

Female Identity After Loss: How Image, Community, and Social Role Help Rebuild Women's Lives

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doi: 10.51505/ijmshr.2026.10413

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.51505/ijmshr.2026.10413>

Received: Aug 11, 2026

Accepted: Aug 19, 2026

Online Published: Aug 29, 2026

Abstract

The loss of a child is one of the most profound experiences a woman can face, affecting not only psychological well-being but also personal identity, social relationships, physical self-perception, and participation in professional and community life. During prolonged illness, caregiving, and bereavement, the maternal and caregiver role may become so dominant that other dimensions of a woman's identity gradually recede.

This perspective article examines identity reconstruction after profound loss through several interconnected areas: reconnection with the body and personal image, renewed social participation, coaching and mentorship, supportive women's communities, modeling as a form of self-expression, and charitable or socially meaningful activity.

Drawing on established psychological and sociological literature and the author's personal and practical experience, the article argues that recovery should not necessarily be understood as a return to a woman's previous identity. Instead, it may involve the development of a new identity in which the experience of loss is integrated into new values, relationships, goals, and social roles.

The article further proposes that psychological support, while essential, may be strengthened by opportunities for self-expression, community participation, renewed visibility, and meaningful contribution to others.

Keywords: female identity, bereavement, post-traumatic growth, community support, body image, modeling, coaching, social role, charitable activity.

1. Introduction

Serious illness or the loss of a child represents one of the most significant challenges a mother can experience. During prolonged illness, a mother may carry a substantial emotional, organizational, and practical burden involving medical procedures, treatment decisions, financial

concerns, family responsibilities, and the continuous emotional demands associated with caring for her child.

Over time, this experience can affect not only emotional well-being but also the structure of personal identity. Professional development may be interrupted, social connections may become limited, personal interests may lose their previous importance, and attention to physical well-being and appearance may diminish.

The role of mother and caregiver can gradually become the central organizing element of a woman's life. When the caregiving period ends through the loss of the child, the woman may therefore experience not only grief but also the loss of the role around which her daily life and sense of purpose had been organized.

Research on bereavement, meaning reconstruction, and post-traumatic growth demonstrates that adaptation after traumatic experiences does not always mean returning to one's previous psychological or social state. Profound life events may instead require the reconstruction of meaning and the development of a changed understanding of oneself and one's future (Neimeyer, 2001; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004; Park, 2010).

From this perspective, recovery after loss can be understood as a multidimensional process. Psychological support remains fundamental, but other dimensions of identity may also require attention: the relationship with one's body, self-image, confidence, social participation, professional or community roles, relationships with other women, and the ability to find meaning through contribution to others.

This article presents a perspective on how these elements may interact in rebuilding female identity after loss. Particular attention is given to personal image, modeling as a form of self-expression, coaching, women's communities, and charitable and social activities.

2. Areas Covered

2.1. Identity Disruption After the Loss of a Child

During a child's serious illness, a mother's attention may become almost entirely concentrated on caregiving. Medical appointments, treatment decisions, financial responsibilities, emotional support, and everyday care can leave little space for personal goals or individual development.

As this continues, previous dimensions of identity may become less visible. Career plans can be postponed, friendships and professional relationships may weaken, hobbies may disappear from everyday life, and self-care can become secondary.

The woman may increasingly define herself primarily through the role of caregiver. Following the loss of the child, this creates an additional difficulty. Alongside bereavement

itself, the woman may confront questions concerning who she is outside the caregiving role, what she wants from her future, and which parts of her previous identity remain meaningful.

Meaning reconstruction after loss therefore involves more than emotional adjustment. It may require the gradual development of a new personal narrative in which the traumatic experience is acknowledged without becoming the woman's only defining characteristic.

Recovery should consequently not always be conceptualized as a return to the person one was before the loss. For some women, such a return is neither possible nor desirable. The task may instead be to construct a new identity capable of incorporating both the experience of loss and the possibility of continued development.

