

Grief Paper

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Throughout my life, I have experienced a few losses, some I would define as ambiguous losses. The majority of the moments of grief in my life however, I view as disenfranchised grief. I am the type of person who holds in her pain until she is about to burst. I was taught at an early age that crying was a sign of weakness and therefore I had to swallow my tears. Therefore, for me to sit here and write my past struggles and losses is very difficult. To relive these moments of my life is hard for me, as I do not like to relive sadness. However, as a future therapist, I understand how this assignment is useful to place my grievances into words and identify coping strategies that can help myself and others overcome similar situations.

As a first generation Brazilian American, I understand that my losses may also be influenced by my culture and background not to mention, my socioeconomic background also. As a child, my parent's economic background did not impact me as much however, as I got older, telling my friends at school that my mom was a house keeper and my father was a construction worker wasn't as socially acceptable anymore. My first encounter with disenfranchised grief was when I realized that my socioeconomic background was different than the "normal" American child. I remember seeing ads on TV targeted to parents to save up for their child's college education. I used to watch that as a little girl and immediately become sad because I knew that was not my future. My parents did not know much about the American school system, and in many situations, I had to teach them about it. My parents were not involved in the PTA as they had no time or even knew what that was. I had dreams of being a performer growing up, as I loved to dance and sing however, I was always discouraged. I had to do what would bring security and not what I enjoyed. Therefore, in many situations, I felt alone and not understood.

Within the book, “Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy”, chapter 2 mentions tasks of the mourning process. A coping strategy I used to overcome the loss of not having the American dream family advertised to me as a kid was the task of processing the pain of the grief. As a disenfranchised grief, this is not recognized as a loss to many people. I had to come to terms with the fact that this is a loss and process the pain of this loss. Chapter mentions on page 45, “The negation of this second task of processing the pain results in not feeling.” This is a weakness I have shared in all my attempts for grieving, as I have always felt that my pain is misunderstood. Therefore, I did not let myself process this pain until I was already an adult. A significant point of grief therapy taught me that writing out my feelings in journals and really allowing myself to process the pain I felt of not having what everyone else considered normal is a strength that is helping me cope with my short comings.

My parent’s divorce was a major loss I experienced growing up as well. I was about 8 or 9 when my parents were separated but continued living together. The divorce was only final when my mom got pregnant by her boyfriend and moved out of our house when I was around 10. It was hard to understand what had happened but the birth of my brother made my parent’s divorce very final. This was another thing about me that made me feel different than my peers. I slowly started to feel inferior to others and I believe that my lack of self-confidence started around this time. Within my family of origin, divorce has been passed down on both sides so this was not such a big issue. However for me, growing up where the American dream was very different than my current reality, it made a big impact in my life. I remember at my high school graduation, all I wanted was a picture of my parents together at my side and my mother refused to take a picture with

my father. My parents did not throw me a party; instead I was invited to one. My mother refused to take the picture in front of everyone and it was very humiliating for me. My parents would not even take a picture together to celebrate their only daughter.

I had therapy as a little girl, which helped me process the pain of my parent's divorce. I mostly played games with my therapist but I do remember having a moment of intervention where the therapist had me tell my mom my feelings. I cried and I remember forgiving her in that moment. Chapter 3 in the book, "Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy", mentions active emotional coping, which I believe helped me during my parents divorce. Therapy along with my relationship with God helped me redefine my relationship with my parents and allowed me to forgive them of their mistakes. The therapist helped me vent my feelings rather than bottle it up and in that moment, allowed for a moment of healing. Reframing my problems has been my biggest strength, as I always try to look at how to make a negative situation become positive however, I do still struggle with venting. My tendency is still to bottle up my emotions therefore, although I had a breakthrough moment back when I was younger, I still need intervention to help me to fully express my feelings.

Another loss I also experienced during this time was the fact that from age 10 to age 19 I did not live with my mother. My mother left my father and I to live with my brother and his father. Although I was given the option to go with my mom, my grandmother begged my mom to leave me with my father, as no one trusted my mother's boyfriend. I also did not want to leave, as I would have my own room. Therefore, I did feel the loss of not living with my mother and sometimes blamed my younger brother for taking her away. Additionally, within the Brazilian culture, it is unusual for a little girl to

be left to live with her father. It is customary that the mother stays with the children. Therefore, I experienced a lot of judgment due to this fact where many Brazilian friends and family members expected me to become a rebellious teenager. I was always reminded of this and grew up with the sense that I had to prove everyone wrong and be as perfect as I could be.

For the longest time, I used blaming as an avoidant emotional coping style. I blamed my brother and his father for taking my mother away. It helped me get over the pain of my mom leaving but it made me angry instead. God helped me through this process by not only placing forgiveness in my heart but also helping me redefine this situation. Instead of seeing my brother's birth as a negative moment, I now see him as the reason we came to know God in the first place. Before my brother, we barely went to church. His birth was the catalyst to my salvation and relationship with the Lord and I believe reframing this situation has been my biggest coping strength.

As a teenager, my father, uncle and grandmother were business owners and owned the deli on the first floor of our apartment. However, after a few years, they went bankrupt and could no longer afford our rent. My father and I, along with my grandmother and uncle who lived on the floor above us, were evicted from our apartments. My father and uncle had to move in together into a one bedroom while my grandmother decided to move back home to Brazil. I was still finishing high school and had plans on going to college locally. Therefore, my cousins took me in, as they lived really close to my high school. I lived there for a little over a year and yet it was a hard moment in my life. I no longer lived with any of my parents and I had to live with others out of charity. Soon, my friends at school found out as well and it was hard not to feel

like the poor kid. For a while, so that I wouldn't be a burden on my cousins, my mom would make me go to her house to shower and eat and then only go to my cousins to sleep. I would get to their house around midnight most nights and wake up early for school the next day. It wasn't until my mother split up from my brother's dad that I was allowed to move in with my mom. During this time, I felt like I didn't have my own privacy or a place to call home.

