.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study sought to evaluate how well cultural competency

is integrated into grief counseling education and practice. Through a mixed methods approach, a qualitative thematic coding of funerary rituals and quantitative textbook analysis, it was revealed that there is a clear impact on coping mechanisms from cultural funerary practices and psychological education severely underrepresents cultural considerations in grief work.

The ethnographic content analysis of funerary traditions across diverse cultures demonstrated that grief is not a universal, linear experience but a culturally embedded process shaped by symbolism, rituals, and collective meaning-making. The textbook review found that on average, only 1.07% of pages in core psychology texts referenced cultural competence, with even fewer offering in-depth applications or case studies. These findings highlight a troubling disconnect: while mourning is a profoundly cultural act, educational foundations in grief often reflect Western, individualistic models. This aligns with the research question, showing that without integrating cultural consciousness, current models risk pathologizing or misinterpreting non-Western grieving practices.

However, the study faced notable limitations. Ethnographic data was drawn from secondary sources like videos and documented accounts rather than direct field interviews, which may have limited the contextual depth of these practices. Additionally, the small sample size of textbooks analyzed restricts this research from resulting in a broader generalization of the inclusion of cultural consciousness. Despite these challenges, the research fills a

critical gap in existing literature by quantifying the neglect of cultural education in psychology and highlighting its real-world implications. In doing so, this research has emphasized an ethical responsibility of mental health practitioners and educators to embrace pluralistic approaches to grief that affirm diverse cultural realities.

This has direct implications for the community of practice: training programs should move beyond token mentions of culture to embedding it within theoretical frameworks and therapeutic techniques. Culturally sensitive grief counseling should be considered the norm rather than the exception.



Culturally sensitive grief counseling should be considered the norm rather than the exception.

For future research, this study encourages broader analysis of psychology syllabi across institutions to assess curriculum-wide attention to cultural grieving. Additionally, interviewing practitioners and patients about their experiences with culturally mismatched or aligned grief support would provide further insight. A longitudinal study examining the outcomes of culturally conscious therapy versus traditional models could also offer valuable experience for reform. Another beneficial addition to this research project would be the addition of inter-rater reliability measures in the data coding to ensure consistency and validity.

In conclusion, this research reveals that without cultural consciousness, grief counseling remains incomplete. A more inclusive, responsive approach to attending to grief is essential for healing in a globalized, multicultural world.

