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**I WISH YOU WERE HERE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON A STORY OF GRIEF AND
THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL CAPITAL**

BY

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DISSERTATION

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirement for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Doctor of Philosophy in Organization, Information and Learning Sciences

The University of New Mexico
Albuquerque, New Mexico

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DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my beloved husband, Robert. Although he always said one of his life goals was to be quoted, as an extreme introvert, he would likely hate that I'm telling some of his story while researching grief and psychological capital (PsyCap). That realization almost stopped me before I began. But he also wanted to be married to Dr. Albright and was extremely proud that I was pursuing this degree. He loved being in conversation with me about the topics I was studying, and, although he lovingly joked about being a UNM widow, he graciously gave me the space to succeed in my classes. While he was alive, my dissertation focus was on stories in the workplace and how they affected the psychological capital (PsyCap) of individuals. After his death, I realized telling the story of my grief and PsyCap was a unique way of looking at stories and PsyCap. In some ways, I think he would be thrilled to be so deeply involved in making the dream of becoming 'Dr. Albright' a reality.

Robert was my best friend, favorite conversationalist, lover, personal chef, and playmate. Meeting, dating, and marrying him were some of the best things that ever happened in my life. He loved me for me, not because of family ties, but simply because he could. I loved him for all he was and worked our whole married life to try and give him a glimpse of the amazing and unique person he was. I will forever be thankful for the woman he helped me become. And I will forever have a heavy heart that our life together was cut short by our choices. I love him, and I wish he was here.

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**I WISH YOU WERE HERE: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY ON A STORY OF GRIEF AND
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ABSTRACT

We have all experienced grief. The death of a person or pet, the death of a relationship or end of a job, and even disappointments carry with them experiences of grief. Whenever someone or something dies, we try to make meaning of the situation to find some closure and move toward a new normal. Meaning making occurs as we tell our stories, share our experiences, and sort through memories. Qualitative research is much the same. In qualitative research one might hear, see, or experience a story, then sort through the details, looking for ways to explain and bring meaning and understanding to it. This autoethnographic dissertation is part of that meaning making journey for me. My husband, Robert, died in December of 2017 after many years of being an alcoholic. Using my Facebook posts, journals, photos, and field notes, I looked at my grief story and my psychological capital (PsyCap.) I also used the Psychological Capital Questionnaire as a data source. In this qualitative longitudinal study, I explored what our grief stories tell us about our PsyCap, what we can learn about PsyCap and our experience of the stages of grief, and how the malleability of PsyCap is an interplay of its four component resource parts (hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism.) PsyCap, as a composite construct of four component resources, and grief, have not to my knowledge, been studied in this way. This dissertation opens doors to new and compelling ways of looking at both PsyCap and grief.

Key words: grief, psychological capital, PsyCap, story, autoethnography, qualitative research, stages of grief, longitudinal study, malleability of PsyCap, Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ)

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Chapter 1: Introduction

I don't want to. I don't want to celebrate Christmas without Robert. I don't want to start the new year without his daily presence in my life. I don't want to keep working without being able to debrief the day with him. I don't want to keep going to school without the ability to talk the ideas I'm learning about over with him. I don't want to watch movies without him. I don't want to listen to music without him. I don't want to, but I will. I know I have many things still to do, many ideas to still birth, many experiences to still be absorbed in. I don't want to do any of it without the love of my life. But, I will. I need to, for me, for my future, and for those I might still influence in this life. For this moment though, I don't want to. (Albright, Facebook, December 10, 2017, "I don't want to continue participating in life without Robert, but I will")

Grief. We have all experienced it in some form or another. Perhaps we have grieved the death of a loved one, friend, acquaintance, pet, or the death of a relationship, the end of a job, or the completion of a season of life. Grief is a universal experience, but how we experience grief is as unique as our fingerprints. This research study is an in-depth look at my unique grief experience after my husband, Robert's long illness and death. Using the lens of my story of grief and my experience of the stages of grief, I analyzed my psychological capital, including its malleability.

Definition of Terms

Before we get into the background of the study, there are a few terms that I need to define. Whether the terms are common or new, I want to make sure you understand the nuance of what I mean when I use them. Table 1 has a summary of the following terms.

Autoethnography

Autoethnography is a research method that “uses personal experience (*‘auto’*) to describe and interpret (*‘graphy’*) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices

(‘*ethno*’)” (Adams, et al., 2017, p. 1). Autoethnography is a way of conducting research and writing about that research that strives to understand a unique cultural experience (Ellis, et al., 2011). Autoethnographies are “highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author/researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding” (Sparkes, 2000, p. 21). In other words, autoethnography uses one person’s story to take a deep, researched dive into their cultural and social world in order to gain transformative understanding.

Autoethnography must not be confused with autobiography. Autobiography is a literary genre and is the telling of a single person’s story by that person. It is “the biography of oneself narrated by oneself” (Britannica, n.d., Autobiography). Autobiographies have no requirement to follow a research method or even use accurate and appropriate data. Autobiography is a literary genre. Autoethnography “is a form of ethnography of one’s own culture, rather than a piece of autobiography” (Reed-Danahay, 2020, p. 7).

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method. Qualitative research revolves around the lived experiences and cultural realities of people. Autoethnography is a research method that allows for first person, under the surface details to be examined and interpreted and it shares many of the same characteristics as ethnography. Ethnography tends to look at groups from the group’s perspective. Autoethnography examines groups or individuals but tends to be written from the perspective of a single researcher. Autoethnography has been called many things over the years. . . self-ethnographies, confessional ethnographies, critical ethnographies, auto-anthropology,

self-reflexive field accounts, and ethnobiography (Reed-Danahay, 2020). Throughout all its various names, autoethnography is fundamentally a single person's ethnographic narrative that reflects a "wider cultural emphases on self-revelation and confession, and an appeal to subjectivity and lived experience" (Coffey, 1999, p. 117).

Ethnography and autoethnography usually include extensive field work. Both the ethnographer and an autoethnographer look for patterns in the data they collect and discuss the findings in the form of "a cultural portrait and personal reflections" (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015, pp. 295-296).

However, the purpose of autoethnography is slightly different from that of ethnography. It includes disrupting norms both in research practice and in the way the research is presented; "working from insider knowledge;" writing and research to make life better; "breaking silence/(re)claiming voice;" making the work accessible to those within and outside the specific field of research (Holman Jones et al., 2016, p. 32); and describing "moments of everyday experience that cannot be captured through more traditional research methods" (Adams, et al., 2017, p. 4). Autoethnography "emerged to account for the role of personal experience in research, to illustrate why the personal is important in our understanding of cultural life, and to more fully articulate the complex research and decision-making processes researchers engage in, in the conduct of their work" (Holman Jones et al., 2017, p. 33).

Richardson (2000) suggests ethnography be evaluated using five criteria.

1. Substantive contribution: Does this piece contribute to our understanding of social-life? Does the writer demonstrate a deeply grounded (if embedded) human-world understanding and perspective? How has this perspective informed the construction of the text?

2. Aesthetic merit: Does this piece succeed aesthetically? Does the use of creative analytical practices open up the text, invite interpretive responses? Is the text artistically shaped, satisfying, complex, and not boring?

3. Reflexivity: How did the author come to write this text? How was the information gathered? Ethical issues? How has the author's subjectivity been both a producer and a product of this text? Is there adequate self-awareness and self-exposure for the reader to make judgments about the point of view? Do authors hold themselves accountable to the standards of knowing and telling of the people they have studied?

4. Impact: Does this affect me? emotionally? intellectually? generate new questions? move me to write? move me to try new research practices? move me to action?

5. Expresses a reality: Does this text embody a fleshed out, embodied sense of lived-experience? Does it seem 'true'—a credible account of a cultural, social, individual, or communal sense of the real'? (p. 254)

As a variation of ethnography, these criteria are true for autoethnography as well. Does this research make a substantive contribution by researching sociological understandings? Does the text encourage or invite responses? Is it reflexive? Does it have impact? Does it express a cultural, social, individual, or communal reality that seems credible? These are critical aspects of an rich and thick autoethnography.

