

Reflective essay: grief and bereavement



This essay is a reflective journey through the loss I have experienced in my life. The essay will discuss two models of bereavement, dual process and continuing bonds. Towards not only understanding self in the process of loss, but also to understand some of the theories used to assist those who are grieving. Relevant referenced literature will be used to demonstrate understanding of the models of loss chosen for the assessment.

The loss that has impacted my world most recently began with the wonderful knowledge of pregnancy. That beautiful piece of news set in motion a series of events beginning with the primary loss of membership within a band, which I had created and maintained for six years. The band was a manifestation of hopes, dreams and realisations I had carried since childhood and finally began actualising in my early thirties. The secondary losses were simple I thought, as in losing the social network associated with being a band member, and the loss of a portion of identity. However, a major friendship was also lost in the process and this in reality lay far deeper than the apparent primary loss. This friend and fellow band member M was actually my x partner and soul mate, with who I had shared my life and musical experiences from the age of nineteen. Even though we had separated as partners we were still very close as friends and involved musically. I had lost my x, my best friend, my band member, fellow song writer, and pain in the butt. I acknowledge that adjusting to motherhood and the happiness of my new family life overshadowed the losses I was experiencing, and also my resilience, spirituality and being quite differentiated contributed to my ability to cope, move forward and adjust to yet another segment of my very interesting, challenging and rewarding life.

Attachment and meaning, family systems, social support, cognitive process in adjustment and coping, are all factors and terms associated with the theories of loss and bereavement which have preceded and assisted Stroebe and Schut (2007) to generate the dual process model. Their model perceives a person oscillating between loss-orientation and restoration-orientation. Loss-orientation deals with the process of having a good cry and experiencing and dealing with the emotion of loss, and restoration-orientation deals with getting oneself back into feeling okay to proceed with life emotionally, physically and psychologically. Within this process of oscillation it is important to understand the need for both negative and positive thought processes within both loss and restoration. Furthermore it is important that one experiences and adjusts to both aspects of thought processes in life, even when it appears that loss is not perhaps a prominent focal point. Stroebe and Schut (2004) discuss how attachment theory plays a role within the dual process model, by aligning loss-orientation with the experience associated through loss of a relationship where the bond of attachment is deep. Secondly their restoration-orientation process can align with cognitive stress theory by making use of tasks or coping strategies to assist a grieving person to find balance in their process of loss. The strength of the dual process model as Stroebe and Schut (2004b) explain is the ability to understand that people fluctuate between positive and negative thoughts and emotions. Additionally by applying certain aspects of cognition tools and the understanding of attachment, a balance between the swaying emotions and thoughts can be normalised and processed in a comfortable and personal manner as adaption takes place.

In my experience of grief I certainly experienced the swapping of emotional positions such as sadness that our friendship had ceased, and feeling okay that M wanted to disconnect. I am able to reflect with both sadness and joy, when I ponder our shared love and experiences.

However I also take great strength from my husband and son, my parents and siblings in an almost unconscious process of living and loving.

Continuing bonds resonated with me in that it recognised attachment bonds don't disappear when one experiences loss or death, instead the connection and bonds change and continue. Klass and Walter (2004) explain continuing bonds as recognition that the human condition in both life and death is far more complex and unique than many theorists previously had argued. In addition research discovered that many diverse people carried on conversations and relationships with the dead. Klass, Silverman, & Nickman (1996) relate that continuing bonds means that those left behind feel a real sense of the person they have lost, either unconsciously or on a conscious level, therefore their changed relationship with the deceased is a continuous process of adjustment. It is now realised people don't get over a loss of a loved one, they continue to have an internal relationship or tell stories to keep their meaning alive. From what I have understood of continuing bonds dealing with grief, is simply not as simple as getting over a loss, but a process of mourning, grieving, adjusting and changing.

Packman, Horsley, Davies & Kramer (2006) cite Hogan and DeSantis who refer to attachment in connection with continuing bonds such as reaffirming relationships, search for understanding, checking in with deceased,

reconnecting, asking for guidance, and seeking to meet again, it seems the process demonstrates once more that attachment and love does not cease with the death or loss of our loved ones. Nadeau (2007) discusses continuing bonds around how families make meaning via conversations and shared feelings through storytelling, family conversation or verbalising experiences of the person who has died. In addition to dreaming, comparing and experiencing interpretations of personality, joining or linking of events or perhaps considering fatalistic observations, through which these processes assist a person to deal and adjust to the loss and life without the physical presence of their loved one. It almost seems ridiculous in my mind to consider those I've lost in life as being completely gone just because they died or have disconnected their friendship. In my personal culture of beliefs, values, and spirituality, death is but a single part of an enormous cycle where as human beings we experience the physical plane of existence, which is only a fraction of our total cycle of being and knowing.

