



Differences in Grieving Amongst Children and Parents

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INTRODUCTION

I had my first encounter with grief at eight years old, following my mother's death from cancer. After dealing with the loss of a parent at such a young age, I understand how hard it can be to deal with. That being said, I have always wondered how my grandmother dealt with the loss of her child, and how different her experience was from mine. The question or problem I would like to look into, specifically within the Bay Area, is how the grieving process differs in parents who have lost a child versus children who have lost a parent.



Stages Of Grief

RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

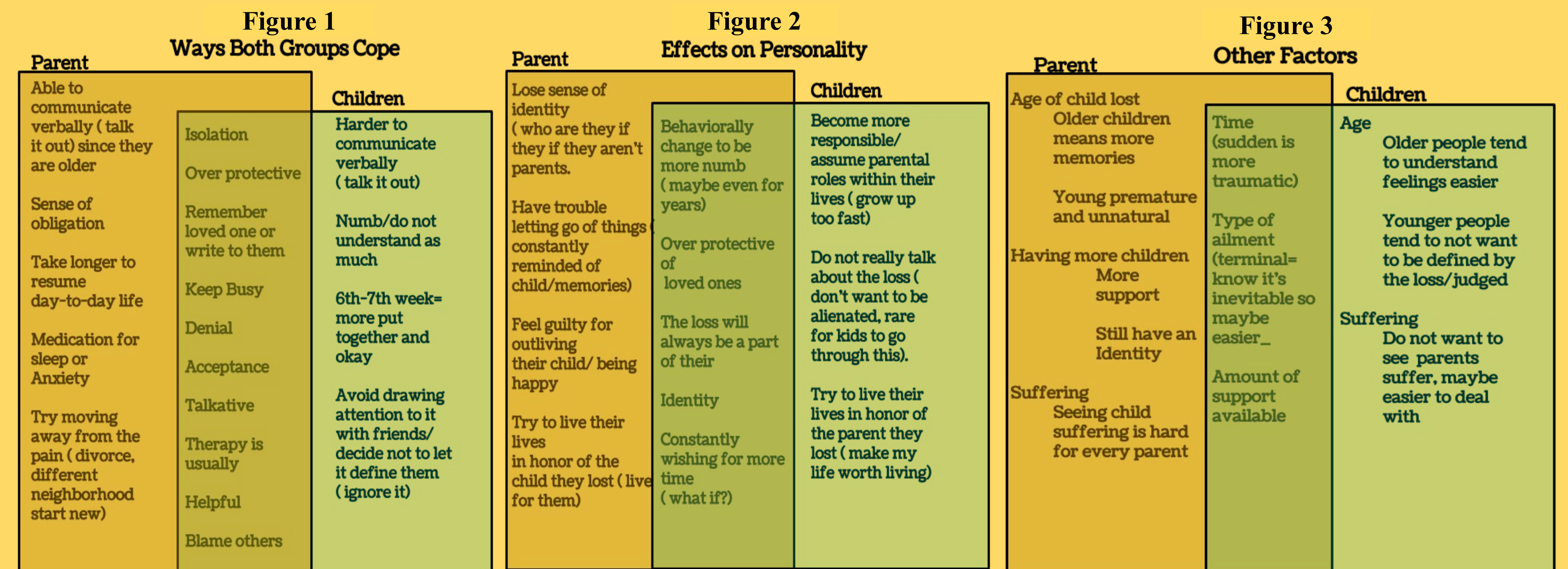
The inquiry approach I used when conducting my research was a phenomenological approach, as I interviewed different grief counselors in the Bay Area and out of state, as well as focus groups. I did this by using interview questions for the grief counselors that are more focused on the various aspects of grief that might be different in children and adults, specifically the different mannerisms and causes and effects that occur.

The data analysis technique I used is coding. This method was the best for sorting the data I gather into different themes I want to explore, such as the five different stages of grief and individual processes that are demographically dependent.

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DATA AND FINDINGS



After interviewing six grief counselors in the Bay Area and one out of state, I coded their responses into three data categories. Figure 1 shows the data comparing the ways both demographics cope, Figure 2 shows the data comparing changes in personality, and Figure 3 shows the data comparing other factors in the grieving process.

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSIS

Through my findings, I was able to see clearly that children who have lost parents and parents who have lost children go through a grieving period that is very similar, with only slight differences. Generally, both demographics tend to isolate themselves and go through a period of denial/acceptance, and both groups find therapy helpful.

Additionally, the age of the deceased and death conditions take a toll on both groups, and significantly impact the breadth of the emotional period. Lastly, both groups tend to take on more responsibility, hold onto things, and often feel a sense of regret. Key differences are shown in communication ability, as adults are more able to articulate their feelings, while children are not as communicative and may have a harder time understanding and working through the loss. In addition, the ability to "move past" the trauma is generally easier among children (they do not understand as much) and harder for adults (hard to envision the rest of their lives without this person, etc.). The grieving process can be easier for parents who have the support of their spouses or other children, as opposed to children, who have limited support/resources (e.g., an only child losing their parent).

IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

My findings are important in that they show how these two demographic groups grieve in similar traumatic events, that the process is not all that different, and that the majority of the differences are attributed to age. In addition, my findings could finally allow people to understand the feelings they are going through, that this is natural and inevitable, and that these things should be discussed more. Grief is something that is not prioritized, and there is a lot of stigma in our society around talking about it, which is something that must be changed. For future work, I would recommend possibly interviewing individuals from the two demographic groups (an adult and a child) and collecting first-hand insight into how their respective grieving periods compare (same or different). As someone who has experienced this as a child, I had wanted to collect first-hand data as part of this project, but unfortunately, I was unable due to the ethical complications. I think it would provide interesting and important material that can further spread awareness.

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