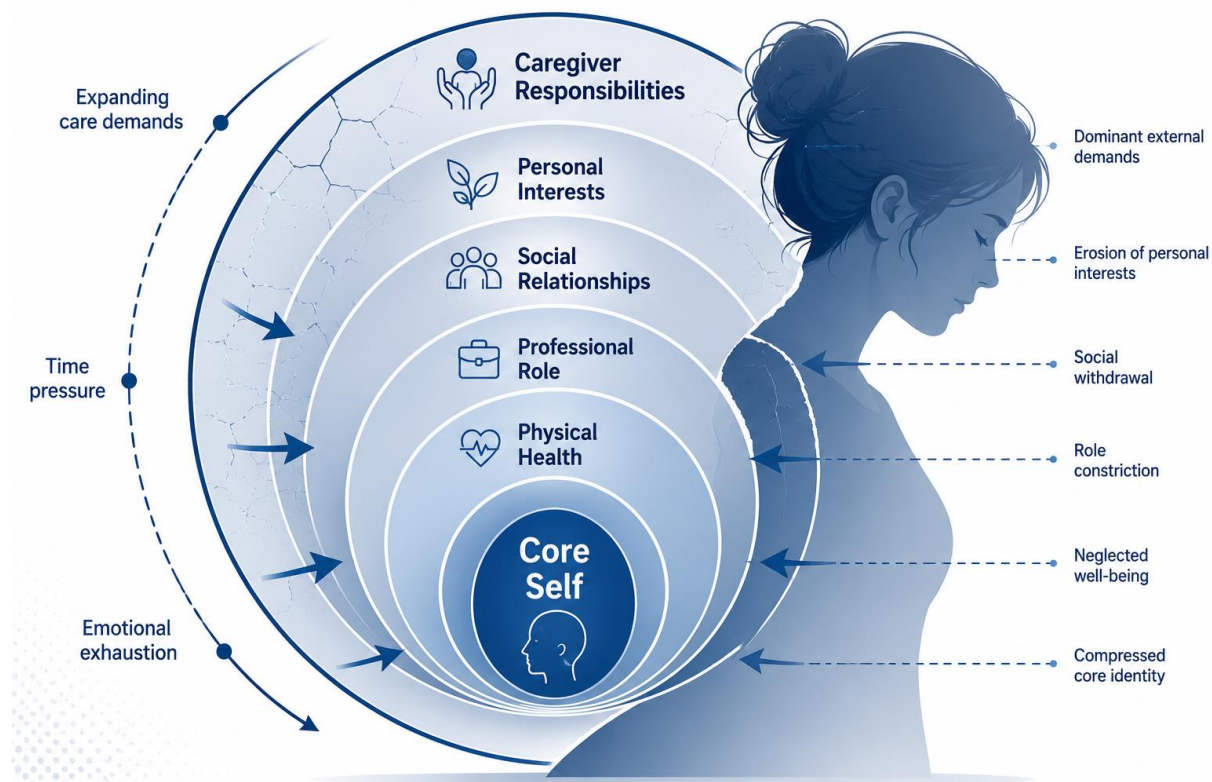


Figure 1. Layered model of identity erosion

2.2. Reconnection With the Body and Personal Image

Chronic stress and prolonged caregiving can substantially change a woman's relationship with her own body. Sleep, physical activity, nutrition, personal care, and appearance may receive progressively less attention when the needs of the child necessarily take priority.

After loss, rebuilding this relationship may become one component of identity reconstruction.

Physical activity, walking, attention to health, personal care, clothing, and other forms of

engagement with one's appearance can help restore awareness of oneself as an individual with personal needs and preferences.

Within this framework, attention to appearance should not be dismissed as superficial or self-centered. Body image forms part of an individual's broader psychological relationship with the self (Cash & Smolak, 2011).

Changing personal style, participating in a professional photo session, or consciously creating a new visual image may therefore have symbolic importance. Such experiences can allow a woman to see herself differently and to recognize dimensions of her identity beyond bereavement.

The objective is not to conceal grief through appearance. Rather, personal image may provide one accessible means of reconnecting internal change with an external representation of the self.

2.3. Modeling as a Form of Self-Expression and Visibility

Modeling deserves particular consideration within this broader discussion of identity and image.

In this context, modeling is not proposed as a clinical treatment or as an activity limited to the professional fashion industry. It can instead be understood as a structured form of self-expression and visibility.

A woman who has spent years primarily being identified as a caregiver, or later as a bereaved mother, may have difficulty seeing herself outside these roles. Standing before a camera, participating in a creative project, working with clothing and image, and presenting herself publicly can create a different experience of the self.

The significance lies partly in visibility.

Traumatic experience can make a woman feel that her individuality has disappeared behind the circumstances of illness and loss. Creative participation can offer an opportunity to become visible again — first to herself and subsequently within a broader social environment. Modeling may therefore represent one possible practice through which confidence, bodily awareness, personal expression, and social participation can be explored.

