WHILE YOU WAIT...

Consider the reasons you chose to attend this presentation today...

WHEN THE WORK WOUNDS: POLITICAL GRIEF & MORAL INJURY IN LGBTGEQIAP+ AFFIRMING COUNSELING PRACTICE

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PRESENTATION DOWNLOAD



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WHO'S IN THE SPACE?



AGENDA

Learning Objectives

Sociopolitical Contexts

Political Grief

Moral Injury

Political Grief & Moral Injury

Managing the Relationship

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Define and differentiate the constructs of political grief and moral injury as they manifest within LGBTGEQIAP+ affirming counseling practice.
2. Analyze the impact of sociopolitical stressors and systemic inequities on both client experiences and counselor well-being using a trauma-informed and culturally responsive framework.
3. Apply ethical decision-making strategies, reflective practices, and relational supports (e.g., supervision, consultation, advocacy) to mitigate the effects of political grief and moral injury while sustaining affirming and ethically grounded clinical work with LGBTGEQIAP+ populations.



SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS

SOCIOPOLITICAL CONTEXTS

- Legislative volatility
- Cultural polarization
- Systemic inequities



SOCIOPOLITICAL HARM



Witnessing

Hearing clients describe rejection, discrimination, violence, or restricted access to affirming care.

SOCIOPOLITICAL HARM



Anticipating

Preparing clients for possible future threats, losses, or changes in access to resources.

SOCIOPOLITICAL HARM



Navigating

Working within institutions whose policies, procedures, or practices conflict with affirming values.

SOCIOPOLITICAL HARM



Responding

Balancing client advocacy, professional obligations, personal values, and institutional constraints.

