



**Title of the Work: The Colors of Grief: A Quilt**

**Type of Work: Creative Scholarship**

**Interior Design Educator's Council Pacific West Regional Conference  
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## **Abstract**

This creative scholarship presentation explores the personal experience of grief through the framework of “making” as art therapy. As the artist, I used quilt-making as my therapeutic activity to unpack and process my own grief. The creative process also allowed me to explore trans-cultural and culture-specific frameworks of grief, and to connect with others within my community through the creation of this grief quilt.

Background: Everyone experiences loss. Whether it's the loss of a job, a home, a person to death or illness, or a lifestyle, loss is a global construct. Everyone grieves differently, and every culture has its own set of rituals and traditions to deal with loss (cite). Many widows in Russia, Greece, and Czechoslovakia wear black for the rest of their lives, while many Mexicans and Mexican-American communities observe “Dia de los Muertos” (the Day of the Dead).

Every culture also has color associated with grief: many European and Western communities wear black as a cultural symbol of grief, while in Egypt, Mexico, and Ethiopia, yellow is a primary color of bereavement. In Korea, the Middle East, and India, white symbolizes grief. In Thailand, widows wear purple. (Knox, 2011).

Intent: My goal was to make meaning of my own loss by creating something tangible, grounded in theory (Kubler-Ross model of grief), and culturally relevant to symbols I associated with grief and grieving (the colors and the medium).

The Kubler-Ross Grief Cycle (Kubler-Ross, 1969) has been widely accepted and utilized throughout the Western world as a way to process grief. The stages of the model are: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969).

Process: I gathered scraps of discarded clothing from a local tailor as the medium, which to me represented the invisible community of grief in my own neighborhood. The quilt was constructed with a combination of mechanical and hand sewing techniques; using a sewing machine and my own hand stitching. The quilt, which measures approximately 66” x 66”, has five primary colorways, each associated with a stage of grief and a culture's grief process: purple for Denial; orange for Anger; yellow for Bargaining; blue for Depression; and green for Acceptance. Because emotions and feelings undulate, the quilt visually undulates. Each quilt block has a dark side and a light side to illustrate the high points and low points of the grieving process. Within the green quilt blocks—the stage of Acceptance—each previous color is represented somewhere. It's faint, because grief never really goes away and so neither do the colors.

As the Kubler-Ross model points out, everyone grieves differently. It's not a linear process; grief can be many things. It can be the first thing you notice in the morning. It can appear in unexpected times—when you smell a Christmas tree or reach for the phone. In that moment of grief, you seek comfort. You need something to hold onto, wrap up in, and physically touch to derive comfort. A quilt can be such an object. You can hold it, wrap yourself in it, use it as a barrier, or just let it sit on your lap.