

Thursday, 08 March 2007

Human Development

Trading Post or Grave Site?

**A brief reflective essay examining the grieving process
behind Chad's Trading Post**

Picture walking into a small, family restaurant in Massachusetts, sitting down in a booth and waiting for your waiter to come take your order. You start looking around and realize that many of the workers have things like “Chad's brother,” “Chad's father,” and “Chad's best friend” written on the backs of their shirts. You also notice that there are pictures of this kid plastered all over the walls, and what seems to be memorabilia—little knick-knacks—of his life. How would you feel? Would you think that this family lost their beloved son and are attempting to keep his spirit alive, or would you think that it was just downright creepy and the family needs to move on?

However you would personally feel, one thing should be fairly apparent given the above situation; the family members are grieving over the death of their child. This type of grief, according to Levinson and Prigerson, is traumatic grief because it involves an event that is “unexpected” (2000). The remaining family members—Chad's father, mother, siblings, and friends—are all experiencing a specific type of traumatic grief known as chronic grief. According to the DSM-IV-TR, chronic grief is when the bereaved “remain interminably in a state of grief without progression of the mourning process towards completion” (Worden, 1991). Chad's family members are still mourning his tragic death, which occurred more than 15 years ago. Though the DSM does not explicitly declare a time frame for so-called “normal” grieving, 15 years does seem abnormal when compared to the typical 18-month typical grieving pattern for widows (***)).

Chronic grief has the possibility of causing problems in the future. Personally, I worry about the mental and psychological health of Chad's friends who work at the Trading Post. While it's very thoughtful of them to remember and honour Chad through working in the restaurant that was his high-school dream, I fear that they might not continue on with their lives in the same manner as if they hadn't started working there in the first place. By staying at the restaurant years after his death, the friends are exhibiting signs that they haven't yet completed the grieving process, and therefore are fixated on Chad's untimely demise. This type of fixation could easily impact future friendships and relationships in many different hypothetical ways. For instance, the friends' obsession with remembering Chad may come off as odd and even frightening to new people, and could therefore hamper the formation of future friendships. Moreover, the friends might be preoccupied with Chad's death and be

consumed with thoughts about the possibility of their other friends dying 'before their respective times.' In either hypothetical scenario, the friends would be experiencing significant social impairment as a result of their chronic grief.

Personally, I believe that the grief expressed by Chad's family and friends is both helpful and harmful. In that, I believe that creating the restaurant in his honour is helpful, considering that is what he always wanted to do. It nicely serves as a way of keeping his spirit alive. However, keeping his pictures up all around the store and wearing shirts designating each employee's relation to Chad is excessive and potentially harmful. In my opinion, the family and friends are completely engulfing themselves in Chad's *death*, instead of the healthier alternative of remembering the good parts of his *life*.

REFERENCES:

Glass, I. (23, Sept. 1999). *This American life* [Radio broadcast]. Washington, D.C.: Public Radio International.

Worden, J.W. (1991). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner* (2nd ed.). London: Springer. Retrieved from <http://www.adhd.com.au/grief.htm> on 08 March 2007.

*** Reference removed in order to protect source's identity.