SOCIOPOLITICAL HARM



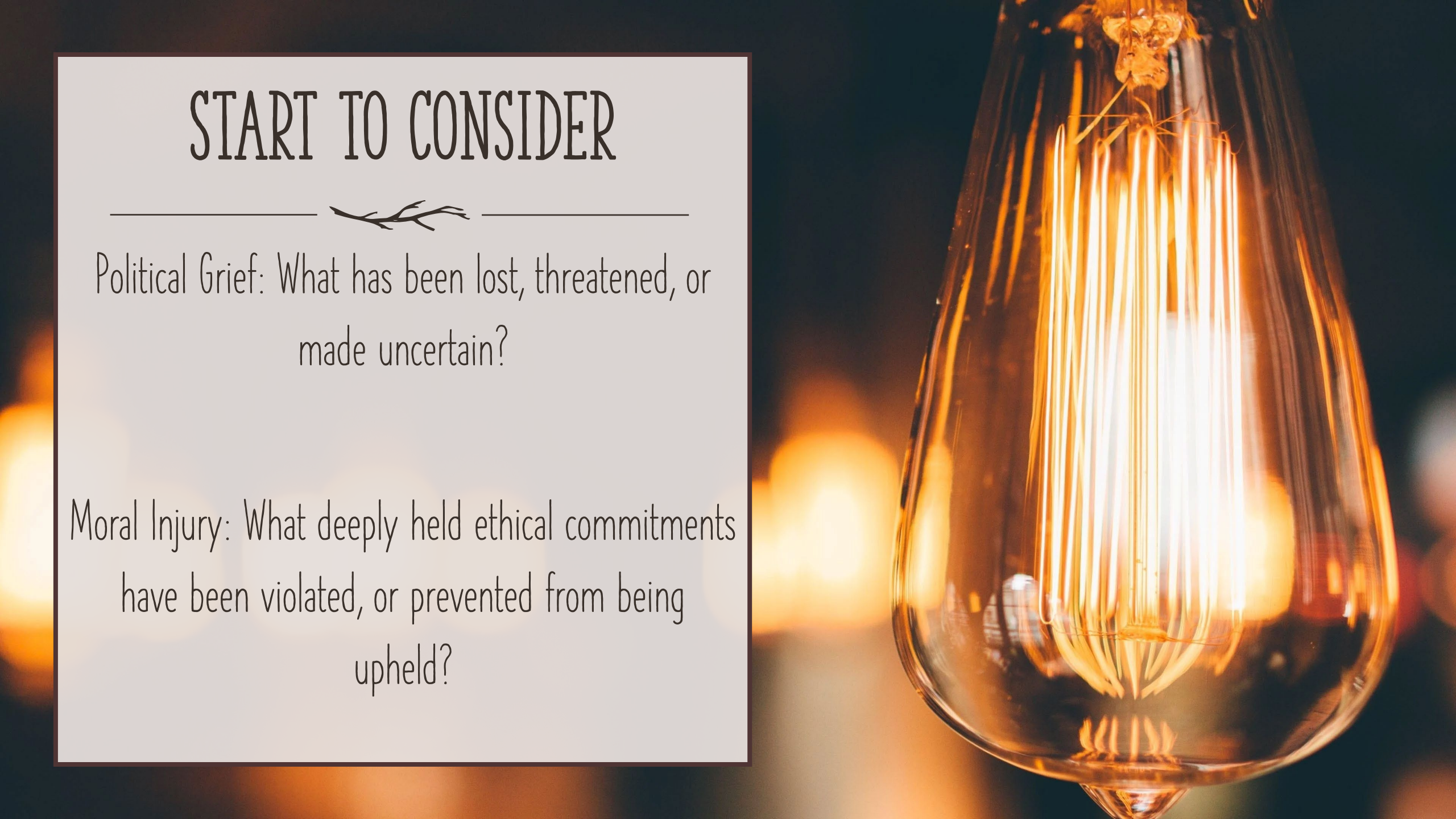
Living

Experiencing the same sociopolitical conditions personally as an LGBTGEQIAP+ person, community member, family member, or ally.

START TO CONSIDER

Political Grief: What has been lost, threatened, or made uncertain?

Moral Injury: What deeply held ethical commitments have been violated, or prevented from being upheld?




POLITICAL
GRIEF

GRIEF VS. POLITICAL GRIEF

GRIEF

Psychological response to bereavement, both death and non-death losses, including related feelings, thoughts, and behaviors (Crunk et al., 2017).

POLITICAL GRIEF

Psychological response to losses, threats, or perceived ruptures connected to political events, policies, systems, or sociopolitical change, includes mourning losses of safety, rights, belonging, justice, or faith in institutions. (Thompson et al., 2025)

WHAT ARE WE GRIEVING?

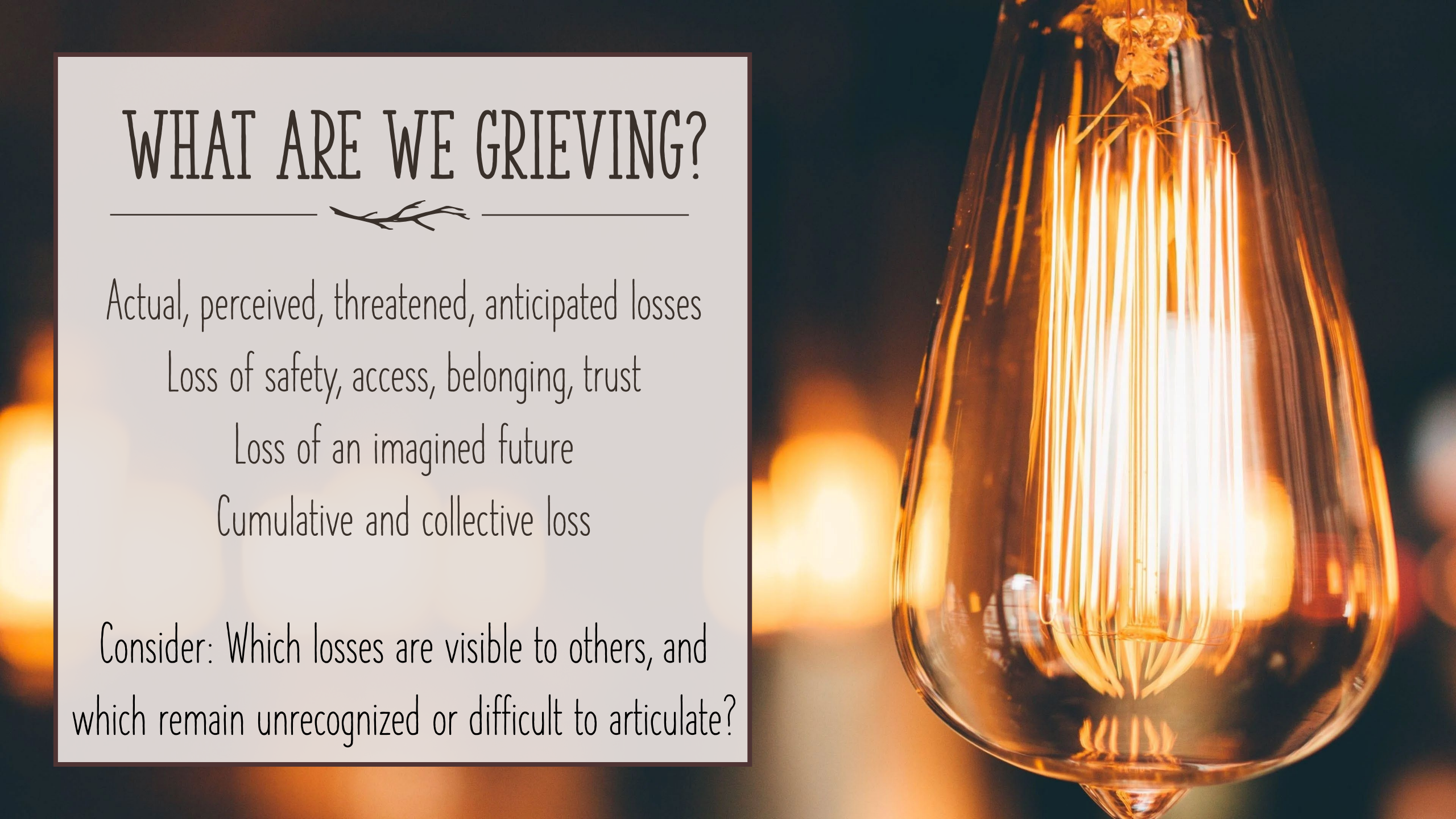
Actual, perceived, threatened, anticipated losses