"The author of an autoethnography . . . is the indigenous ethnographer, the native expert, whose authentic first-hand knowledge of the culture is sufficient to lend authority to the text" (Reed-Danahay, 2020, p. 7). Through autoethnography, the researcher's story is examined, revised, and retold. That telling allows the readers to revise and retell their own stories. "The story is one's identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell" (Lieblich et al, 1998, p. 7). As an

autoethnographer, I am responsible for this cycle of telling and retelling, so that insights and meaning are potentially discovered by both the researcher and the reader.

Grief

When someone experiences great loss there are typically three words used to describe the experience: grief, mourn, and bereavement. To mourn is to “feel or express great sadness, especially because of someone’s death” (Dictionary.Cambridge.org, n.d., mourn). A root word for mourn, *morna*, suffixed from the Proto-Indo-European root *(s)mer*, also gave English the word remember (etymonline.com, n.d., mourn). “Bereavement is the period of grief and mourning after a death” (medlineplus.gov, bereavement). A root word for bereavement from the Old English, *bereafian*, also gave English the words rob and deprive (etymonline.com, n.d., bereave).

For me, grief encompasses mourning and bereavement. Interestingly, a Latin root word of grief, *gravis*, also gave English the word gravity. “The Latin adjective meant ‘heavy, weighty,’ and it formed the basis of a verb *gravare* ‘weigh upon, oppress’” (Ayto, 1990, p. 264). Bereavement - to rob or deprive, mourn - to remember, and grief - to feel the gravity, the heavy weight, the oppression of the situation, these are all part of the grieving process for me.

Since grief is the word I feel encompasses the entire experience of mourning and bereavement, I will be focusing on that concept in this research. What do I mean when using the term, grief? Interestingly, many of the books and articles I have found on grief do not define it. They just jump right into discussing it, as if everyone knows what grief

is. Perhaps that is true. But, for clarity, here is a definition that resonates with my understanding and experience of grief. “Grief is the response to loss, particularly to the loss of someone or something that has died, to which a bond or affection was formed” (Grief, 2020, para. 1). Part of the reason I like this definition is that it hints to an idea that grief can occur at times other than when a person dies.

How long does grief last? Several people told me early in my grief journey that the more intensely I knew and loved Robert, the more intense and long lasting my grief would be.

There are many who never fully recover and “get back to normal,” in contrast to the frequently observed capacity of the bereaved in primitive societies to smile, laugh, and go about their ordinary pursuits the moment the official mourning period is ended. The lack of conventionalized stages in the mourning process results in an ambiguity as to when the bereaved person has grieved enough and thus can legitimately and guiltlessly feel free for new attachments and interests. (Blauner, 1992, pp. 26-27)

I don’t believe I will ever “get back to normal” and that’s ok with me. My grief over the death of Robert, in some form or another, will likely last my lifetime.

Psychological Capital

Psychological Capital is another term used throughout this dissertation.

Psychological Capital flows out of the field of positive psychology and was introduced into workplace application by Fred Luthans to enhance positive organizational behavior. Positive psychology places a “greater emphasis on examining what was right with people and what contributes to human flourishing and growth potential” (Luthans, et al., 2010, p. 44). Positive organizational behavior (POB) is “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be

measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement” (Luthans, 2002b, p. 59). As positive organizational behavior was developed, several criteria were implemented to serve as foundational criteria for POB. The criteria included development of theory and research, use of valid measurements, being state-like, and having “a positive impact on work-related individual-level performance and satisfaction” (Luthans, et al., 2007b, p. 542). Hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were “determined to meet the inclusion criteria” for POB (Luthans, et al., 2007a, p. 542). Luthans defined optimism, hope, confidence (a term sometimes used for efficacy), and resiliency “as positively oriented psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and managed for performance improvement. They are collectively referred to as psychological capital or simply, PsyCap” (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 342). PsyCap also flowed out of the concept of human capital, “the experience, education, skills, knowledge, and ideas that people bring to their jobs” (Froman, 2010, p. 62). PsyCap “looks at the issues of human capital but takes it in the direction of positive psychology looking at such issues as who are our employees, and how do we develop them to their fullest capacity” (Boverie, Grassberger & Law, 2013, p. 388). PsyCap is used both as a way to analyze POB and as one of the tools used to strengthen individual employees and thus the positive behavior of the organization. It “is not only concerned with ‘who you are’ (i.e., human capital) but also, in the developmental sense ‘who you are becoming’” (Luthans, Avey, Avolio and Petersen, 2010, p. 42).

PsyCap is a “higher order positive construct composed of the four first-order constructs of *hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism* (or the HERO acronym)” (Luthans,

et al., 2015, p. 3) and “enhances the attitudes, behavior, personality and performance of individuals” (Gautam and Pradhan, 2018, p. 26). It is

an individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by (1) having confidence (efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals and, when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope); (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resiliency) to attain success. (Luthans, et al, 2015, p. 2)

From this definition we can see the four separate yet interconnected component parts of PsyCap are: hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism (see Figure 1.) These four component resources were first referred to as HERO by Fred Luthans (Luthans, 2012). PsyCap is not an umbrella term, a quick way to reference hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. It is a construct of its four component resource parts and is present when all four synergistically work together.

Figure 1

PsyCap’s Component Resource Parts . . . HERO



Story

Story is another term I will use regularly that can have several meanings. What do I mean by story? Some people think of a story as a fairy tale. Others think of stories as descriptive narratives. When I talk about stories, I mean a factual narrative recounting of the day or factual happenings in life with the intention to communicate, to the best of the teller's knowledge, the remembrance and experience of them.

Humans are natural storytellers. Fisher (1990) describes humans as *homo narrans*, a play on the term *homo sapiens*. When we examine our own stories, "we can begin to understand the underlying purpose of narrative, which is to enable us to make sense of our experience" (Clark, 2001, p. 87). The stories we tell have the potential to influence how we live our lives and interpret the experiences of life.

Autoethnography, grief, PsyCap, and story are key terms I will use regularly throughout this research. Table 1 shows a quick summary of those terms.

Table 1

Summary of the Definitions of Important Terms

Term	Definition
Autoethnography	A qualitative research method that combines aspects of ethnography and autobiography by studying one person's story to take a deep, researched dive into their unique cultural experience and social world in order to gain transformative understanding.
Grief	A response to the death of a loved one, friend, acquaintance, pet, a relationship, the end of a job, or the completion of a season of life and can last a lifetime.

Table 1 (cont.)

Psychological Capital (PsyCap)	A “higher order positive construct composed of the four first-order constructs of <i>hope</i> , <i>efficacy</i> , <i>resilience</i> , and <i>optimism</i> (or the HERO acronym)” (Luthans, et al., 2015, p. 3) that “enhances the attitudes, behavior, personality and performance of individuals” (Gautam and Pradhan, 2018, p. 26). PsyCap occurs when hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism are present.
Story	A factual narrative recounting of the day or factual happenings in life with the intention to communicate, to the best of the teller’s knowledge, the remembrance and experience of them.

Background of the Study

PsyCap has mostly been studied in workplace settings, indeed businesses are the setting for which it was originally designed (Avey, et al., 2009; Avey, et al., 2008; Culbertson et al., 2010; Froman, 2010; Gallup, 2007; Luthans et al., 2007; Luthans et al., 2010; Paterson et al., 2014). PsyCap can enhance “the individual and collective human condition in all facets of life, especially at work” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. ix). However, even in the workplace setting, the focus is on developing individual’s PsyCap to enhance the overall positive organizational behavior (Luthans, et al., 2007; Gautam & Pradhan, 2018; Luthans, et al., 2015; Youssef-Morgan et al., 2015). PsyCap concerns individuals within an organization and as such can be used outside organizations as well.

When I started thinking about what to research for my dissertation at the beginning of my PhD journey, my focus was slightly different. My original focus explored psychological capital in the workplace and how the stories we tell within that setting can influence the positive organizational development of the workplace. I have

always had a fascination with stories and their role in shaping how we understand the world. When I learned about PsyCap, I thought stories might be an influencing factor in the strength of an individual's psychological capital. After my husband's death, I realized I had a powerful story to share about my own grief journey, my stages of grief, and how my PsyCap interacted and showed malleability. This insight fine-tuned my research to a personal setting, one which might speak to the broader experiences of others.

