

Personal Reflection & Self Care Paper

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The handsome husband and the beautiful wife, the quintessential three children with the big house on the corner and the white picket fence, can all look like the picture perfect family, to those who are looking in from the outside. However, sometimes, things aren't always what they appear to be. Upon closer investigation, it could be found out that there is a lot more than meets the eye that may be going. Behind the picturesque smiles pasted on the "happy" family members faces, there is a world of turmoil going on due to abuse. Whether it is physical or emotional abuse, partner violence is a devastating fact that takes place more often than people tend to realize and it is one of the topics covered during this class that hit home to me.

Designed to chip away at a person's self-esteem and self-worth, emotional abuse is a form of intimate partner violence that can be overlooked or dismissed, due to the fact that there are no visible bruises. The deep scars are not visible to the naked eye, but rather, are imprinted on the psyche or very soul of an individual, so much so that it becomes part of them and the knowledge that said abuse is occurring is not even apparent to their very self. Such was the case with myself, while as that particular topic was being read about and studied, what was already known by myself through the counsel of therapists, became even more clear. Being married at an age that some would consider to be entirely too young, age 22, many would say that I didn't even begin to know what I was getting into, and they would be right. Add to that becoming a first time mother at age 23, while still navigating being a wife for the first time, as well as a pastor, it need not be said that my plate was indeed full.

As mentioned above, it was through counseling that I came to understand that what was taking place in my marriage, over the course of 17 years, was not just normal miscommunication, but was in fact emotional abuse. The dismissal of my feelings, the "boxing me in"- even in ministry towards the latter part of the marriage, and being the unwilling

participant in “the blame game”, were all indirect signs of being in an emotionally abusive and destructive marriage. The subtlety of it all lent to an increasingly toxic environment that had me on the “crazy” cycle-wondering if it was just me, or if things are really all my fault because of my reactions. I questioned, if, I was really so damaged as a child (due to my own parent’s cycle of crazy, with physical and emotional abuse), that I was inadvertently, single handedly destroying my own marriage and subsequently my five children. This fog of doubt encapsulated me over the years off and on to the point that resulted in a disastrous situation. Fast forward three years, and the fog began to clear as long desired interventions were made by seasoned professionals, helping me to understand what was really going on. Though still in the process of navigating separation and divorce, I am mentally and emotionally in a much better place than I ever was.

As I move forward in my career of being a counselor, I anticipate that there may be challenges that may arise when I encounter clients that are in a situation similar to the one I have gone through. I need to be aware of the personal feelings that may resurface when dealing with said client, and ensure to the best of my ability that I would not impose my ideas and thoughts of how things should go onto the client. I believe it might even be more difficult given a situation where the client is either in denial or unaware themselves of the possibility of emotional abuse being perpetuated in their marriage. Or worse yet, if the partner who is the abuser is also involved in the counseling sessions, I may find it increasingly hard to manage my emotions and reactions. I do believe that by continuing my personal individual therapy and also keeping my supervisor abreast of any countertransference that may take place in that situation, will help me to be objective and be the counselor and helper that the client needs to make the decisions that are best for them.

Along with individual personal therapy, I also believe that it is important to be very intentional about my self-care, laying the groundwork both now and for in the future. As a counselor, it is no secret that I will encounter clients that have or are dealing with traumatic situations, and doing so on a day to day basis can definitely have a significant effect, potentially causing vicarious trauma. Identifying with the pain of those who have endured horrible things, and especially situations similar to that of my own, can contribute to my feeling overwhelmed, burdened and even cause me to exhibit symptoms as though the trauma were directly happening to myself.

To counteract this potential pitfall, I think that it is also important to address self-care with a multi-faceted and pragmatic approach, being sure to make time to take care of myself physically, by exercising and doing physical activities that I enjoy, helping to alleviate the stress that I will inevitably acquire during my counseling career. Eating healthy and being well balanced in my indulgences can also help me to have the physical stamina necessary, while not depriving myself of treats that I enjoy. By developing and nurturing healthy relationships with close friends and family, I will be creating a network of support and at the least, maintaining and strengthening the relationships that I already have that are good for me. Most importantly, as a Christian, I find that staying connected to the vine that is Christ, has and will go a long way in keeping me focused and balanced in all things, as I believe the bible when it says “You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on You” (Isaiah 26:3, Holy Bible).

Overall, I believe that nothing has taken God by surprise, including the problem crisis topic of emotional abuse that was more than just pages on a textbook, but an actual reality for myself. I believe that all things do work together for good to them who love God and who are the called according to His purpose. Somehow, what I have gone through and the lessons that I have

learned from it, is an essential ingredient that will be used in and through the course of my career and hopefully, I will embody the definition of what it truly means to be called a “helper”.