Loss of safety, access, belonging, trust

Loss of an imagined future

Cumulative and collective loss

Consider: Which losses are visible to others, and which remain unrecognized or difficult to articulate?



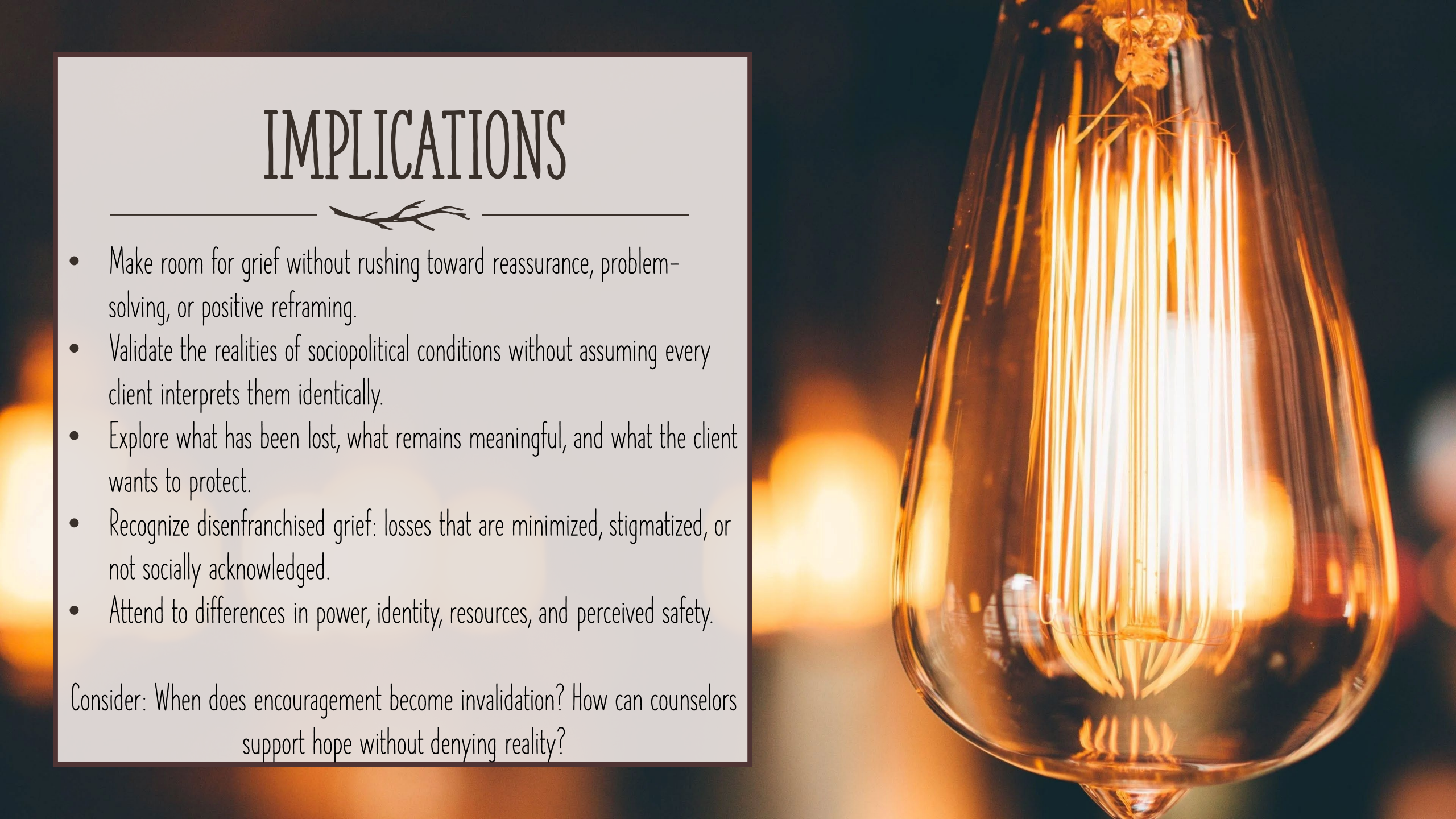
BUT HOW DOES IT SHOW UP IN COUNSELING?