In the end, the setting of this study was my grief journey through the illness and death of my husband and several years following his death. Grief is a vulnerable topic for discourse and research, but I am willing to be vulnerable in the hope that my journey may shed some light on the grief experiences of others. This grief setting was the lens through which I looked at my psychological capital, learned about it from my stories and stages of grief and studied its malleability. In a very real and vulnerable way, I am studying my sociological experience and understanding of grief and demonstrating how PsyCap was a part of my grief experience.

To the best of my knowledge, grief and psychological capital have not yet been studied together. There are many studies that examine grief, and some studies that focus on grief and the individual component resources of PsyCap like hope or resiliency, but I have not found a study that takes a longitudinal look at a personal journey of grief and how psychological capital, as a singular construct, interacted with that journey and showed its malleability.

Several theories were used to frame this study. The theories of grief are primarily based on the work of Kübler-Ross and Kessler. Theories of PsyCap are primarily based on the work of Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, Avey, and Avolio. Theories of autoethnography are primarily based on the work of Holman Jones, Adams, and Ellis. Theories of story are primarily based on the work of Clark and Rossiter. These researchers helped shape my foundational understandings of each of the significant core concepts in my dissertation.

Need for and Purpose of the Study

Why is this study important? My research helps to answer the call of Avey, Luthans and Mhatre for more “longitudinal research designs that advance knowledge of if and how PsyCap fluctuates over time” (2008, p. 705). This kind of longitudinal research will help “yield important information to understanding the state-trait distinction that is so vital to not only the research, but also for PsyCap application” (Avey, et al. 2008, p 707). In addition, it answers the call of Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, and Hirst (2014) for more longitudinal studies on PsyCap’s within-person changes, in other words, PsyCap’s malleability.

What does qualitative longitudinal research look like? Qualitative longitudinal research “focuses on individual narratives and trajectories and can capture critical moments and processes involved in change” (Calman, et al., 2013, p. 1). “One of the major advantages of qualitative longitudinal research is the nuanced understanding of phenomena which evolves through time” (Carduff, et al., 2015, p. 2). It “helps make sense of experiences as they unfold over time: leading to research findings which are

sensitively attuned to the detail of individual experience” (Miller, 2015, p. 293). In autoethnography the “longitudinal perspective . . . refers to a time-related approach in research, which is often focused on the past, but also includes the present and the future” (Eriksson, 2013, p. 3).

Although many topics have been used as lenses to study grief, to my knowledge, psychological capital as a composite construct has not been one. Grief has not been used as a context to study PsyCap. This longitudinal study of the interaction between PsyCap and grief is a first and the purpose is significant. What if our grief experiences and our PsyCap, a state-like characteristic that can enhance “attitudes, behavior, personality and performance of individuals” (Gautam and Pradhan, 2018, p. 26) are intertwined? Grief is universal. Knowing how an individual’s PsyCap interacts with their grief story or their stages of grief, might affect how PsyCap can be used. This knowledge might influence how PsyCap training is designed and conducted. It might expand the use of PsyCap outside the workplace, to be used as a tool in everyday life. It might affect how PsyCap can be used as an influencing factor in life’s experiences, including experiences such as grief.

So, what is the importance of this study? What difference can it make? This study takes a longitudinal look at the interaction between PsyCap and grief during the grief experience. The result of this study is an accrual of both grief and PsyCap knowledge. It also advances the continuing development and use of PsyCap, both for individuals outside of work and in human resource management, as a beneficial aid in the midst of the experiences of life, including grief.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of a dissertation describes the overarching theories that have the potential to inform the research. “Theoretical framework simply states the theory aspect of your work, the existing, tested and viable theories backing up your current research” (Afribary, 2020, Theoretical Framework vs Conceptual Framework . . .)

The two basic theories that frame my research are:

1. Grief theories
2. PsyCap as a construct composed of component resources

Grief Theories

An important theoretical foundation for this study is the theory of grief.

Although there are many grief theories in use today (Bass, 2020; Bonanno, 2019; Davis Konigsberg, 2011; Westberg, 1962 & 2019), I have primarily focused on Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s theory of the five stages of grief (2005), denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. In addition, I have discussed the theory of anticipatory grief (Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), and Kessler’s sixth stage of finding meaning (2019). Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s work has been the forerunner in discussions of stages of grief. Even when there is disagreement about which stages and whether there are stages, Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s work is mentioned. Since their stages of grief seem to be a common language of grief, I am using them as a tool and one of the theoretical foundations of my research.

PsyCap as a Construct Composed of Component Resources

Another theoretical framework that informs this research is the concept of PsyCap as a construct composed of component resource parts. Each of the component resource parts of PsyCap: hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism, “are interconnected constructs” (Bajwa, et al., 2009, p 506). The components of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism can be considered for research individually, but as the construct of PsyCap, the component resource parts have a synergistic relationship that strengthens an individual’s ability to deal with life’s circumstances, both inside and outside the workplace. In this research I am looking for PsyCap by coding for the individual component resources. When hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism are present the unique synergy of PsyCap can be found.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of a research study are the specific theories that will be used in the study. Below is a discussion of the conceptual theories that will inform the framework of this research.

1. PsyCap is a state-like construct and therefore malleable.
2. Grief can be experienced in stages.
3. Stories are the primary way we learn and make meaning.

PsyCap is Malleable

PsyCap is considered state-like. In positive psychology, states and traits exist on a continuum. Traits are related to personality and are those things that “appear consistent across different occasions and situations” (Price et al., 1987, p. 397). Traits

are “very stable, fixed, and very difficult to change” (Luthans, et al., 2007b, p. 544).

Intelligence is often considered a trait. States, on the other hand are “momentary and very changeable” (Luthans, et al., 2007b, p. 544). Feelings are often considered a state.

In the continuum, trait-like characteristics are “largely genetically based and very difficult to change” (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017, p. 345). However, state-like resources are “relatively malleable and open to development” (Luthans, et al., 2007b, p. 544). PsyCap is considered to be in the state-like category of the continuum (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, 2007; Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, and Hirst, 2014). “PsyCap resources are conceptualized to be more stable than states such as moods or emotions, but not as fixed as personality traits such as conscientiousness” (Luthans, et al., 2010, p. 44). PsyCap is “between transient states, which are momentary and very changeable, and ‘hard wired’ traits, which are very stable and difficult to change” (Newman et al., 2014, p. S122). PsyCap can also change based on circumstances. It is flexible and pliable. “Psychological capital is also subject to change (increase or decrease) depending on the work context such as the amount of social support they receive, leadership, and/or organizational climate” (Petersen, et al., 2011, p 432). Other constructs, considered state-like, include “wisdom, well-being, gratitude, forgiveness and courage” (Luthans, et al., 2007b, p. 544).

Some disagree or even discount PsyCap as state-like. For instance, Culbertson et al. (2010) call PsyCap a “state-like trait”, which seems to be a jumble of terms that seem to contradict each other. Hobfoll (2002) refers to self-efficacy as a trait. Steele and Wade (2004) suggest “optimism seems to be a stable trait” (p. 236). Froman (2010) calls

hope an emotion. Snyder (2002) refers to hope and self-efficacy as traits. And Sytine et al. (2019) refer to all the aspects of HERO, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism, as traits.

Clearly, there is not consensus. However, I agree with Luthans et al. and Newman et al., that PsyCap, as a composite construct, is more “state-like” than “trait-like.” It is not fixed, like a trait, but neither is it unstable, like a pure state. PsyCap is state-like and therefore, malleable.

Grief is Experienced in Stages

Another key conceptual framework for this research study is the idea that grief can be experienced in stages, albeit cyclical or concurrent. The word ‘stages’ can be misleading. Neither Kübler-Ross, Kessler nor I believe the stages are linear. Instead, they are landings that you can expect to experience in one form or another, often in a cyclical or concurrent way, coming back to them in different ways at different times. This autoethnography about grief is an opportunity to speak in detail about what is often left unspoken, but intensely, and perhaps universally experienced.