A coping strategy that helped me overcome this situation was when I was able to accept help from others. Chapter 3 of the book, "Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy" mentions this coping strategy and how this coping can even help a person's esteem. As a person who has a tendency to bottle her emotions, asking for help has always been a struggle. Therefore this was a big weakness of mind growing up. In my family of origin, we do not ask help from others as that is seen as disrespectful. We do not burden others with our problems. Therefore, the Lord had to work in me to help me redefine what asking for help looks like. Redefining what help was is what allowed me to share my loss with others and not feel inferior due to my loss.

After losing my home, my father lived in the U.S. with my uncle for about a year until they both decided to move back to Brazil. I was 18 when I last saw my father and I haven't seen him since. It was hard losing my father at that age and for many years I even forgot I had a father. He was really terrible at keeping in touch, as was I, so we drifted apart. Now he calls me every now and again however, it's usually because he wants to apply for his green card and wants me to help him. In all honesty, my father became very distant from me as soon as I entered my teenage years and ever since that moment, we

had been drifting apart. I guess he could no longer relate to me as he did when I was a child. However, that distance become more recognizable when he moved away.

For a long time I felt like I had no father, and it was during a moment of healing with God, that I remembered that feeling is not normal. A weakness in my coping with this loss was that I went into denial. By not acknowledging I even had a dad was therefore omitting the pain of losing one. The first task of mourning mentioned in Chapter 2 of “Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy”, was to accept the reality of the loss. This was a significant learning point of grief therapy for me, as I was able to put into words what I had experienced previously with God. In the moment of healing that I had with God a few years ago, my coping strength was to accept that I did have a father and the reality was that we no longer had a relationship. It was hard to come to terms with that reality and to process it but it was necessary so that I could fully mourn that moment.

Another major loss I suffered was when my grandmother passed away. This was the grandmother who always lived in Brazil, but who I would spend every summer with when I would go visit her. I started visiting my grandmother when I was 6 years old and I went almost every summer until her death. Until this day, I have dreams where she shows up. My family are not very affectionate, due to their origins of being raised on a farm and how early each of them had to work and become adults themselves. My grandmother was someone however who always showered me with affection. It was devastating to lose her and until this day I regret not being able to enjoy her more as a child.

When my grandmother died, God confirmed to me that my grandmother had accepted Jesus before and was with Him. This gave me peace in my mourning process and allowed me to reframe this negative moment into a positive one, knowing that her

suffering had ended since she was so sick before, and that now she was resting with Jesus. What was hard to cope with afterwards however, was adjusting to a world without her in it. Due to distance, it was not as difficult however; I went about 7 years before visiting her hometown again. I avoided the town for a while, as I knew that the moment I went there, I would have to readjust the memory of that place as a place without my grandmother. Now I try to remember my grandmother while living my life, hoping I will see her again one day. I still have photographs to remember her by. Chapter 4 of the book, “Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy”, mentions keeping a memory book and this is something I will want to incorporate as I continue with my this fourth task of the mourning process of my grandmother.

Lastly, the seventh loss I will discuss in this paper, was the loss of a relationship. I was 23 when I really fell in love for the first time. I had other relationships growing up but none were as serious as this one. We had only dated for a few months but were already planning a wedding. I could see no faults in this boy and was ready to plan my life around his. However, it was too serious too fast for him and he ended things by telling me he never really loved me in the first place. It was the hardest thing to hear and it was very hard to overcome. He was the pastor’s son and had a lot of influence in my youth group therefore, I would constantly have to see him and hear him preach. I became depressed, lost weight and if it weren’t for Jesus and my friends, I’m not sure how I would have coped.

Chapter 2 of “Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy”, mentions how some individuals attempt to cope using a “geographical cure” by traveling from one place to the other without grieving their pain of the loss. After my relationship ended, all I wanted

to do was to leave and that is exactly what I did. My coping weakness was that for three years I lived abroad, away from my ex and it was one of the best moments of my life. However, my ex would try to get in contact with me during that time and it would open up a can of worms that I had thought was gone. It was only when I decided to just focus on Jesus was I really able to let go of all possibility of getting back together. A significant learning method mentioned in chapter 4 of “Grief Counseling and Grief Therapy”, was helping the bereaved find meaning in the loss. This is an important coping method for me as this is exactly what I did to overcome the loss of this relationship. I understand that this loss is was catapulted me into stepping outside of my comfort zone and doing what I always dreamed of and therefore this loss was a blessing in disguise. I feel that this has been a coping strength for me as I now see the loss as something that was necessary for my story rather than a painful memory.

Therefore, although my family of origin, ethnicity and weakness in coping strategies had made grieving hard to overcome, there are many healthy coping strategies that I have gone through in my life to help me and that is in large part due to the Holy Spirit and the help of others around me. Grief therapy has taught me four many important things. The ability to write down or express your pain in any form is an important coping technique to process your pain and to not bottle up your emotions. Accepting the reality of your losses and finding their meaning are important in order to help you overcome your grievances. Accepting help from others and adjusting to a world without what was lost. Lastly, to remember those we have lost by moving in our lives and keeping a memory book to honor their memory. These are all key things that helped me throughout my losses; some ambiguous, some disenfranchised and some recognized losses.

## References

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