It should not be presented as a replacement for psychological care. Its potential value lies in its role as one component of a broader process of identity reconstruction.

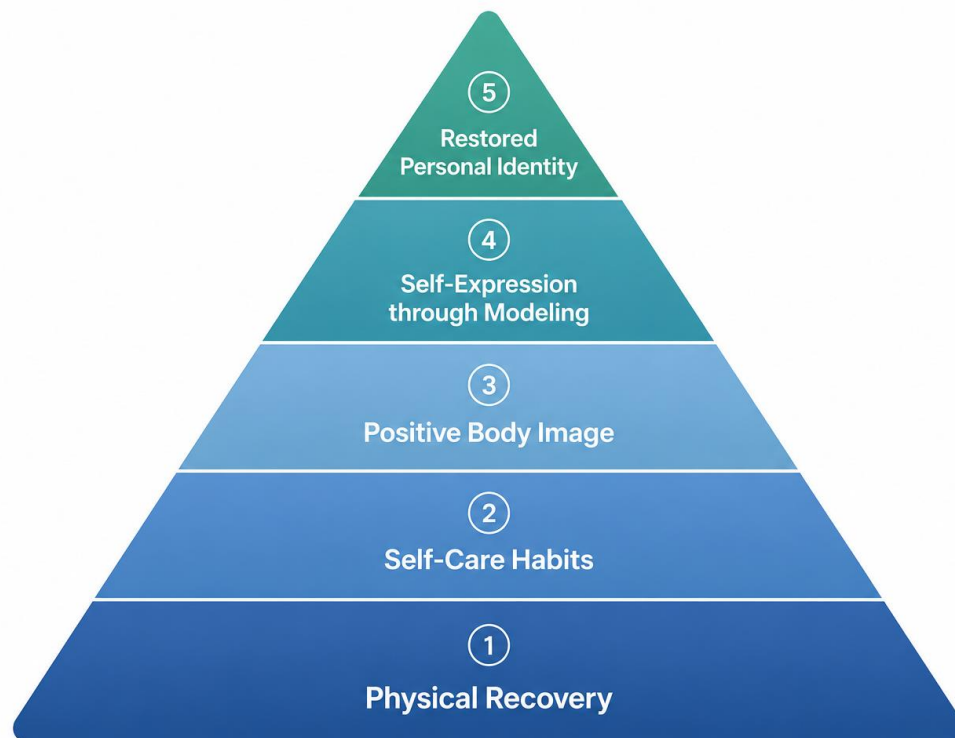


Figure 2. Pyramid of identity reconstruction

2.4. Coaching and Future-Oriented Identity Reconstruction

Psychological support is essential in addressing grief and traumatic experience. However, recovery may eventually generate a different set of questions concerning the future.

What should I do next?
 What goals still matter to me?
 Which abilities do I want to develop?
 What kind of life can I build now?

Coaching and mentorship can contribute to this future-oriented stage by helping individuals formulate goals, recognize personal resources, develop practical strategies, and re-enter professional or social activity.

The distinction is important. Coaching should not substitute for psychotherapy or professional mental-health treatment. Its role is different: it can support goal formation and personal development when an individual is ready to begin directing attention toward future possibilities. In the context of identity reconstruction, this may help transform an undefined sense of survival into a more structured understanding of future roles and objectives.

2.5. Women's Communities and Shared Experience

Social isolation is another important dimension of bereavement.

Women who have experienced severe illness or loss within their families may find that ordinary social environments do not always provide sufficient space to discuss their experiences. Communication with women who have faced comparable circumstances can therefore have particular significance.

Supportive communities can reduce isolation by creating an environment in which participants do not constantly need to explain the emotional context of their experiences. Group interaction also exposes women to different examples of adaptation. Seeing another woman rebuild professional, social, family, or creative aspects of her life may expand an individual's perception of what is possible after loss.

The importance of group connection and interpersonal support has been extensively recognized within psychological literature (Yalom & Leszcz, 2020).

Women's communities may consequently serve not only as spaces for emotional support but also as environments for rebuilding social identity, relationships, confidence, and participation.

2.6. Charitable Activity and the Development of a New Social Role

For some women, personal experience of illness and loss eventually leads to a desire to help others facing similar circumstances.

Charitable work, volunteering, advocacy, community projects, and support for families may provide a new form of social participation.