Stories Help Us Make Meaning

A third key conceptual framework for this research is the idea that stories are formative and help us make meaning. This theory, Narrative Learning Theory (NLT), is a primary foundation for choosing to use stories in my dissertation and a significant part of my learning experiences. NLT helps us understand how we read ourselves into the stories we hear and the stories we tell. What is NLT?

Narrative Learning Theory “falls under the larger category of constructivist

learning theory, which understands learning as construction of meaning from experience” (Clark, 2010, p 63). It “connects experiential learning and the notion of narrative as a sense-making medium” (Clark, 2010, p 5). We learn from stories. We learn from hearing stories, from telling stories, and from recognizing ourselves in stories (Clark, 2010). “When we hear, we are the receiver; when we tell, we are the actor, the one putting all the details together and making the experience coherent for ourselves and for others.” (Clark, 2010, p. 6)

In narrative learning theory, we argue that there is an even closer connection between learners and experience. The nature of experiences is always prelinguistic; it is ‘language’ after the fact, and the process of narrating is how learners give meaning to experience. Narrative learning is constructivist in character, but the construction of the narrative is necessary to make the experience accessible (that is, to language it), and how it is constructed determines what meaning it has for the person. (Clark, 2010, p. 64)

Stories can be a source of learning, a tool for learning, and a way to remember learning. They can also be a way we make meaning of life experiences.

These theories helped me to see and better understand the extent to which my PsyCap was present in my grief story and my experience of the stages of grief. They help to frame my research.

Significance of the Study

Amid the current worldwide pandemic, COVID-19, grief, stress, and even mental health issues seem to be increasing. Dyrdek Broad and Luthans reflect in a recent article that “the future global mental health demands are significant, and collectively, we do not have the supply to meet the current demand . . . as a result, novel, innovative, stigma eliminating approaches such as PsyCap . . . seems essential” (2020, p. 543).

PsyCap has already been shown to help stress loads (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan (2017); Kalman and Summak, 2017; Avey, Wernsing, and Luthans, 2008; Avey, Luthans, and Jensen, 2009; Bajwa et al., 2018; Gautam and Pradhan, 2018; Sytine et al., 2019; and Wiedenfeld et al., 1990; Da, et al., 2020; Petersen et al., 2011; Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020). PsyCap has been called on as “critical resources needed in today’s stress-filled workplace” (Avey, et al., 2009, p. 680). Now PsyCap is being looked at in the field of mental health. What if it can play a role in grief?

Is there a reciprocal relationship between the stories we tell ourselves during grief and our PsyCap? Knowing the interaction of an individual’s PsyCap in their grief stories and experiences of their stages of grief might affect how the innovative, novel construct of PsyCap is developed on an individual, stigma-eliminating level. Could PsyCap be used to help people navigate the grief journey? The insights this research explores can help future researchers design tools to develop PsyCap in a way that honors the grief journey of individuals.

Autoethnographic research design has played a role in making this research significant and valuable. As the world has been engulfed in a pandemic, millions of people have experienced grief through the loss of normal life interactions, changes in circumstances, loss of jobs, and the death of friends and loved ones. People all over the world are living stories of grief and loss. “The psychologist and novelist Keith Oatley calls stories the flight simulators of human social life. Just as flight simulators allow pilots to train safely, stories safely train us for the big challenges of the social world” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 58). Perhaps the autoethnographic research design will serve as a

flight simulator for those who read my dissertation. In telling my story of grief, why and how I struggled and made the decisions I did, and how my PsyCap was a part of that story, readers of this dissertation might “train” for their own grief journeys.

In addition, “many scientists now believe we have neural networks that activate when we perform an action or experience an emotion, and also when we observe someone else performing an action or experiencing an emotion,” and these “mirror neurons” may help us play these fictional simulations over and over in our minds (Gottschall, 2013, p. 60). This may occur for those who read my dissertation and is another way this autoethnographic study can be significant. Autoethnographies “allow another person’s world of experience to inspire critical reflection on your own” (Bochner and Ellis, 1996, p. 22). By reading this dissertation and hearing my grief story and the role PsyCap played in it, readers might imagine my experience, which may bring new understandings to their own experiences with PsyCap and grief.

Research Questions

A strong research design is based on the research question and the argument that research is needed to fill a gap in knowledge. “Qualitative research questions are open-ended, general questions” (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015, p. 181). They typically begin with how or what, “use neutral exploratory language and refrain from conveying an expected direction or prediction” (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015, p. 181).

My primary research quest is to explore PsyCap and grief. I have done this by specifically looking at what the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our psychological capital and what can be learned about PsyCap from my experiences of the

stages of grief. I also looked at what my grief stories and the psychological capital questionnaire reveal about the malleable characteristics of PsyCap. Each of these questions have been answered with an intense, longitudinal, and autoethnographic look at PsyCap through an individual's grief stories.

Research Design

Autoethnography is an appropriate research method to study a unique and personal cultural experience to gain sociological understanding. Since my research revolved around studying my unique experiences to gain sociological understanding of grief and the role of PsyCap, choosing autoethnography as my research method was a strong choice. Autoethnography evolved, in part,

to create particular and contingent knowledges and ways of being in the world that honor story, artfulness, emotions, and the body; to treat experience and individuals with responsibility and care; and to compel all who do, see and listen to this work to make room for difference, complexity, and change. (Holman Jones, et al., 2016, p. 25)

“In contrast to more traditional ethnographic forms, autoethnographic writing is based upon and emerges from relationship and context.” (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 57). To do that, rigorous data collection is an important aspect of the methodological framework and good qualitative research. Data collection procedures must include gathering multiple forms of rich and thick data. “Autoethnographic inquiry incorporates many of the standard forms of traditional qualitative data collection – such as fieldnotes, interviews, and personal documents” (Anderson and Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 58) and “audiovisual materials” (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015, p. 338).

“Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary material (data) for social investigation” (Chang, 2016, p. 108).

In autoethnography, experience is being “interpreted, made sense of, and judged” (Holman Jones, et al., 2016, p. 54). Autoethnographers analyze the data, in part, by richly and thickly describing their experience, remembering that our memories are mutable. “As we grow older and/or change our perspective, our relationship to the events and people of the past changes, too. The past is always open to revision and so, too, are the stories of the past and what they mean now.” (Holman Jones, et al., 2016, p. 54).

Autoethnographic data can include “autobiographic data such as memories, memorabilia, documents about themselves, official records, photos, interviews with others, and on-going self-reflective and self-observational memos” (Chang, 2016, p. 108). The data can be gathered through “recalling, collecting artifacts and documents, interviewing others, analyzing self, observing self, and reflecting on issues pertaining to the research topic” (Chang, 2016, p. 113). Data should allow the researcher to accurately and thoroughly “learn about participants’ perspectives and experiences” (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015, p. 349). I have used Facebook posts, journaling, photos, fieldnotes in the form of self-observational memos, and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire in my research to help me remember my perspective and experiences throughout my grief journey.

Positionality

Part of my positionality includes believing that PsyCap is state-like, malleable with the possibility of change. Individuals, who are open to learning, can be taught to recognize and strengthen their hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. “The term ‘state-like’ . . . means these characteristics can be developed in a person. It has been shown that Psychological Capital can be trained and improved with practice and intentional effort.” (Luthans, Avolio & Avey, 2007, p 3). This research explored the changes I have experienced in my PsyCap during my grief journey.

I also bring a strong bent toward looking at the stages of grief as fluid, sometimes cyclical, or concurrent experiences. This research looked at PsyCap and how it impacted my experience of the stages of grief. I also position myself as one who understands life through stories. Indeed, some of the most meaningful and memorable learning I have experienced has been in the form of stories. This research looked at how PsyCap interacted with the grief stories and stages of my grief journey.

My positionality comes from my own story and background. I taught in the church for 20 years and, during that time, earned a certificate in Christian Education and two master’s degrees in church-related fields. Even my undergraduate degree was in church music. Knowing the stories, morality tales, and spiritual concepts of the Hebrew/Christian Bible and finding ways to share those stories through music, bible study, art, experiential learning, and lived experiences was my life’s focus for 20 years. I was always looking for ways to connect the stories of the Bible to the stories of the lives of the people I worked with and mentored. Story and our relationship to it became a

part of my core, my identity. Even after moving to a different career, stories continued to be a part of my everyday life and thinking. Only now, I no longer intentionally connect our stories to biblical stories. I am more interested in seeing the connections of all stories to one another. Stories of nature, history, shared experiences, and experiences seemingly completely foreign to us can all find connections to our personal story.

