

# When Failure is Not an Option: From TBI to Ph.D.

**Kelli Williams Gary, Ph.D., MPH, OTR/L**  
**Assistant Professor**  
**Department of Rehabilitation Counseling**

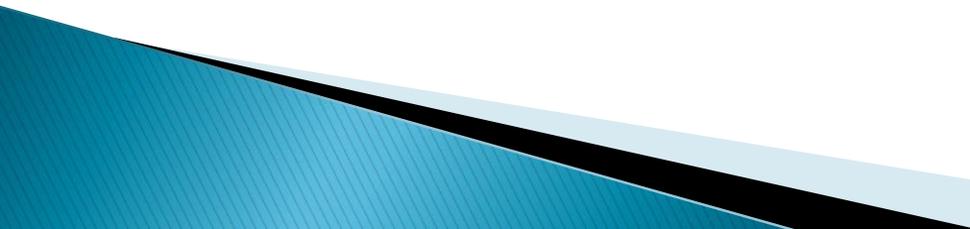


# Disclaimer

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# Learning Objectives

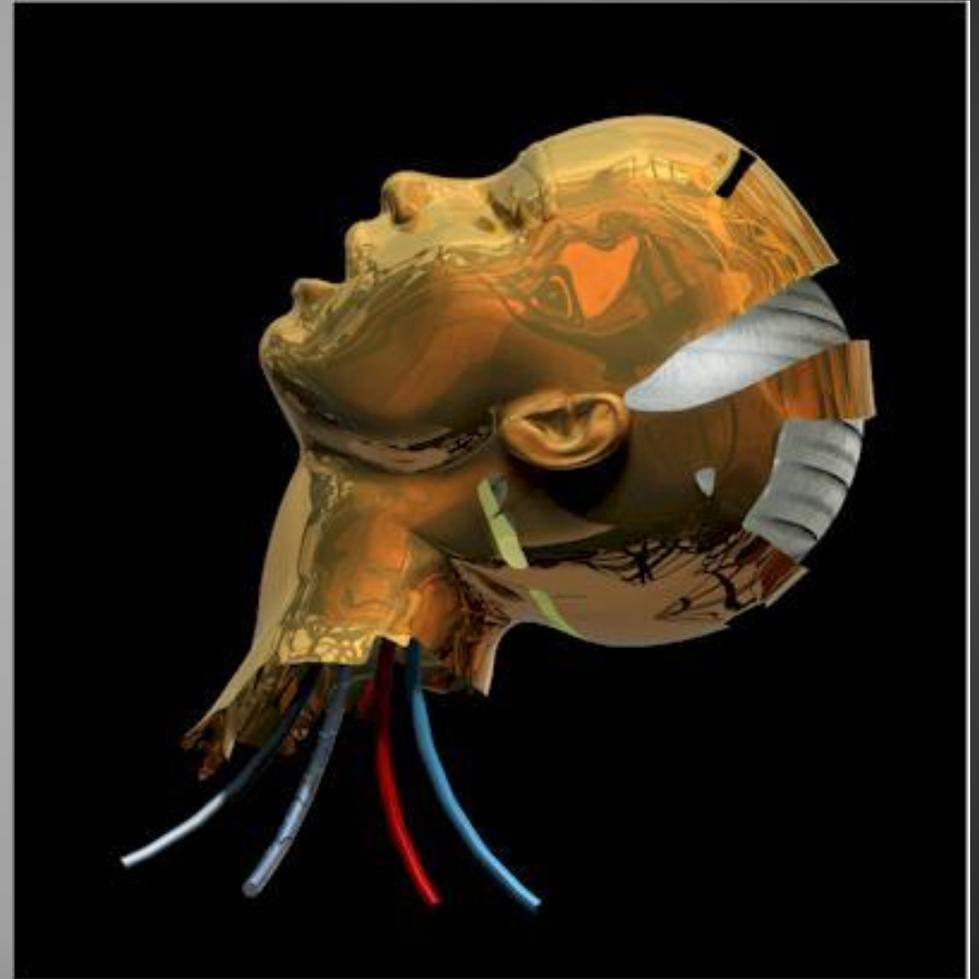
- By the end of the session, participants will be able to:
    - Identify physical, cognitive, and emotional symptoms that are common after traumatic brain injury.
    - Describe in detail my journey to return to school after brain injury and obtain BS, MPH, MS, and PhD and describe challenges with work history in between.
    - Describes ways to cope with unexpected changes that often result after traumatic brain injury.
    - Discuss the strategies that assist with enhancing productivity and happiness after suffering from a traumatic brain injury.
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# Introduction



# What is Traumatic Brain Injury?

- Damaged to the brain.
- External or mechanical force.
- Loss of consciousness/post-traumatic amnesia.
- Objective neurological findings.