The process of writing this assessment has made me consider exactly what losses I have experienced. I began by making a time line of losses, and realised that through death I had lost four grandparents, friends, one x mother-in-law, and one current mother-in-law, nine cats, one bird, and one dog. The losses consisted of my heart at least three times, contact with aunts and uncles, and my cousins, jobs, dreams, my band, friends, even my respect at certain times, and the most significant friendship of my life prior to meeting my husband and my baby. Through contemplating my losses I can identify with certain aspects of poor self-esteem that has occurred in my life, and understand how feeling unworthy of certain considerations from <https://assignbuster.com/reflective-essay-grief-and-bereavement/>

friends is mixed in with the manner in which I handle loss in general. Being strong inside even though I feel alone is part of the coping mechanism loss in my life has taught me. For me being differentiated and resilient are the real keys to handling life's myriad of experiences. Walsh (2006) suggests that beliefs and values build our cultural and family historical story that in turn builds resilience, which is strongly tied in with ones spiritual beliefs and life meaning. Weiten, Lloyd, Dunn, & Hammer (2009) cite Gallagher and Chase who suggest that children benefit immensely from having their sense of resilience strengthened and nurtured by cherishing close relationships between children and parents. Resilience can help with the development of coping strategies, for example how to release anger, or help children be able to differentiate between risk assessment of traumatic event and management of possible danger. Furthermore the importance of relating and sharing of values and beliefs, not only in self, but also in a wider social arena, and encourage the ability to see and endeavour towards a positive future.

My sense of myself as a differentiated and resilient person has also been a driving force behind my search of spiritual answers outside my birth religion. I live my life through my sense of spiritual knowing, which I align with the Buddhist concept of dharma, reincarnation and karma. My foundation of spirituality and knowing in God as my belief and value system is how I function through life's loves and losses. I now understand how positive functioning is interconnected with a sense of differentiation. Corey (2009) discusses, differentiation is the process of becoming an individual with a positive sense of separateness from family of origin, able to live life with an ability to accept responsibility for one's own emotions, thoughts, feelings,

perceptions and behaviour. I am truly thankful for the two strengths of resilience and differentiation, as in whenever I feel alone in my experiencing of loss, be it as simple as feeling I have no one to talk to, I can draw from inside myself the strength to escape negative emotional spirals. I also have an immense sense of connection to a higher spirit and find great comfort in life's meaning and feeling of universal love.

Since life, love, death, loss and grief all are experienced, affected, and expressed, in highly individual styles and approaches it seems logical there should be different methods and theories attached to grief and loss counselling. Therefore when I look at the two models of dual process and continuing bonds, I feel it important to understand attachment in life and loss. Machin (2009) discusses that the sense of self and independence is born out of the relationships of attachment we experience across our lifespan. These attachments are what allow a person to develop resources such as coping mechanisms, resilience, and the predisposition towards either positive or negative outlooks on life as well as death and loss. Sigelman and Rider (2009) refer to Bowlby's theory of attachment, concerning how a person copes through life's challenges and stages, which can depend a great deal on the style of attachment they have developed, such as securely attached opposed to avoidant or resistant attachment. These attachment styles play out through life in the manner of relationships beginning with family relationships, meaningful friendships, and marriage relationships, a person experiences through life and through their losses. Sigelman and Rider (2009b) cite Parkes who in conjunction with Bowlby constructed their theory of attachment model of bereavement, based on the simple fact that loss and

love are counterparts that cannot be separated. Furthermore our interpersonal connections are built through attachment and centred on the conveying and sharing of love. Machin (2009b) also considers that attachment styles are also impacted through family culture, especially in how a person is taught the norms, values and beliefs surrounding appropriate mourning and grief, and life and love. As I reflect on how I seek and find support around my losing M as a close friend, the cultural influence and norm my family advocates, is that of behaving as if nothing has changed. Almost like saying, what are you worried about, and ignoring any deep feelings that need sharing to complete the cycle of grief. In relation to attachment within my family history I would say I have learnt secure attachment as a child, but as I grew my sense of attachment to my parents and siblings had a feeling of separateness, which funnily enough I feel was the grounding for my sense of differentiation and resilience, self reliance, sense of spiritual belonging and an ability to have a positive life mindset. On the flip side that separateness I felt when younger was the underlying force behind my poor self-esteem which was an enabling factor in the attachment style of relationship I shared with M.

No matter the type of grief or loss one experiences or suffers in some way or another, love is at the heart of the felt experience. Even if the loss is as simple as the loss of a job, or perhaps a beloved cat, or friend, a partner, a mother or father, sister or brother, or sadly a child, it is love that binds us, it is love that makes life and death worthwhile. Kubler-Ross (1998) put it very succinctly when she wrote, “ you should live until you die, no one dies alone, everyone is loved beyond comprehension, everyone is blessed and guided,

and the hardest lesson to learn is unconditional love, everything is bearable when there is love, and finally the only thing that lives forever is love” (p288).

To conclude this essay I would reflect on the importance of a counsellor taking the time to experience and deal with life’s losses and loves. Whether one chooses a particular model or process to assist the journey of self discovery, it is important to understand the underlying concepts of the attachment bonds that are formed over a life span. The bonds we form also bring the love that not only continues but also fluctuates between positive and negative emotional balancing and adjustment.