Such activity does not remove grief. Nor should social contribution be regarded as an obligation for bereaved women. However, when it develops naturally from personal values and readiness, helping others may contribute to meaning reconstruction.

Experience that was previously associated primarily with suffering can become a source of knowledge, empathy, and practical understanding.

This transition is particularly relevant to the concept of post-traumatic growth. Growth does not imply that trauma was beneficial or necessary. Rather, it describes positive psychological changes that may develop through an individual's efforts to adapt to profoundly challenging circumstances (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004).

Charitable and community activity can also establish a new social role. A woman may begin to perceive herself not only as someone who has experienced loss but also as a mentor, organizer, advocate, volunteer, founder, or community participant.

This shift can become an important component of identity reconstruction.

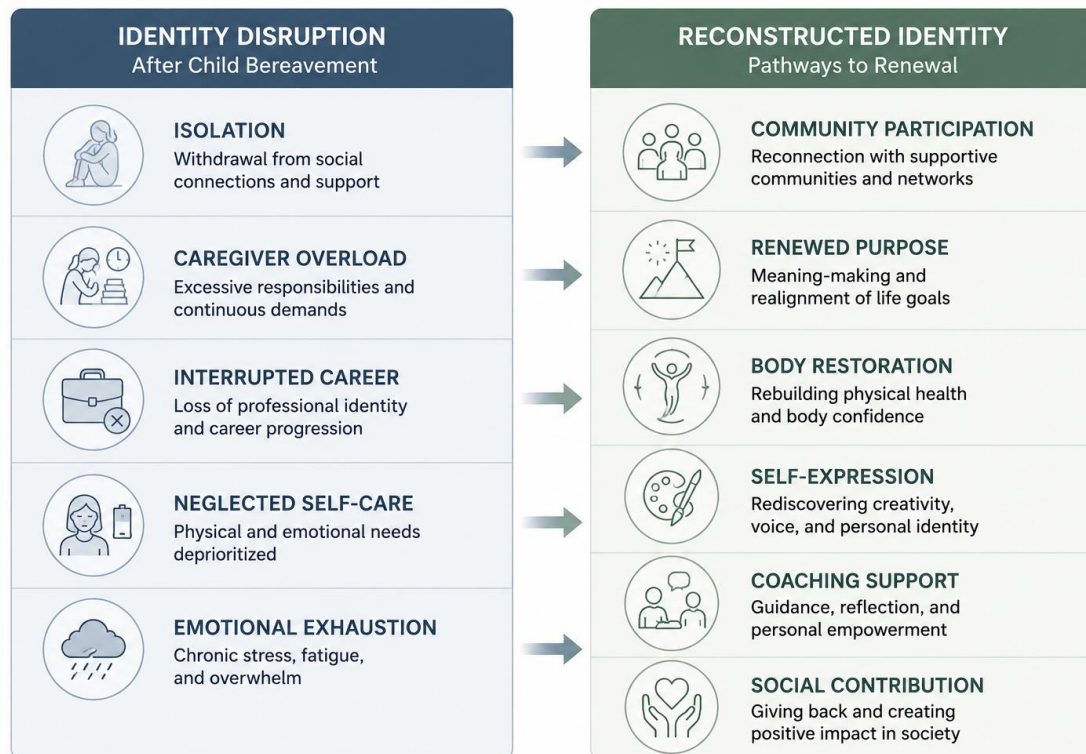


Figure 3. Before–after comparative framework

2.7. Personal Experience as a Basis for Social Mission: The Case of Tetiana Artemeva

The author's own experience provides a practical illustration of this perspective. Tetiana Artemeva experienced years of struggle associated with the serious illness of her child and subsequently faced the loss of her son. The experience profoundly affected her personal life, priorities, social role, and understanding of identity.

Following this loss, recovery did not mean simply attempting to recreate the life that existed before the crisis.

Instead, the process involved gradually rebuilding different dimensions of identity: physical well-being, self-image, confidence, social visibility, communication with others, and the search for a new purpose.

This personal experience contributed to Artemeva's involvement in charitable initiatives supporting families affected by serious childhood illnesses and loss and to the development of projects focused on women experiencing difficult life transitions.

Modeling also became part of this process.

For Artemeva, participation in modeling and image-related projects was not simply professional activity. It represented an opportunity to reconnect with her body, develop a different perception of herself, regain visibility, and establish an identity that existed alongside — rather than being completely defined by — her experience of loss.