# Living with a TBI



# Motor Vehicle Accident



# My Hospitalization



# Consequences from TBI

## □ Physical changes

- Seizures, headaches, fatigue, weakness, paralysis, sleep disorder, balance and dizziness.

## □ Cognitive changes

- Impaired reasoning or memory, judgment, decision making, following directions, difficulty with reading and writing, and organizational skills.

## □ Emotional changes

- Sadness, poor self control, impulsivity, low self-esteem, decreased understanding of social rules, difficulty initiating an activity, and low frustration tolerance.

# My Residual Deficits

- ▶ Hemiparesis
- ▶ Impaired language comprehension
- ▶ Dysgraphia
- ▶ Impaired math skills
- ▶ Deficits in problem solving
- ▶ Poor safety judgment
- ▶ Poor intellectual functioning
- ▶ Poor ST memory
- ▶ Poor non-verbal reasoning
- ▶ Poor cognitive flexibility
- ▶ Poor abstract thinking
- ▶ Poor control of emotions
- ▶ Emotionally labile
- ▶ Insecure
- ▶ Sexual dysfunction
- ▶ Fatigue
- ▶ Lack of awareness of deficit areas

# Silent Epidemic



Pre-injury



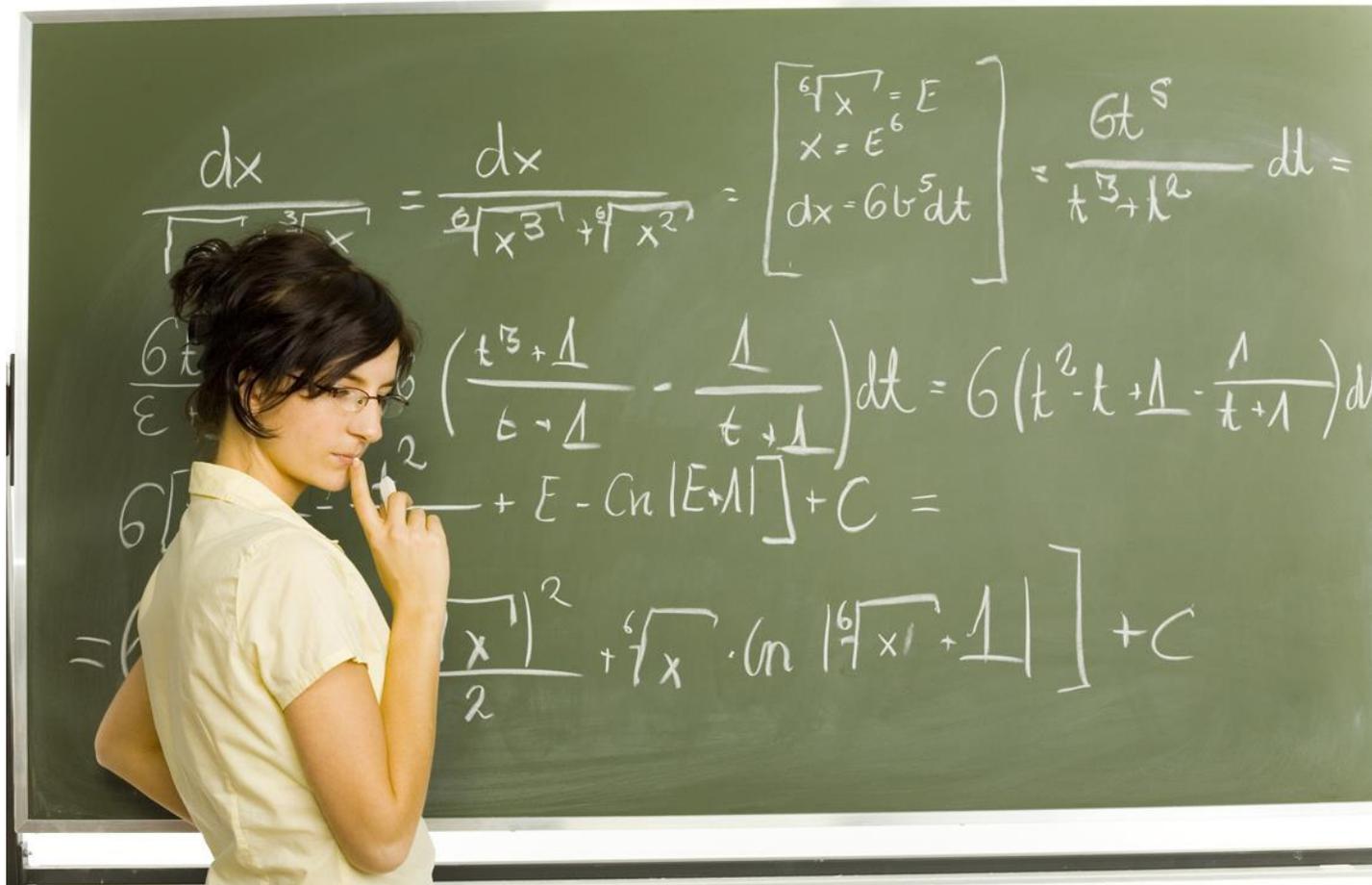
Post-injury

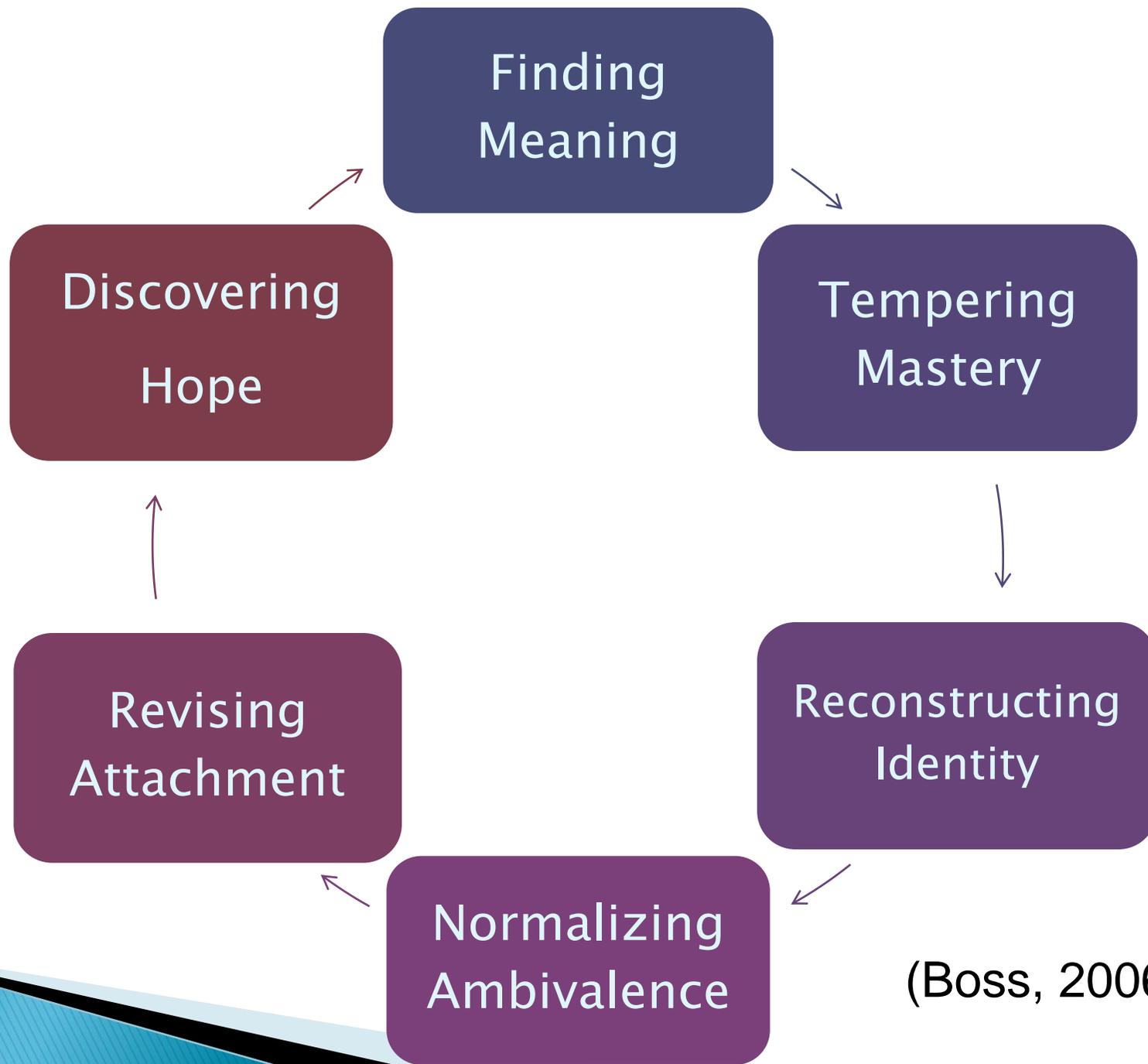


*“With ambiguous loss, there is no closure; the challenge is to learn how to live with ambiguity”*

