

Personal History of Grief

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MFT 603: Individual and Family Development

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April 24 2023

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As I contemplate the losses I would like to ponder on, I reflect on the below 7 losses that required me to make significant changes in order to obtain stability as I dealt with grief.

Loss of Close-Knit Family Bonds Due to Sibling Marriages

This was a loss that I feel and continue to grieve over today. Being the youngest child of my family and seeing close-knit bonds between my father's siblings, I took it for granted that all relationships stay the same even when siblings get married. However, it did not turn out to be the same in my birth family due to the complexities of the in-law relationships. As my siblings were in the process of leaving and cleaving, we all had to adjust to the differences in the upbringing and interests of their spouses. Distances 'both physical and emotional' crept in that changed my family of origin dynamics to become more cordial and distant instead of close-knit like we were. My parents continue to be the glue that binds us together as a family while we as siblings remain close from a distance. Learning about disenfranchised grief, I now realize it is my voice that I was seeking to be heard without condemnation or judgment. Instead, my voice and opinions were asked to be suppressed in order to help the family readjust to the new dynamics. I realize now that it was more than just the bonds that I lost, it was my identity in the family that I had to sacrifice.

Loss of Support System as a First-Generation Immigrant

I came to New York City at the age of 22 to further my education with the intention to go back and get a better job to support my family. But it was the beginning of a heavy loss of the comfort and love of my parents and extended family who I had around me to support me emotionally, financially, and physically. Though it was not a loss of being abandoned, I grieved the loss of family and friends similarly. I did not have the financial means or tools to stay

connected to my known support systems and had to navigate life on my own. The new life in an unknown land posed many challenges due to integration into a new culture and starting life from scratch.

Loss of Singleness

Thanks to our study on grief theories along with our understanding of developmental stages I am now able to understand maturational losses. It was not until my late 20's when I fell in love and decided to take the next step of commitment in a marriage that my life had to change all over again. I now had to care about my husband and the demands of being a wife and move from my known surroundings in New York City life to the suburbs of New Jersey. Though I was happy to be married and focused on readjusting, I never took time to express and grieve over the things I missed as I was expected to fit into the new role. I felt the loss of life as I knew it in NYC, friendships, the life I made on my own, and not being able to use my money as I desired. It was a time of giving up the singleness that I had found a way to happily adjust to and reinvent the wheel again as a married person. As I feel blessed to have a family of my own I realize that there is still a lingering sense of grief as I did not celebrate the loss of my singleness.

Acknowledging the fact that I denied myself grieving the loss of singleness before moving on to married life may help me now stop when I get frustrated with the responsibilities and rejoice instead.

Miscarriages

Miscarriage took my husband and me by surprise as we had no knowledge about the same. The pain and the consequent years of dealing with grief were through prayer but were a difficult few years. Though after both of the miscarriages, I did take time to grieve, talk, and process, it was my "invisible tattoo".(McCoyd, J. & Walter, C., 2021, p. [Page # 220]) Sadness

about the losses is still something that lingers even after so many years at times. This loss also affected my following pregnancies. When I was blessed with children part of the fear from the miscarriages clouded my experience of joy through the successful pregnancy of our twins. Nine months of bed rest for my twins was what I gave them in response to the miscarriages. However, the memory, shame, and guilt of the miscarriages stayed with me as a question in prayer till I was able to finally find peace. Today I am able to speak about miscarriages and hopefully be a strength to other women who may be struggling.

Loss of Career Pathway and Privileges Of Double Income

The one word that comes into my mind as I think of the losses is resiliency. Due to miscarriages, our outlook on having children and raising them took a shift. The predicament was the choice of opting to take the promotion at Coach, the company I loved working for, and the news that I was pregnant on the same day. It was a difficult choice we made as a couple that I would give my very best to be used to help partake in God's gift of creation and parenting. I gave in my resignation letter and transitioned to full bed rest for the next 9 months. My mother flew in to cook, clean, and take care of me and my home so I could have healthy surviving babies. After the twins were born my husband, in turn, had to give up a high-paying job to be part of caregiving for our twins which would not be possible otherwise due to his travel schedules. These sacrifices brought the loss of material comfort and dreams. Loss of the comforts of life was something we did not sit and grieve but adjusted to the change of circumstances.

Children's Health Issues

As a parent, doing justice in raising children to walk in the righteous path feels like a huge calling. When health issues arise the lack of knowledge or identification becomes almost a guilt to carry. On realizing our child's hearing was decreasing, the decision to have him wear a

hearing aid for the rest of his life was a difficult one especially when praying for a miracle of healing. The ambiguity of not knowing if there was anything we did to cause it would be something that might never have closure, as there is no explanation for why he started losing his hearing. The biggest life changer for our family was to also be blessed with a bright child who finally we were able to get a diagnosis of dyslexia and ADHD. The process and steps to find answers incurred the loss of family life the way we imagined it and each of us had to grieve the process as we made adjustments. This process is what I now realize was my training ground as God is using me to help many families in the future so that they may walk their paths with less grief and cope joyfully.