One of the story themes I find myself coming back to throughout my life has been a story of grief. I have experienced the death of loved ones, relationships, and work situations. I have experienced small griefs like expectations unmet or goals unfulfilled (Westberg, 2019). In each grief experience I found myself living the stages of grief. Sometimes a stage was truncated, and often stages were repeated. Even with these multitudes of grief experiences, I was not prepared for the grief I experienced when my husband, Robert, died in December of 2017.

Robert had been sick for several years. Although he knew he was ill, he always blamed it on something other than his medical diagnosis, alcoholic liver disease. I believe it was only a few days before his death that Robert realized the extent of his illness. Prior to that, I think that he believed he could choose to make himself better at any moment.

Because Robert never admitted to being seriously ill, we never talked about death, and I was never able to process my grief about his illness, his attitude about seeking help, and his imminent death while he was sick. This has shaped my grief journey after his death.

I also believe that grief often has a unique way of unburdening us of the positionality we imagine for ourselves, bringing us to a common place of rawness. As I continue on this grief journey, I am discovering that grief, like music, is a universal language that almost all of us have experienced as an ebb and flow through our lives.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

Creswell and Poth speak of the importance of thinking about the assumptions a researcher brings to a research question/inquiry (2018, p 18-22). I brought several assumptions to the research based on the theories mentioned above. The first is that everyone experiences grief. The second is that PsyCap has the power to strengthen an individual for life's experiences and journeys.

In addition, I also brought philosophical assumptions to my work. Ontological, epistemological, methodological, and axiological assumptions are important to recognize and articulate. More will be written about each of these assumptions in chapter three.

Limitations

Clarifying the limitations of the study is another important foundational aspect of good qualitative research design. A limitation of my research was that, to the best of my knowledge, the combination of PsyCap, grief, and autoethnography has never been used in research before. That has been both exciting and a little foreboding. Another limitation is that autoethnography is sometimes an underestimated and misunderstood qualitative method. A further limitation has been the difficulty in successfully shifting

between “personal narrative” and “placing the autoethnography in a broader cultural, historical and political context” (Alexander, 2015, p. 550), in other words, the shift between being the researcher and the one researched.

In addition, it is difficult for autoethnographers to avoid implicating others in their writing (Tullis, 2016). In the simple act of telling my story, I have implicated both Robert and myself. Also, in talking about my experiences, I have implicated my family, and by referring to my journaling, including Facebook posts, I have implicated by proxy those who commented on the posts. Even if I do not mention specifics or names, these people may be implicated. This is a limitation of using story to describe and interpret a culture, even if, on the surface, it seems to be the grief culture of a single person.

Design Flaw Limitations

“Autoethnography is an approach to research and writing that seeks to describe and systematically analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 1). As such, it “acknowledges and accommodates subjectivity, emotionality, and the researcher’s influence on research, rather than hiding from these matters or assuming they don’t exist” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 2). The willing use of subjectivity, emotionality, and researcher influence must also embrace meticulous strategies to build trustworthiness and rigor. Without this counterbalance, the research ceases to be autoethnographic and instead becomes an autobiography.

Delimitations/Intentional Areas Not Investigated

I have not investigated every aspect of Robert’s life, my life, and our lives together. Although many aspects have been pertinent to my grief story and the

research questions I have explored, there are aspects of our lives that have not been relevant to this research story. I also have not investigated every nuance of grief. Nor did I investigate every way PsyCap can be used. This study was an autoethnography focused on my grief journey during my husband Robert's long illness and death, how my PsyCap interacted in those stories and my stages of grief, and how I found my PsyCap to be malleable. It was a very personal, longitudinal, and narrow look at these topics and one I believe fills a significant gap in research and opens the door for future studies.

My autoethnography is only my version of events; they are not Robert's. It is my version of events both at the time and looking back with lenses of grief, PsyCap, and healing. If someone else who knew Robert and I told the same story, they would bring up other facets of the experiences, and they would look at it through their own lens. Even if everyone involved participated, there would be memories inadvertently or perhaps purposefully left out. There would be experiences and conversations forgotten. There would be nuances of conversations missed at the time and never remembered fully. Even so, "autoethnography, as a method, can lead to emotionally and intellectually powerful texts that extend out beyond the page or the stage to affect audiences and communities" (Tullis, 2016, p. 246). This aspect of autoethnography is part of why a study of this nature has the potential to be so significant. Autoethnography is research that is observed, explored, lived by the author, and then relived and interpreted by the audience.

Chapter 1 Summary

In this chapter, we have looked at key terms, the need for the study, its purpose, and its significance. We have also looked at the research design, its limitations, as well as the significance of the study, and my assumptions. In the next chapter, we will take a deeper look at the literature pertaining to PsyCap, grief, and stories. Following that, we will look in detail at the autoethnographic research method used for this dissertation. Once the foundational understandings of the topic and methodology are in place, we will look at the research results and discuss ramifications and future research.

A Storied Moment of Grief

My head was spinning. I just got the call from the hospital. Robert was failing fast. They'd been trying to get hold of me for a few hours. Could I come? I looked at the clock. It was 4 a.m. Why did I take that cold medicine to help me breathe? Why did I come home? Why didn't I stay? Where are my jeans? Oh, please Lord, help me get to the hospital as fast as is safely possible.

Robert died just before I arrived on Saturday, December 2, 2017. His body was still warm, but it was clear his spirit, his essence was gone.

(Albright, Fieldnote, Spring 2020, "Hospital Call to Come Now")

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

In the Spring of 2017, I took a course on wisdom. Although I did not need it for my degree, it came highly recommended and I felt, as a life-long learner, I needed it for my own knowledge. Robert and I always talked about all the various topics I studied, and the wisdom course was no different. At one point in those conversations Robert said, “I think wisdom is, in part, not drawing either/or lines. Wisdom is liminal.” I was deeply struck by his words and wrote them down in my Notes app. I remember him asking what I was doing. When I told him I was writing down what he said, his cheeks flushed with pride.

As I worked on this chapter, I realized Robert’s statement is true for much of this literature review. There is very little black and white, either/or in grief, PsyCap or stories. Most of the information is liminal. Liminal is a beautiful shade of grey. It is both/and. It is like standing in the door frame and neither being out of the room you are coming from nor quite in the room you are entering.

Even this autoethnography is liminal. For example, it is generally written somewhat informally. It can even be poetry or presented as performance art. Dissertations are generally formal. As I have written and researched, I have felt like I have walked a fine line between what is expected in a dissertation and what can be accomplished through autoethnography. Another way of saying that is, I have tried to live in a liminal space somewhere between the two by creating a dissertation that

follows the prescribed requirements, but in a way that is conversational, engaging, and perhaps even slightly informal. This dissertation is, in its own way, liminal.

The wisdom from the literature that follows is in many ways, liminal. It is neither black nor white. It shares insights, learnings, and opinions. The various articles and books often show convergent thinking between authors as well as dissonant reasoning between authors. The learnings from the literature are both/and. They are liminal.

Methods of Searching

How did I find all these resources? In general, I found them by searching databases such as Academic Search Complete, APA PsycInfo, APA PsycArticles, ProQuest, and by using Google Scholar. I used terms such as ‘psychological capital or PsyCap’ and ‘grief or loss or bereavement or mourning.’ I did not limit my search to only peer-reviewed texts, but also looked at books and articles in less scholarly non-peer-reviewed journals. In addition, I used the reference sections and interesting quotes in the books and articles I read to lead me deeper into the topics.

Since I was not able to find any resources that mentioned PsyCap *and* grief, I looked to references where PsyCap *or* grief were researched. When choosing specific references on grief, I gave specific preference to those that described the grief experience, and I especially gave preference to those who are widely considered forefathers and foremothers in their field. I also gave preference to those that mentioned the death of a spouse, death by suicide, or alcohol abuse. In addition, I looked for resources that broadly described the ways different cultures experience grief and to those authors who discussed grief’s effects on health. When choosing specific

references for PsyCap I looked to the originators of the term and primary researchers in the field.