*-Pauline Boss, Ph.D.-*

# My Community Re-integration





(Boss, 2006)

How did I find meaning?

# Strategies to Find Meaning

- ▶ Naming the problem.
  - ▶ Religion and spirituality.
  - ▶ Forgiveness.
  - ▶ Small good works.
  - ▶ Perceiving suffering is inevitable.
  - ▶ Hope.
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How did I temper mastery?

# Strategies for Tempering Mastery

- ▶ Recognizing the world is not always just and fair.
  - ▶ Recognizing where views of mastery originate.
  - ▶ Externalizing blame.
  - ▶ Decreasing self blame.
  - ▶ Managing and making decisions.
- 

How did I reconstruct my identity?

# Strategies for Reconstructing Identity

- ▶ Defining family structures.
  - ▶ Select major development themes.
  - ▶ Developed shared values and views.
  - ▶ Avoid isolation.
  - ▶ Avoid resistance to change.
- 

How did I normalize ambivalence?

# Strategies for Normalizing Ambivalence

- ▶ Normalize guilt and negative feeling but not harmful actions.
  - ▶ Regain personal agency.
  - ▶ Seeing the community as family.
  - ▶ Asking questions about context and situation.
  - ▶ Bring ambivalence feelings to the open.
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How did I revise attachment?

# Strategies for Revising Attachment

- ▶ Move from despair to protest.
  - ▶ Knowing that fantasies of a missing person are common.
  - ▶ Paying attention to developmental stages that exacerbates anxiety.
  - ▶ Using multiple family and couple groups to build new connections.
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How did I discover hope?

# Strategies for Discovering Hope

- ▶ Finding spirituality.
  - ▶ Imagining options.
  - ▶ Laughing absurdity.
  - ▶ Developing patience.
  - ▶ Redefining justice.
  - ▶ Avoid continuing to long for life as it used to be.
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# Top 10 Tips for a Happy and Productive Life

1. Know and accept your limitations so you can more easily move towards overcoming them.
  2. Surround yourself with resources, especially brain injury resources.
  3. Connect with mentors that understand brain injury.
  4. Understand that tasks that were simple before may not be easy now, but it can become easier over time.
  5. A loss of prior skills can open the door for new ones.
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# Top 10 Tips for a Happy and Productive Life

6. Learning will be an ongoing, lifelong process.
  7. Never turn away from any professional support.
  8. Do not use your injury as a crutch.
  9. Never measure your success by the success of others.
  10. Never give up working towards any goal.
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# TBI Does Not Discriminate!



# Remember Three Words

- ▶ Patience
  - ▶ Perseverance
  - ▶ Tenacity
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# Reference

- ▶ Boss, P. (2006). *Loss, trauma, and resilience: Therapeutic work with ambiguous loss*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc.
- ▶ Brainline.org. (2011, April 28.). Kelli Gary: Living with traumatic brain injury [Video file]. Retrieved from [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H\\_167MUqu7k&feature=results\\_video&playnext=1&list=PL1EED3553D681FA76](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H_167MUqu7k&feature=results_video&playnext=1&list=PL1EED3553D681FA76)

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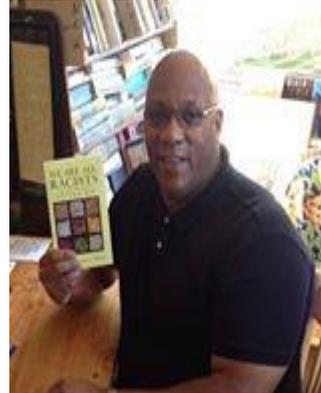
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**Dr. Paul Wehman**



**Dr. Faye Belgrave**



**Dr. James Krause**



**Beloved deceased husband-  
Mr. Frank J. Gary**

# Thank You

[williamsjonk@vcu.edu](mailto:williamsjonk@vcu.edu)

# Questions?