References

- [1] Anaïs Aeschlimann, Eva Heim, Clare Killikelly, Mariam Arafa, Andreas Maercker, Culturally sensitive grief treatment and support: A scoping review, *SSM - Mental Health*, Volume 5, 2024, 100325, ISSN 2666-5603, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmmh.2024.100325>.
 - [2] Doughty Horn, E. A., Crews, J. A., & Harrawood, L. K. (2013). Grief and loss education: Recommendations for curricular inclusion. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 52(1), 70–80. <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1556-6978.2013.00029.x>
 - [3] Edge, D., & Lemetyinen, H. (2019). Psychology across cultures: Challenges and opportunities. *Psychology and psychotherapy*, 92(2), 261–276. <https://doi.org/10.1111/papt.12229>
 - [4] Kokou-Kpolou, C. K., Cénat, J. M., Noorishad, P.-G., Park, S., & Bacqué, M.-F. (2020). A comparison of prevalence and risk factor profiles of prolonged grief disorder among French and Togolese bereaved adults. *Social Psychiatry & Psychiatric Epidemiology*, 55(6), 757–764. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00127-020-01840-w>
 - [5] López, M., & Cardeña, E. (2022). Mayan & Swedish attitudes and practices toward death. *Death Studies*, 46(8), 1909–1922. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2020.1867253>
 - [6] O'Connor M. F. (2019). Grief: A Brief History of Research on How Body, Mind, and Brain Adapt. *Psychosomatic medicine*, 81(8), 731–738. <https://doi.org/10.1097/PSY.0000000000000717>
 - [7] Phillips AC, Carroll D, Burns VE, Ring C, Macleod J, Drayson M. Bereavement and marriage are associated with antibody response to influenza vaccination in the elderly. *Brain, Behavior, and Immunity*. 2006;20:279–89.
 - [8] Sue, S., Zane, N., Nagayama Hall, G. C., & Berger, L. K. (2009). The case for cultural competency in psychotherapeutic interventions. *Annual review of psychology*, 60, 525–548. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163651>
- Case Study #1: Ghana
- [9] A LIFE WELL LIVED: FANTASY COFFINS FROM GHANA. (2025). Retrieved from Nmfh.org website: <https://nmfh.org/portfolio-item/a-life-well-lived-fantasy-coffins-from-ghana/>
 - [10] Ghana's Unique Coffin Tradition- On Assignment [Youtube Video]. (2025). Retrieved from https://youtu.be/nw3C_f2A-F8?si=rKvhkUvJDsFtDuIQ
 - [11] Thomson, E., & Alamy. (2021, January 13). Meet the fantasy coffin-designers of Accra, Ghana. Retrieved April 30, 2025, from Travel website: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/travel/article/meet-the-fantasy-coffin-designers-accra-ghana?>
- Case Study #2: The Ashanti People
- [12] Agyekum, M. (2024). Transition's Heritage Funeral Series: A peek into Ashanti funeral rites for a mother-law. [Youtube Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p5CApUNuDZo>
 - [13] Ghana Funeral Traditions (the case of the Ashantis) [Youtube Video]. (2022). Retrieved from <https://youtu.be/VdHeowNSFyU?si=1wzbm1Xly1abv3Qz>
 - [14] McCaskie, T. C. (2011). Local Knowledge: An Akuapem Twi History of Asante. *History in Africa*, 38, 169–192. <https://doi.org/10.1353/hia.2011.0003>
- Case Study #3: Tibetan Funeral Rites
- [15] Coberly, M., & Shapiro, S. I. (1993). Death and Dying in the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 12(3), 2. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.ciis.edu/ijs-transpersonalstudies/vol12/iss3/2/>
 - [16] Hanging the bodies of passed-away people in trees: a funeral even more mysterious than sky burials. [YouTube Video]. (2024). Retrieved from https://youtu.be/6hFmDl3QyI?si=Wm_zf5PHka-rulzG
 - [17] The secret rites of sky burials - Global Times. (2015, October 9). Retrieved March 30, 2025, from Globaltimes.cn website: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/galleries/203.html>
 - [18] Tibetan Sky Burial: How does it Work? A Window to the Tibetan Culture [Youtube Video]. (2021). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=je8cGS1JCaI>
- Case Study #4: The Irish Wake
- [19] House Strictly Private. (1975, January 26). Retrieved April 30, 2025, from RTE Radio website: <https://www.rte.ie/radio/doconone/646810-radio-documentary-house-strictly-private-irish-wake>
 - [20] McLaughlin, M. (2019). Keening the Dead: Ancient History or a Ritual for Today? *Religions*, 10(4), 235. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel10040235>
 - [21] Why Irish people are so fascinated by deaths, wakes and funerals. (2023). Retrieved from <https://www.rte.ie/brainstorm/2023/0118/1346067-ireland-death-rituals-funerals-wakes/>
- Case Study #5: New Orleans Funerals
- [22] JAZZ FUNERALS OF NEW ORLEANS. (2025). Retrieved from Nmfh.org website: <https://nmfh.org/portfolio-item/jazz-funerals-of-new-orleans/>
 - [23] New Orleans Jazz Funeral and Rebirth [VIDEO]. (2005). Retrieved from <https://www.pbs.org/video/religion-and-ethics-newsweekly-new-orleans-jazz-funeral-and-rebirth/>
 - [24] New Orleans Jazz funeral demonstration I [Youtube Vidéo]. (2022). Retrieved

from https://youtu.be/alzPbV61sOM?si=SqG5EvthUg4s_777

- [25] The Jazz Funeral | New Orleans. (2017). Retrieved from Neworleans.com website: <https://www.neworleans.com/things-to-do/music/history-and-traditions/jazz-funeral/>