Loss of Family Togetherness as Schedules Get Busier and Children Age

My family is entering this next phase of family life which requires us to rebalance. The time in the young lives from 0-11 was filled with the joy of doing things together as a family. Children's interests change as they grow and find their own voices. For my family, Covid-19 was the much-needed break we needed to refocus and reset from our busy lives. However Covid-19 I believe also rushed the process of losing family time as each one of us got used to a lifestyle that involves technology. Now everyone living under the same roof is able to do things of their own interest on a computer and does not need the presence or help of another family member. Activities and family time together are more scheduled. We are still in the process of relearning and readjusting to find ways that we could balance personal time and joyful family time. I find it interesting that I started with grief related to losing close-knit relationships within my family of origin due to marriage and I am at a stage in life when I am trying to avoid the same happening to my children as our family lifestyle changes.

b) Identify Coping Strategies employed to manage the pain of the 7 losses

Prayer, community, and resiliency are the three words that I can identify as the coping strategies I used to manage the pain of the losses. To God be the glory that the losses we never grieved over have instead become a praise report of how we see God's abundance in our lives every day. As a new student immigrant, my college counselor helped me cope with the losses felt due to the absence of the physical presence and voice of my parents. A very meaningful coping strategy for me in all losses can be attributed to my personal faith journey and accepting God's grace. Though I grieve the loss of the maturational losses, I also rejoice in how I developed a personal relationship with my Creator and I can sing His praises as I witness how He walks beside me. Support and comfort of community is another strong coping strategy that helped me cope with the losses. The women's hostel was the community that helped me cope and readjust to life in America. The private chapel in the hostel is how I spent the nights weeping in the presence of God. Faith I think is a constant and prominent factor used to cope.

c) Identify family-of-origin and ethnicity factors that influence grief

Being raised in an ethnicity where the community shares life together gave me the boldness and confidence to talk to strangers as an immigrant. This helped me process my feelings and it was like talk therapy. Since my family of origin always felt comfortable bringing God as the chief author of our life, I am able to endure the losses as I can surrender them as part of his bigger plan. "Weeping may endure for a night but Joy comes in the evening" (Psalm 30:5) rings in my head as I process grief. Leaning not on my own understanding and trusting God as I sought answers to the losses, I felt not only helped me cope with it but also showed me how he was present in the storms even when I did not see him. Having parents who had sacrificial love

influences how I cope with grief. It was also one of the ways I cope by volunteering my time for others' needs instead of focusing only on my struggles.

d) Analyze Strengths and Deficits in Their Personal Mourning Process

The biggest deficit is the void I felt in the personal mourning process by not addressing the loss I felt of the strong-knit family bonds. It is a loss that I did not process or grieve well and the repercussions of it are still being felt by me as it is the unspoken grief that I carry. Having faith and a personal relationship with God has been the biggest strength in coping with losses. Faith helps me come to a place of healing where I can have compassion for myself and others in the midst of the losses. Seeking God's will in each of the situations, helped me see myself as being a child of the Most High God who I know is a loving father and has plans for me that I cannot comprehend. Having the support of family and friends was a strength that helped as part of the therapeutic process to grieve. It can also be seen as a deficit as a professional counselor might help to grieve through the process objectively. Having a professional counselor who I could see at college was a great strength as I dealt with my strong emotion of grief and fear of the unknown. If I had leaned on family at that time I could have possibly felt the pangs of loneliness even more and even caused harm to my parent's coping strategies for my loss in their lives. The legacy of sacrificial love experienced by me growing up turned out to be the greatest strength I could lean on as I handled losses in my life. The times of mourning were also a time of soaking in the word of God and seeking His will for my life.

e) List 3-4 of the most significant points of learning about grief therapy

The new terminology we learned about ambiguous losses was a name I can now put to the unspoken losses and changes that happened to me and my family. This is the most difficult loss as it does not need to have closure and can be triggered at different times and events. The

concept of not needing closure for every loss is an interesting concept that can help clients deal with their losses and be able to move on with productive lives.

The concept of disenfranchised grief is a necessary concept for all counselors to understand. By helping validate the feeling that clients experience, we can help them react better to the loss and destabilization they feel.

ACE (Adverse childhood experiences) inflicts a lot of losses and too many can trigger disaster in people's lives and the risk carries forward to generations. Therapy for such people gets complicated as they may not be able to make meaning of their experiences.

Grief refers to a person's reaction to the losses or bereavement and deals with the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors experienced after the loss and changes over time. Mourning is what one does when faced with grief to bring about relief and can be viewed as stages, phases, and tasks. Grief counseling involves helping people with normal uncomplicated grief to have a healthy adaptation to mourning within a reasonable time frame. Grief therapy is the term used when we help people who have complicated grief reactions.

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