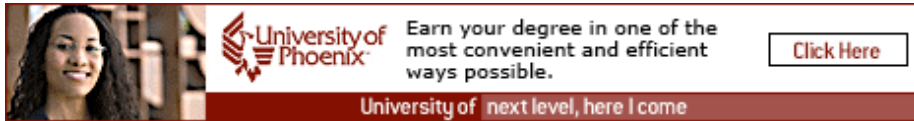


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Addicted to grief? Pain can become a pleasure

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Grief is universal, and most of us will probably experience the pain grief brings at some point in our lives, usually with the death of a loved one. In time, we move on, accepting the loss, reports Science Daily.

But for a substantial minority, it's impossible to let go and even years later, any reminder of their loss — a picture, a memory — brings on fresh grief and yearning. The question is, why do some grieve and ultimately adapt, while others can't get over the loss of someone held dear?

Reporting in the journal *NeuroImage*, UCLA scientists suggest that such long-term or "complicated" grief activates neurons in the reward centres of the brain, possibly giving these memories addiction-like properties.

This study is the first to compare those with complicated and noncomplicated grief, and research may help psychologists do a better job of treating those with complicated grief, according to Mary-Frances O'Connor, UCLA assistant professor of psychiatry and lead author of the study.

"The idea is that when our loved ones are alive, we get a rewarding cue from seeing them or things that remind us of them," O'Connor said. "After the loved one dies, those who adapt to the loss stop getting this neural reward. But those who don't adapt continue to crave it, because each time they do see a cue, they still get that neural reward."

The study analyzed whether those with complicated grief had greater activity occurring in either the brain's reward network or pain network. The researchers looked at 23 women who had lost a mother or a sister to breast cancer. Of that, 11 had complicated grief, and 12 had noncomplicated grief.

O'Connor cautions that she is not suggesting that reveries about the deceased are emotionally satisfying but rather that they may serve as a type of craving that may make adapting to the reality of the loss more difficult.

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