Case Study #6: Brazilian Finados Rituals

- [26] Bond, K. (2019, December 2). All Souls Day in a small town of Paraíba, Brazil. Retrieved from Maryknoll Lay Missioners website: <https://mklm.org/brazil/dia-de-finados-paraiba/>
- [27] Celebrations of Life & Death: Examining Colonial Influence and Cultural Variations Throughout Latin America – Crow. (2021). Retrieved from Write-crow.org website: <https://writecrow.org/crow-writing-contest/celebrations-garduno/>

Case Study #7: Yanomami Death rituals

- [28] CONKLIN, B. A. (1995). “thus are our bodies, thus was our custom”: mortuary cannibalism in an Amazonian society. *American Ethnologist*, 22(1), 75–101. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.1995.22.1.02a00040>
- [29] Jacob, F. (2013, May 30). They Eat Your Ash to Save Your Soul – Yanomami Death Culture. Retrieved April 30, 2025, from Academia.edu website: https://www.academia.edu/3632663/They_Eat_Your_Ash_to_Save_Your_Soul_Yanomami_Death_Culture?source=swp_share
- [30] The Yanomami people: a life of beliefs | SLICE [YouTube Video]. (2022). Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DX7LpUEnOBM>

Case Study #8: Aboriginal/Yolngu Mourning rituals

- [31] Bâpurru - Death in Yolngu Culture. (2017, May 23). Retrieved from Yidak-iStory.com website: <https://yidakistory.com/bapurru/>
- [32] Glynn-McDonald, R. (2022, October 25). Death and Sorry Business | Common Ground. Retrieved from www.commonground.org.au website: <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/death-and-sorry-business>
- [33] MARCELINO, U. (2021, October 20). Rare access captures Amazonian chief's funeral ritual. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/investigates/special-report/brazil-indigenous-kuarup/>
- [34] National Gallery of Australia. (n.d.). Burial Ceremonies. Retrieved from National Gallery of Australia website: <https://nga.gov.au/first-nations/the-aboriginal-memorial/burial-ceremonies/>
- [35] Reid, J. (1979). A time to live, a time to grieve: Patterns and processes of mourning among the Yolngu of Australia. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, 3(4), 319–346. <https://doi.org/10.1007/bf00051462>

Case Study #9: Hindu Cremation rituals

- [36] H.Parsons. (2024, March 26). An Easy Guide to Hindu Funeral Traditions. Retrieved from H.Parsons website: <https://www.hparsons.com.au/post/hindu-funeral-traditions>
- [37] Liu, M. (2023, August 28). Death and religion intertwine in India. Retrieved from News and Events website: <https://dornsife.usc.edu/news/stories/death-on-the-ganges/>
- [38] McBride, P. (2014, August 7). The Pyres of Varanasi: Breaking the Cycle of Death and Rebirth. Retrieved from National Geographic website: <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/photography/article/the-pyres-of-varanasi-breaking-the-cycle-of-death-and-rebirth>

Case Study #10: Japanese Kotsuage and Butsudan

- [39] Christopher, John Chambers, et al. “Critical Cultural Awareness: Contributions to a Globalizing Psychology.” *American Psychologist*, vol. 69, no. 7, 2014, pp. 645–655, <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036851>.
- [40] Deague, T. (2023, December 21). Kotsuage – TerryDeague.com. Retrieved

from terrydeague.com website: <https://terrydeague.com/kotsuage/>

- [41] Martin, R. (2013, June 21). Japanese cremation ashes rituals: Kotsuage and Bunkotsu. Retrieved from Scattering Ashes website: <https://scattering-ashes.co.uk/different-cultures/japanese-cremation-ashes-rituals-kotsuage-bunkotsu/>