- Both clients and counselors
- Fear, sadness, anger, hopelessness, helplessness
- Difficulty imagining a safe future or sustaining hope
- Heightened vigilance or withdrawal
- Emotional fatigue or preoccupation
- Loss of trust in institutions
- Disillusionment with professional systems
- Grief that others minimize or dismiss
- Feeling isolated or misunderstood by colleagues

IMPLICATIONS

- Make room for grief without rushing toward reassurance, problem-solving, or positive reframing.
- Validate the realities of sociopolitical conditions without assuming every client interprets them identically.
- Explore what has been lost, what remains meaningful, and what the client wants to protect.
- Recognize disenfranchised grief: losses that are minimized, stigmatized, or not socially acknowledged.
- Attend to differences in power, identity, resources, and perceived safety.

Consider: When does encouragement become invalidation? How can counselors support hope without denying reality?



SOCIAL IMPACTS OF POLITICAL GRIEF

- Strained or damage relationships
  - Internet
  - Close family and friends
  - Classmates
  - Colleagues
- Mental health
  - May feel unheard or not valued
  - Constant reminders of marginalization
  - How much of higher education is contributing to political grief?

Support systems are crucial to responding to trauma. But what happens when that system is gone?



MORAL INJURY

DEFINING MORAL INJURY

The psychological, emotional, and existential distress that arises when counselors:

- Perpetrate, witness, or are constrained from preventing actions
- That violate their deeply held professional and moral values
- Particularly when systemic or institutional forces limit ethical care

THREE SUBTYPES

- Perpetration-based moral injury
- Witnessing-based moral injury
- Betrayal-based moral injury

PERPETRATION-BASED MORAL INJURY

Arises when an individual directly commits an act, under orders, under duress, or under conditions of moral ambiguity, that violates their personal ethics or moral values (Litz et al., 2009; Griffin et al., 2019)

- Self-directed attribution of wrongdoing or guilt
- Produces syndrome-level disruption across cognitive, affective, behavioral, and interpersonal domains, including erosion of moral self-concept and professional identity (Jinkerson, 2016)
- The affective signature, guilt, shame, and self-condemnation is meaningfully different from the hyperarousal and avoidance central to PTSD,
    - Direct implications for how distress is assessed and treated (Griffin et al.., 2019)

WITNESSING-BASED MORAL INJURY

When an individual observes the moral transgressions of others, the suffering of those left unprotected, the abuse of institutional power, the abandonment of the vulnerable specifically without the capacity to intervene (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017).

- Produces a distinct cluster of moral emotions – moral disgust and existential distress
- Perceived failure of one's own moral agency.
- The subtype witnessing-based moral injury is particularly salient among helping professionals whose role is defined by protective and remedial responsibilities

BETRAYAL-BASED MORAL INJURY

Results from what has been done to one by those entrusted with legitimate authority. The wound is located not in the individual's own action but in the violation of the implicit moral contract between practitioner and institution (Shay 1994; 2014).

- Removes relational and institutional resources
- Manifests as anger and moral disgust directed outward



What it's not...

BURN OUT

Emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a diminished sense of personal accomplishment, has been extensively documented among counselors across practice settings, with research consistently linking it to role conflict, excessive caseloads, inadequate supervision, and the erosion of occupational support (Maslach & Jackson, 1981; Mullen et al., 2021; Bardhoshi & Um, 2021).

COMPASSION FATIGUE

The cumulative cost of empathic engagement with those who suffer and secondary traumatic stress, arising from indirect exposure to clients' lived experiences, are identified as additional tolls within helping professions (Figley, 1995; Stamm, 1995).