Theoretical Orientation and Review of Literature

Story

Overview.

A story can be many things, if not all things: account, achievement, adventure, alibi, allegory, anthropology and all words ending with -logy, anecdote, apology, ballad, belief, bet, byword, case study, catharsis, challenge, chat, chronicle, confession, contrivance, correspondence, creation, crisis, defamation, disagreement, discourse, discovery, discursive formation, dream, epic, episode, etymology, event, excuse, experience, fable, faction, failure, fantasy, fiction, finding, folly, function, future, glossolalia, gossip, happening, hearsay, heresy, hesitation, historiography and all words with -graphy, information, interpretation, invention, issue, joke, journey, justification, legend, lesson, lie, matter, metamorphosis, metaphor, model, myth, narrative, news, nightmare, novel, ontogeny, phylogeny, and other words ending with -geny, past, perspective, plot, poem, poesis, praise, prayer, prejudice, pretense, pretext, problem, project, promise, prophecy, protest, question, reason, recital, recommendation, religion, report, research, reverie, ritual, rumour, scene, science, slander, statement, subject, tale, testimony, translation, travel, truth, vicissitude, yarn, Zeitgeist. Everything can be a story, if only because everything is the outcome of a process; although not everything is 'sayable' (Jackson, 2002: 21)" (Maggio, 2014, pp. 90-91).

Yes, a story can be many things, and when I use the word, I am specifically referring to a factual narrative recounting the day or factual happening in life with the intention to communicate to the best of the teller's knowledge, the remembrance and experience of them (see Table 1).

Stories have been a part of our lives as humans probably since the early moments of trying to communicate with one another. "Telling tales is one of the hardwired instincts of our species; it is a natural way of communication" (Yang, 2013, p. 144). Cunningham quotes Philip Pullman who takes it a step further by saying, "After

nourishment, shelter, and companionship, stories are the thing we need most in the world” (2015, p. 5).

“Many different root metaphors have been put forth to represent the essential nature of human beings . . . I propose that *Homo narrans* be added to the list” (Fisher, 1990, p. 62). This play on the term *homo sapiens* highlights an essential characteristic of stories. They are our core.

Why have stories become such a critical part of our daily lives, relationships, and interactions? Some evolutionary thinkers think stories

are just lucky accidents of the mind’s jury-rigged construction. Story may educate us, deepen us, and give us joy. Story may be one of the things that makes it most worthwhile to be human, but that doesn’t mean story has a biological purpose. (Gottschall, 2013, p. 29)

Others believe that “if story were just pleasurable frippery, then evolution would have long ago eliminated it as a waste of energy. The fact that story is a human universal is strong evidence of biological purpose” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 30).

Yang discusses how “storytelling is firmly rooted in the evolution of our brain and several neurological apparatus for language development” (Yang, 2013, p. 134). For Yang, “elaborate storytelling must have emerged as an adapted cognitive device for collecting and sharing important social and geographical information, which was critical for our foraging ancestors in terms of the successful exploitation of scattered resources” (Yang, 2013, p. 135). Perhaps as Gottschall proposes, “the human mind was shaped *for* story, so that it could be shaped *by* story” (2013, p. 56).

We seem to be surrounded by stories. We can find them in books, newspapers, journals, movies, TV shows. They fill our conversations, our emails, and our texts.

Stories are the foundation for social media. We live in “a story-shaped world” (Sarbin, 1993, p. 63). Cunningham suggests

We live in a time where stories exist where they always have: inside the walls of our homes, outside our front doors, in our backyards, on our playgrounds, in the pages of books, in the brushstrokes on canvas, in the imaginative play of children, and in the lyrics and rhythms of songs. Yet, today we are also free to tap into and curate stories in new ways. (2015, pp. 1-2)

“The story is one’s identity, a story created, told, revised, and retold throughout life. We know or discover ourselves, and reveal ourselves to others, by the stories we tell.” (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 7). Those stories are often relational. “They can convey experiences, personal identities, preferred stories, justifications and explanations. Narratives can also mobilise [*sic*] people to collective actions” (O’Toole, 2018, p. 178). The stories we tell are situated in our life, during a specific time, in a particular space and place. “Every story lives somewhere. That place is defined by time, location, perspective, the people involved, and your intent” (Nuriddin, 2018, pp. 46-47). We often use story to help us learn and make meaning from life’s experiences.

Stories and Meaning Making.

By examining our own stories “we can begin to understand the underlying purpose of narrative, which is to enable us to make sense of our experience. Because we are instinctive storytellers, this is a fundamental mode of meaning making” (Clark, 2001, p. 87). This is not an easy process. Instead, it requires, among other things, the ability to tell the story, examine it for the reality it describes and the embellishments it shares, retell the story, make connections, and see it in relation to other life experiences and relationships. “Sensemaking is the cognitive process of building internal

representations of external worlds and construing the causal relations among objects and people to construct a functional map of social relationships” (Yang, 2013, p. 141).

“Experience itself is prelinguistic; it exists prior to and apart from language. We access it, reflect on it, make sense of it through languaging it, which is to say, through narrating it. In short, we learn narratively” (Clark, 2010, p 5). Through the telling and retelling of our life stories, we begin to understand ourselves and our relationship to the world. We begin to make meaning. We are “an unfolding story” because “as we understand the world and our experiences narratively, so also do we understand and construct the self as narrative” (Rossiter, 1999, p. 62). Through our stories, meaning is made and “identities are fashioned” (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992, p. 1). Nuriddin, in quoting Andrew Abela, shares

stories are fundamental to how we think, learn, and make sense of the world around us. Storytelling has been present in every age of human history and in every civilization and culture. Stories appear to enable understanding and memory, and much of both child and adult learning appears to be acquired through a story format. One important reason that stories are so powerful is that information delivered through stories is more memorable. Memory is strengthened by linking information together, and stories link information in multiple ways. Also, stories engage the emotions, and this too aids memory. (Nuriddin, 2018, p. 28)

Stories help us remember. In the remembering, events and experiences become meaningful for us when we “read ourselves into the story” (Hummel, 1991, p. 36).

Stories in Research.

Stories are valuable in research, both as a tool for imparting information and as a tool for collecting information. “Narrative is a metacode, a human universal on the basis of which trans-cultural messages about the shared reality can be transmitted”

(Fisher, 1990, p. 65). We understand one another through the stories we tell of the experiences we encounter. "The act of narration is significant. Telling a story can help someone make sense of their world and so build understanding of themselves and what they do" (Gearty, 2015, p. 161).

We story our identities in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways; in one context we can see ourselves as the hero of the story, while in another we are someone whose agency is limited. These multiple narratives that constitute our identity enable us to manage the complexity of who we are. (Clark, 2010, p. 62)

Within the human experience, grief is part of that complexity. Stories help us to navigate our grief experiences.

"A story may have melody, pitch, and loudness or, in our terms, content and form – content, which comprises many interwoven, sometimes conflicting, themes, and form, which may be characterized by structure, style, coherence, and other attributes." (Lieblich et al., 1998, p. 168). The researcher brings his or her own unique interpretation by choosing the story being told and how they choose to tell it. It is also, in part, the job of the researcher to unravel the storied identities of the person/people researched. This is made even more difficult when the researcher and person researched are one and the same.

Leiblich et al. suggest, "that stories are usually constructed around a core of facts or life events yet allow a wide periphery for the freedom of individuality and creativity in selection, addition to, emphasis on, and interpretation of these 'remembered facts'" (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 8). Everyone has a story. They are each detailed, nuanced, oft mis-remembered, and life-forming. My story is no different.

It is important to remember that our memories are not stored as a sort of video recording, we can play back at our leisure. Memories are stored in various pieces scattered across different areas of our brains (Gottschall, 2013). “Memories for sight, sound, taste, and smell are stored in different locations” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 169). Our “storytelling mind . . . stitches and pastes the scraps and fragments into a coherent and plausible re-creation of what might have occurred, taking his usual poetic-license” (Gottschall, 2013, p. 169). Because of this, our memories are fragile, faulty even. They are “not precise records of what actually happened. They are reconstructions of what happened, and many of the details – small and large – are unreliable” Gottschall, 2013, (p. 169).