Her subsequent engagement with coaching, community initiatives, and charitable work further demonstrated how new social roles may emerge from personal transformation.

This experience forms the practical foundation for the perspective presented in this article: that recovery after profound loss can involve not only processing grief but also actively reconstructing identity through body awareness, self-expression, social connection, future-oriented goals, and meaningful contribution.+

3. Expert Opinion

Based on the literature reviewed and the author's personal and practical experience, female rehabilitation after the loss of a child should be considered more broadly than the management of grief symptoms alone.

Psychological and, where appropriate, medical support remain fundamental. However, the long-term reconstruction of life may also require attention to a question that can emerge after the most acute period of bereavement: Who am I now?

This question concerns identity rather than grief alone.

A woman may have received psychological support and still struggle to reconnect with her body, return to professional or social environments, develop confidence in her appearance, establish new relationships, or imagine meaningful future goals.

For this reason, the author proposes a multidimensional perspective on identity reconstruction involving several interconnected domains:

Psychological processing of loss — acknowledging grief and integrating the experience into one's life narrative

Physical reconnection — restoring attention to health, movement, bodily awareness, and self-care.

Image and self-expression — rediscovering personal style, appearance, creativity, and visible individuality.

Future orientation — identifying new goals and developing practical strategies through appropriate mentoring or coaching.

Community connection — rebuilding social relationships and participating in environments characterized by shared understanding and mutual support.

Meaningful social contribution — when personally appropriate, transforming experience into charitable, volunteer, advocacy, or community activity.

These components should not be interpreted as a standardized therapeutic protocol. Women experience grief differently, and there is no universal sequence or timetable for recovery.

Rather, the framework offers additional areas that may deserve consideration alongside established psychological care.

The author further proposes that modeling and image-related activities merit greater attention as possible forms of identity-oriented self-expression.

Their value does not lie in appearance itself, but in the psychological and social experience of becoming visible again, making choices about one's own representation, and encountering oneself outside the identity imposed by traumatic circumstances.

Similarly, charitable activity should not be romanticized as a necessary outcome of grief. Nevertheless, for women who voluntarily choose this path, social contribution can provide a powerful new context for personal experience.

A central principle of this perspective is therefore that successful adaptation should not be measured by how closely a woman returns to her pre-loss identity.

After profound loss, the previous identity may no longer fully correspond to the person she has become.

Recovery may instead mean developing an integrated new identity — one that recognizes grief and preserves the significance of the lost child while simultaneously allowing the woman to remain an individual with her own body, aspirations, relationships, abilities, social roles, and future.

4. Conclusions

The loss of a child can profoundly affect a woman's psychological well-being and disrupt multiple dimensions of identity, including her relationship with her body, personal image, professional direction, social connections, and perception of the future.

Recovery should therefore not necessarily be understood as a return to a previous version of the self.

The perspective presented in this article suggests that identity reconstruction may involve several interconnected processes: psychological adaptation, reconnection with the body, renewed attention to personal image, creative self-expression, modeling, coaching or mentorship, participation in supportive communities, and engagement in socially meaningful activities.

These elements are not substitutes for professional psychological or medical care. Instead, they may complement established forms of support by addressing dimensions of life that extend beyond the direct processing of grief.

The personal experience of Tetiana Artemeva illustrates how profound loss may eventually lead to the development of new forms of self-expression, social participation, and charitable activity. Rather than erasing the experience of loss, such processes may allow it to become integrated into a broader identity and a renewed sense of purpose.

Further interdisciplinary research is needed to examine how body image, creative self-presentation, modeling, community participation, coaching, and charitable engagement may contribute to identity reconstruction after bereavement and other major life crises.

Acknowledgments

The author expresses sincere gratitude to the women and families whose experiences and resilience contributed to the conceptual development of this perspective. Special appreciation is extended to the specialists and volunteers involved in charitable initiatives supporting families affected by severe childhood illnesses and bereavement, whose practical experience has contributed to a deeper understanding of the challenges surrounding recovery and identity reconstruction.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no financial or non-financial conflicts of interest related to this article.

Funding Information

This work received no external funding and was prepared without financial support from governmental, commercial, or non-profit organizations.

Author Contributions

The author independently developed the concept of the article, reviewed the relevant literature, interpreted the available information and personal experience, formulated the perspective presented, and prepared the manuscript.

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