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### Reflection Paper 1

#### **Understanding of Loss, Grief, and Communication:**

When I was 8 years old, my grandfather died. No one ever explicitly told me, I had to figure it out listening to the adults talk about it. Looking back, I believe my mom was trying to protect me. Loss and grief are hard topics for even adults to understand, it was unfair to expect my mother to explain it to me as she mourned her father. The first time I felt the *loss* of my grandfather was when I saw him lying in a casket. I understood then, he was gone. Personally, I define loss as the moment when a person loses something or someone that was important to them. Loss does not always have to signify a death, but it does signify an absence of some kind. Grief goes hand in hand with loss, and I define grief as the process that a person goes through while trying to cope with their losses. Grief is not an emotion that is felt the same amongst everyone. I do not think grief ever really goes away, it seems to be an emotion that creeps around and shows up when you least expect it. Even 13 years after my grandfather's death, I still get struck by random pangs of grief. It hits when I least expect it, when I do something that reminds me of him. It hits even harder when I realize there's things I do not remember anymore, like his voice. I think the communication surrounding loss and grief is considered very taboo. The conversations surrounding loss tend to be avoided, and when it does get touched on, it tends to become very awkward. Personally, I get very awkward when a person talks to me about their loss, not because I do not care, but because I am always scared to say the wrong thing. I can only

assume that other people feel the same way. Conversations surrounding loss and grief should be gentle, but it tends to be something really scary. Personally speaking, my family isn't very good at communicating about grief and loss. When my grandfather passed away, no one ever told me and it was something I just had to figure out. I do not blame my family for their reaction, this was our first big loss, and I do not think the adults knew how to deal with it either. For this reason, I believe it is important to make sure these conversations happen amongst everyone and not just in familiar or close relationships.

### **Master Narratives of Grief and Loss:**

One thing that is widely believed about grieving someone who has passed away, is that only those close to them get to grieve and be sad. This is a socio-cultural master narrative that can be very hurtful to those who experience grief. This narrative is also widely shown in the media, which only strengthens it. An example of this is social media. Recently, the death of actor Bob Saget shook the internet. There were many people grieving, saying that he was their TV dad, that they grew up with him. However, there were also a lot of people criticizing the fact that these people were mourning a complete stranger. The idea that in order to grieve someone you have to know them strengthens the idea that only people close to the loss are allowed to grieve.

Another socio-cultural master narrative about grief and loss is that it has to be a private thing. Emotions in general are seen as something that should be kept private, and that is especially true when talking about emotions surrounding grief. This is widely seen in the workplace. A personal example of a time I saw this happening was when I worked at Arby's. I always worked the morning shift, and would clock out as soon as the afternoon shift showed up. One day, a person who wasn't usually scheduled to work in the afternoon showed up. She explained to me that our coworker had lost their uncle, and that they would return when they

were ready to be back. I said I understood and moved on. Although it is thoughtful to give a person time to grieve however is needed, it is not okay to expect them to return to work, or school, thinking that they will be the same person they were before. I am not sure if this is the case for most people, but it seems to be a common theme that people get offered time off to grieve and then it is never spoken about again. I think this narrative can be resisted by making grief an emotion that is not seen as unprofessional. Instead, we should encourage people to talk about what they are feeling, and ask in what ways we can help them.

Although there are many socio-cultural master narratives about grief and loss, the majority of the ones I grew up surrounded by were familial. As I mentioned in the previous section, my family always tried to shield me from death. This meant I was not told when a person died, or if I was, I was not allowed to go to the funeral. I remember that the same year my grandfather passed away, an uncle of mine also lost his life. He was in his early 20's and he died tragically in a car accident on his way home from college. I remember I was there when my mom got a call about the accident, and I was there as she called every hospital in the city trying to find him. Then, I was sent away to an aunt's house because apparently, my cousin wanted to have a sleepover with every child in my immediate family. Two days later, for the second time in my life, I attended a funeral. However, I never stepped foot inside the funeral home. All the children sat on a cold bench to the side of the funeral home, and the adults took turns watching us and buying us snacks. I knew my uncle had died. But if I knew, why was no one talking to me about it? Why didn't anyone understand that I understood too? My family comes from a very traditionally Mexican culture. For some reason, this means that children are shielded from the problems of the real world. Children are not told when someone dies, they are just expected to understand. Although it can be hard, I believe there are ways to resist this narrative. Children,

although little, are very smart human beings. Therefore, they should be spoken to with the same kind of respect that adults expect. This means that they should be included in conversations surrounding death, grief and loss. This will result in healthier communication surrounding these topics once that child becomes an adult.

### **Sub-Learning Goals for the Quarter:**

After my first two weeks in this class, I have become more comfortable with the course objectives and how they pertain to me. For this quarter, I have decided to set some goals surrounding my communication around grief and loss.

My first sub-learning goal is to critically reflect on the master narratives that were taught to me when I was a child. When I was a child, grief and loss were not subjects that were often talked about. Because of this, the way I communicate about grief and loss as an adult has been severely affected. I believe that the activities and the readings assigned in this class will help me become more comfortable with speaking to other people about grief and loss. In order to accomplish this goal, I commit to being open about what I learned and how it affected me. I also commit to allowing those around me to join me in my unlearning journey, and letting myself be vulnerable and honest with them too.

Another sub-learning goal of mine this quarter is to be able to use arts-based strategies to help me feel more comfortable with myself. I am the type of person who will not do something if I do not think I can do it right. For this reason, the idea of doing art in class made me feel a bit uncomfortable. I am not uncomfortable with art itself, but I am uncomfortable with the fact that I may not be too good at it. Ever since I was a child, I knew that art was not my strongest suit. For this reason, I tended to do more reading and writing than art. Now that I am in college, it has become nearly impossible to do anything artistic. Now, I have the opportunity to do art and to

explore a new side of myself that I have not really gotten a chance to explore before. This sub-learning goal will also help my goal about better communicating about grief and loss. Arts-based strategies can help me become more comfortable with communicating about grief and loss because it will help me relax. In order to accomplish this goal, I commit to working on every art-based assignment without judging myself or my art. I am my own biggest critic, and I will not allow myself to put down my hard work.

Finally, the main sub-learning goal I have for this quarter is to become more comfortable with the idea of grieving a person who is not dead. Along with becoming comfortable with grief and loss, I want to be able to grieve people who I have lost but not to death. In life, I think it's expected that some people are gonna exit your life but that does not mean it's easier. I have personally cut ties with a lot of people who were not good for me, and sometimes I still get sad about it. These people are not dead, but it's almost as if they were. I hope that the exercises in this class help me understand how I can grieve these people, even though they are still alive. I understand that grieving a person who has passed away is very different, and it might be harder, but I think I am still allowed to grieve. In order to achieve this goal, I commit to really taking in everything we learn and to apply it to my life. I am not going to let myself overthink about what I'm going through, and I will simply allow myself to feel what I have to feel.