What does the fragility of memories mean for a research design based on memories, the stories that help us interpret life and make meaning? Faulty memory is a burden we all bear. Yet, hearing how I am remembering and interpreting my story might be helpful to someone struggling with their own memories and finding ways to make meaning of them. Uri Hasson, a professor of psychology at Princeton Neuroscience Institute, “and his colleagues observed that when personal stories are told the brains of both storyteller and listener synchronise” (Maggio, 2014, p. 95). Stories, mis-remembered, re-membered, woven, and rewoven, still have great power to teach, to paint a picture of reality and knowing. “Even though my story yearns towards and responds to your story, even though there are points of irrevocable contact between our stories, there is no merger or collapse of one into the other” (Gannon, 2016, p. 237). Through autoethnography our stories intertwine and mingle, and we can see how our

realities connect and perhaps discover new understandings about ourselves and the world in which we live.

“When a particular story is recorded and transcribed, we get a ‘text’ that is like a single, frozen, still photograph of the dynamically changing identity” (Lieblich, et al., 1998, p. 8). I may not be perfect in recounting all the nuanced details outside the still photograph of a memory, but my story of the memory is, nonetheless, a relatively accurate portrayal of that moment in time, enhanced by using journaling, Facebook posts, and fieldnotes from that moment of memory. “Creating the space for stories to be created, shared and listened to in a reflective environment opens up safe and interesting pathways to individual inquiry and learning” (Gearty, 2015, p. 161). I am hopeful that this is the kind of autoethnographic space I have created for my research and dissertation.

Summary of Story.

“Helping individuals not only learn through the telling of their own stories but also through their engagement in the stories of others” is an important aspect of narrative learning (Gearty, 2015, p. 160). Whether telling or hearing,

“humans evolved to crave story. This craving has, on the whole, been a good thing for us. Stories give us pleasure and instruction. They simulate worlds so we can live better in this one. They help bind us into communities and define us as cultures. Stories have been a great boon to our species” (Gottschall, 2013, p 197).

Stories are critical to a strong autoethnography. They make the experiences tangible. They are also an integral part of the journaling, Facebook posts, fieldnotes and the pictures that I am using as my data sources. Stories are liminal as well. When a story

is shared in a rich and meaningful way, the hearer often finds themselves standing in the liminal space at the edge of the story heard and at the edge of their own story. Stories are helping me fill the gap in knowledge related to PsyCap and grief.

Psychological Capital (PsyCap)

Overview.

My research has looked at the higher order composite construct of psychological capital (PsyCap) and how it was part of the story of my grief journey and experiences of the stages of grief. What is PsyCap? “PsyCap can be conceptualized as personal psychological capacities and resources” (Culbertson, et al., 2010, p. 422). The term

refers to a higher order construct derived from a constellation of motivational and behavioral tendencies associated with self-efficacy ('having confidence to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks'); hope ('persevering towards goals and when necessary redirecting paths to goals'); optimism ('making a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future'); and resilience ('when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond to attain success') (Dawkins, et al., 2013, p. 350).

The higher order construct of PsyCap consists when the four first-order constructs are all present. “Hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism share a first-order internalized sense of agency, control, and intentionality” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 30). These four constructs, sometimes called HERO, also share an underlying ability to positively appraise circumstances and the “probability for success based on motivated efforts and perseverance” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 30).

Psychological capital is sometimes referred to as “an individual’s positive psychological state of development” (Luthans, et al., 2007b, p. 542). Psychological development refers to the psychological age of a person. It is, in its essence, “how well

a person can adapt to social and other environmental demands” and includes such things as “intelligence, learning ability, motor skills, and subjective dimension like feelings, attitude, and motives” (Craig and Dunn, 2010, p. 309). Intelligence, learning ability, and the like, can grow and mature throughout the life of an individual. The same is considered true of PsyCap.

“PsyCap is concerned with ‘who you are’ now and, in the development sense, ‘who you are capable of becoming’ in the future” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 6). It is “a combination of a person's characteristics open to development, such as self-efficacy, hope, optimism, resilience” (Gautam & Pradhan, 2018, p 26). Those four “PsyCap resources tend to be renewable, complementary, and synergistic” (Luthans, et al., 2015, p. 35).

Background of PsyCap.

Psychological capital stems from the field of positive psychology. Positive psychology is a field within psychology that focuses on the positive aspects of life, and what is going well, as opposed to the negatives or what needs to be fixed. “It focuses on the scientific study of optimal human functioning and the variables that promote positive human emotions, traits, and institutions” (Yadav and Kumar, 2017, p. 200). Martin Seligman founded the discipline of positive psychology. He “believed psychology should give at least an equal amount of attention to the study of human strengths, virtues, and positivity, as compared to the study of human weakness, pathology, and negativity” (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 343). “The aim of positive psychology is to begin to catalyze a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the

worst things in life to also building positive qualities” (Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). Some, like Shawn Achor (2012), talk about the concepts within positive psychology as “positive intelligence.”

PsyCap “has emerged as a leading evidence-based positive approach to human development, drawing from previously largely untapped psychological resources (Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism, or the HERO within)” (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 542). It has been researched all over the world including China, Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Romania, South Africa, Pakistan, Vietnam, Portugal, Egypt and the Middle East, and the United States (Luthans et al., 2015).

Its relationship to many topics has been researched, including creativity, problem-solving and innovation, job search, well-being, work-family conflict, and service quality and customer satisfaction (Luthans et al., 2015). Research on PsyCap also includes guiding “how employees perceive stress symptoms, but also the impact of stress on intentions to quit and job search behaviors” (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009, p. 678), boosting students’ ability to cope with stress and challenges (Bajwa, et al., 2018, p. 506), predicting “satisfaction with important life domains such as work, relationships and health” (Bajwa, et al., 2018, p 505), preparing “teachers to successfully manage cognitive and emotional challenges of working and challenging circumstances” (Kalman and Summsak, 2017, p. 673), fulfilling both eudaimonic (filling one’s potential) and hedonic (subjective happiness) motivation for well-being (Culbertson, et al., 2010), and demonstrating longitudinal effects on well-being (Sytine et al., 2019, p. 642).

PsyCap and Stress.

Studies of PsyCap have begun to support the relationships between the four positive psychological states and lower perceptions of overall stress (Avey, Reichard, Luthans, & Mhatre, 2011). Previous research has also demonstrated that PsyCap is related to psychological well-being (Avey, Luthans, Smith, & Palmer, 2010), subjective well-being (Graf et al., 2015), stress symptoms (Avey, Luthans & Jensen, 2009), and both desirable and undesirable employee outcomes, such as work performance, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, job stress, and turnover intentions. (Sytime, et al., 2019, p. 642)

Petersen, et al. suggested that “The level of an employee’s psychological capital may be an important resource for being considered for ambiguous, complex, challenging, or crisis-oriented assignments because psychological capital may buffer employees from the potential stress associated with such assignments” (2011, p. 446). Riolli, Savicki, and Richards looked at PsyCap and stress and determined “this higher-order concept [psychological capital] may offer an avenue to boost students immunity to stressors, or even to shape the way in which they appraise and define events to reframe them as motivational challenges rather than debilitating threats” (2012, p. 1205). Avey, Luthans, and Jensen (2009) “propose that when combined into the core construct of PsyCap, the positive resources of efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience may provide a better understanding of, as well as practical guidelines for managing, the stress epidemic plaguing today’s organizations” (p 679).

A number of factors contribute to workplace stress, ranging from technological change and global competitive pressures to toxic work environments and managerial bullying (Colligan & Higgins, 2006). Heavier workloads and increased business travel also affect stress levels. . . Downsizing; rapid changes in competitive pressures, technology, and work procedures; heightened levels of job insecurity; and ever-demanding customers make today’s workplace arguably even more stress-laden than it was just a decade ago. (Avey et al., 2009, p.679)

Change, workloads, and pressures at work and at home contribute to our stress.

“Experience of daily demands has been shown to be related to increased stress and diminished health and mood” (Sytime, et al., 2019, p 641).

