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MFT 603 - Spring 2023
Dr. Tesia Wells
Reading Reflection - Week 2

1. *Self-Defined Family and Historical Context*

Dr. Pauline Boss uses the term “self-defined family” and the word captures the uniqueness of a person’s family. I love that phrasing and reminder of all the different types of families that exist. While we cannot choose who we are related to biologically, we can draw support from the people around us who offer the closeness and care that we expect when we think of family. After starting this program, I became able to put words to my family experience. Our family stayed together because we share similar feelings of obligation to our family, but we generally feel disconnected from each other. I often felt like an outsider in my family, but I learned that it was a similar experience that my siblings shared with me. This awareness helped me feel closer to my family and made me realize that my family members might also long for connection, just as much as I do.

After reading this chapter, I want to keep working at learning more about other cultural and historical contexts outside of my own. I am reminded of the value to keep reading and keep learning not only as a therapist, but also as a regular human being. I feel conflicted that the pain of generational trauma can coexist with generational blessings of strength, resilience, and perseverance in Black families. At the same time, God redeemed a fallen world with broken systems, and made a way for us to experience His grace in the present. I didn’t make this connection before, but I have a newfound appreciation for family history because it can also reveal the cultural and historical influences to a person’s development. I hope to encounter the power of narrative and listening to a person’s story in the therapy room.

2. *Trauma and Grief*

Both books on grief address the complex nature of grief, and the relationship between trauma and grief stood out to me. It started to get a little confusing to read about bereavement without trauma, trauma without bereavement, and bereavement with trauma. But Worden summarized the relationship with this note, “the failure of both clinicians and researchers to recognize the uniqueness of the grief experience. Even though the mourning tasks apply to all

death losses, how a person approaches and adapts to these tasks can be quite varied.” (p. 8) Everyone grieves and responds differently to trauma and life events. Each person has a unique perspective and experience that is worth recognizing and affirming. Mourning is an important step to the process of grieving well. I do not grieve well, and I am not sure if I have seen examples of grieving, so I hope the readings will help me understand what to grieve and learn healthy ways to grieve.

In the Asian American context, we tend not to admit our losses. The concept of loss may be more of an area to teach about in a seminar. Grief may even be another topic to explore, but I wonder if people know the value of grief. According to McCoy and Walter, people tend to stifle feelings and affect in response to trauma from adverse childhood events. (p. 296) When processing trauma, especially childhood trauma, there is an added layer of identifying coping mechanisms from childhood, which makes me appreciate the deeper level theories of MFT. It makes sense that theories like Bowenian, Contextual, and Object Relations could bring forth deeper healing and get to the source of pain.

3. *Emotional Maturity*

In *Grief and Loss Across the Lifespan*, “disenfranchised maturational loss” describes a type of loss when expected developmental achievements are not met. Based on the example given, I think I fit this category of the percentage of the current generation of emerging adults who have not been able to establish independent households. (p. 292) I moved home during COVID lockdown and I have not moved out since, partly because I am in school, and another part because of limited financial resources. I definitely felt pangs of sadness and jealousy when I would see my friends get married and have children. I feel stuck, while everyone seems to be “moving forward” in life. Some others may or may not feel the same way as I do, but I wonder if I am limited in some way because I do not have the experience of marriage or raising children. While I do not believe this is true, these thoughts have crossed my mind more often than I’d like to admit. I did not make the connection that these feelings (sadness and frustration) come from the reality of a loss of unmet expectations.