CIRCLE TIME

Examples of Moral Injury



BURNOUT	MORAL INJURY
Emotional exhaustion	Moral/ethical violation
Workload driven	Values conflict driven
Cynicism	Guilt, shame, betrayal
Improves with rest	Requires ethical repair



POLITICAL GRIEF & MORAL INJURY

THE INTERSECTION

Political grief asks:

What have I, my clients, or my community lost–or been influenced to fear losing?

Moral injury asks:

What deeply held commitments have been violated, betrayed, or prevented from being upheld?

COUNSELORS MAY...

- grieve harm occurring within systems they are professionally obligated to navigate.
- experience a gap between their commitment to affirming care and their capacity to provide it.
- witness preventable suffering and feel unable to intervene effectively.
- lose trust in institutions while continuing to work within them.
- experience both the emotional pain of loss and the ethical pain of constrained action.

A SHARED EXPERIENCE - DIFFERENT DIMENSIONS

Consider a counselor working in a setting where an institutional policy limits the affirming services available to LGBTGEQIAP+ clients.

Political grief: The counselor mourns the loss of safety, access, trust, or a hoped-for future for clients and community members.
Moral injury: The counselor experiences distress because institutional constraints conflict with deeply held commitments to client dignity, autonomy, and affirming care.

The intersection: The counselor grieves the harm and also struggles with what it means to remain within, comply with, challenge, or leave the system producing it.

Reflection: What might be missed if we conceptualize this counselor's experience only as grief? What might be missed if we conceptualize it only as moral injury?



MANAGING THE RELATIONSHIP

RESPONDING TO POLITICAL GRIEF AND MORAL INJURY

Managing political grief and moral injury requires more than individual coping.

Responses should address the varied dimensions of affirming practice.

INDIVIDUAL

- Reflect and regulate
- Name the experience: grief, anger, betrayal, helplessness, or ethical conflict.
- Distinguish what is within one's control, influence, or outside one's control.
- Identify personal values, boundaries, needs, and sources of meaning.
- Practice emotional regulation without treating appropriate responses to injustice as pathology.

RELATIONAL

- Seek connection
- Engage in affirming supervision, peer consultation, and trusted professional relationships.
- Make space for collective grief and shared meaning-making.
- Seek feedback and support without requiring colleagues to share identical experiences or responses.

ORGANIZATIONAL

- Examine conditions
- Identify policies, procedures, and institutional practices contributing to ethical conflict.
- Use consultation, ethics resources, formal reporting processes, and appropriate channels for organizational advocacy.
- Develop clear procedures for supporting clients when access to services is threatened or constrained.
- Create environments where staff can discuss ethical tensions without fear of retaliation.

SYSTEMIC

- Pursue values-aligned action
- Engage in advocacy consistent with professional ethical obligations and personal capacity.
- Build coalitions with professional associations, community organizations, and affected communities.
- Recognize that sustainable practice may involve resistance, strategic compromise, boundary-setting, or decisions about whether to remain in a particular role.

THE LIMITS OF AFFIRMING CARE: A CASE CONSULTATION

Jordan is a counselor at a community agency serving LGBTGEQIAP+ clients. Recent institutional policy changes have created uncertainty about which affirming services the agency can provide and how staff should respond to related client concerns.

During a session, a transgender young adult expresses fear about losing access to supportive services and says they no longer trust institutions that claim to care about them. Jordan feels sadness and anger while recognizing the client's uncertainty and loss of trust.

After the session, Jordan learns that agency leadership expects counselors to follow the revised procedures while questions about their scope and implementation remain unresolved. Jordan worries that complying without further clarification could undermine the client's well-being, but is also concerned about the consequences of challenging leadership.

Jordan begins questioning whether it is possible to practice with integrity in the current environment. They feel exhausted by repeated conversations about sociopolitical threats and increasingly isolated from colleagues who do not share their concerns.



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DISCUSS

1. Identify the grief. What losses, threatened losses, or disruptions might Jordan and the client be experiencing? Whose grief is visible, and whose may be overlooked?
2. Identify the moral tension. What values or ethical commitments appear to be in conflict? What additional information would Jordan need before concluding that an ethical violation has occurred?
3. Examine the intersection. Where do political grief and moral injury overlap? What would be missed if Jordan's experience were described only as burnout or stress?
4. Develop a response. What could Jordan do in the next 24-72 hours to support the client, clarify obligations, and obtain appropriate consultation?

CLOSING REFLECTION

Rooted: What value, relationship, or source of meaning grounds me in affirming practice?

Recognize: What grief or ethical tension do I need to acknowledge rather than minimize?

Rise: What is one sustainable action I can take at the individual, relational, organizational, or systemic level?



COMMENTS AND CURIOSITIES

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THANK YOU!

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