What constitutes stress? “The classic definition of stress offered by Lazarus (1966) is that it ‘occurs when an individual perceives that the demands of an external situation are beyond his or her perceived ability to cope with them’” (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009, p. 679). Or to look at it another way, stress “occurs when there is a loss of resources, a threat of loss, or when individuals fail to gain resources after substantive resource investment” (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 547).

In other words, we are stressed when we don’t think we have the resources to cope with our situation. It does not matter why we don’t think we have the resources, or what our situation is. When the level of perceived resources does not match the level of perceived need, there is stress.

My research revolved around the idea that PsyCap might be a part of my grief story and experiences of my stages of grief and that it was malleable. Is it possible that my PsyCap offered an avenue to boost my ability to cope with stressors that were beyond my control, namely Robert’s health and eventual death?

PsyCap, as a unique higher order composite construct consisting of four component parts, is used as a tool to strengthen individuals in work and life. At work, it helps them cope with the stresses of the job, and in turn strengthens the human and psychological capital of entire organizations. How does PsyCap do that?

The Synergistic and Interrelated Nature of PsyCap.

PsyCap arguably has a synergistic effect, whereby the whole may be greater than the sum of its parts. It is purported that this effect occurs because PsyCap incorporates the coping mechanism(s) that the four individual components have in common (Avey, Reichard, et al., 2011). This mechanism process is attributed to psychological resource theory (Hobfoll, 2002), which states that some constructs are indicators of broader, multidimensional 'core' factors, which aid individuals in producing favourable outcomes, such as job performance. (Dawkins, et al., 2013, p. 350)

PsyCap as a construct, benefits from the coping mechanisms that are elements of its component resource parts: hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. In this way it can be used to help reduce stress. Bajwa et al. suggest that "the four dimensions of psychological capital, namely: self-efficacy (confidence), optimism, hope, and resiliency are interconnected constructs" (2018, p. 506). There is an overlapping nature of the four aspects of PsyCap.

The factors of PsyCap interact synergistically. For example, hopeful individual who possess the agency and pathways to achieve their goals will be more motivated to and capable of overcoming adversities, and thus be more resilient. Efficacious people will be able to transfer and apply their hope, optimism, and resilience to the specific tasks within specific domains of their life. Resilient individuals will be adept in utilizing the adaptational mechanisms necessary for realistic and flexible optimism. PsyCap efficacy, hope, and resilience can in turn contribute to an optimistic explanatory style through internalized perceptions of being in control. These are just representative of the countless positive synergies that result from the interaction among the four factors that affect overall PsyCap. (Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, and Avolio, 2015, pp 30-31)

Hope influences resiliency. Without hope, why rebound? Optimism and hope influence efficacy. Without optimism and hope, how do you find the strength to motivate yourself to keep going, keep trying? "The four positive resources interact in a synergistic manner such that an individual is at his or her operational best when one resource is

informing the other (Luthans, et al., 2010, p. 48). There is an overlapping, synergistic aspect of PsyCap's component resource parts.

If the constructs of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism are seemingly interrelated, what does that say about psychological capital? Is PsyCap a construct of its own, unique from its interconnected parts? Dawkins et al. (2013), and Luthans, Youssef and Avolio (2007a) concede that PsyCap may indeed be greater than the sum of its parts. Luthans quotes several other researchers who seemingly agree that PsyCap as a whole "has consistently shown higher correlations with outcomes than any of the individual positive psychological capacities of efficacy, hope, optimism, or resiliency by themselves (e.g., see Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2006; Luthans, Avolio, Walumbwa, & Li, 2005)" (Luthans et al., 2007c, p. 212). The four component resources "hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism – synergistically shape attitudes, behaviors, and performance associated with goal accomplishment and success" (Lin, et al., 2016, p. 404). They enable "an individual to uphold an internalized sense of control while goals are being successfully pursued" (Nolzen, 2018, p. 242). In fact,

PsyCap has been both theoretically (Luthans, 2002a, 2002b; Luthans, Youssef, et al., 2007, Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2013) and empirically (Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007; see also reviews by Avey et al., 2014; Dawkins et al., 2013; Newman et al., 2014) been clearly demonstrated to be a second-order construct which accounts for more variance in attitudes, behaviour and performance than the four individual positive constructs that make it up." (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 545)

Together, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism, are "four resources synergistically interacting to form the core construct of PsyCap" and "can be expected to lead to higher performance based on their reinforcing greater extra effort" generating "multiple

solutions to problems, positive expectations about results leading to higher levels of motivation, and positive responses to setbacks” (Luthans, et al., 2010, p. 48).

Although other studies separate from Luthans et al. have found support for PsyCap as a unique and separate construct (Gautam and Pradhan, 2018, Sytine et al., 2019), but not everyone believes that the support for PsyCap as a strong individual construct is sufficient. Dawkins et al. suggest there is “insufficient evidence for establishing discriminant validity of a construct, particularly one rapidly gaining scholarly attention” (Dawkins et al., 2013, p. 361). The data points to PsyCap as a unique construct, however, the data shows that as a composite construct PsyCap is strongly correlated to its component resource parts (Luthans, Avolio, and Avey, 2007).

In this research, am I talking about PsyCap as a construct, or am I talking about PsyCap as simply an umbrella term for its four component resource parts? Am I researching the construct PsyCap or its component parts? The answer is, in reality, both. Think of PsyCap for a moment, as a piece of apple and raisin pie. PsyCap is the piece of pie, all of the goo, the apples, the raisins, and crust together. You cannot have that piece of pie without the goo, or without the apples, or without the raisins, or without the crust. They all must be there to have a piece of apple raisin pie. The same is true with PsyCap. It is when I find all four components present in a journal entry, Facebook post, field note, or photograph that I will be able to say PsyCap is fully present. If any one of the four component resource parts are missing, it is not a complete picture of PsyCap as a composite construct. I am researching both PsyCap as a component construct and its four component resource parts, hope, efficacy, resiliency,

and optimism. If the interactive, interwoven dance of the four component resources that make PsyCap uniquely PsyCap are not visibly present then is it likely that PsyCap, as a component construct, is not present in the data.

PsyCap as a Reservoir of Resources.

Positive organizational behavior stems from the field of Positive Psychology. The field of positive psychology at the subjective level is about valued subjective experiences: well-being, contentment, and satisfaction (in the past); hope and optimism (for the future); and flow and happiness (in the present). At the individual level, it is about positive individual traits: the capacity for love and vocation, courage, interpersonal skill, aesthetic sensibility, perseverance, forgiveness, originality, future mindedness, spirituality, high talent, and wisdom. At the group level, it is about the civic virtues and the institutions that move individuals toward better citizenship: responsibility, nurturance, altruism, civility, moderation, tolerance, and work ethic. (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5)

“PsyCap which represents individuals’ psychological resources as a whole is made of human strengths and positive capacities” (Kalman and Summsak, 2017, p. 658). PsyCap is “an individual person’s psychological resource and a core element of success and well-being” (Katajisto et al., 2021, p 323)

Youssef-Morgan and Luthans posit that “positivity and PsyCap can help build a reservoir of psychological resources” (2015, p. 186).

These resources can be used to cope with and overcome challenges, setbacks and times of negativity that may drain these resource reservoirs. Regularly replenished resources, through PsyCap development and management, can help balance and optimize positivity and negativity (Cameron, 2008), leading to higher well-being. (Youssef & Luthans, 2015, p. 186)

“Employees proactively build up their psychological capital resources over time to improve their future performance” (Petersen et al., 2011, p. 432). When individuals “strengthen their enduring personal resources, including intellectual, physical, psychological, and social resources” they can “later be reserved or drawn on as

necessary for coping or survival” (Lin et al., 2016, p. 402). Petersen, et al. also discuss the concept of a reservoir of resources. They posit that

an increase in employees’ psychological capital provides more resources and a stronger foundation for them to draw from and achieve an increase in subsequent performance. Similarly, a decrease in psychological capital may deprive individuals and take away from such a reservoir of resources, resulting in the employee having lower subsequent performance. (Petersen, et al., 2011, p. 433)

“PsyCap, as an underlying capacity consisting of four positive psychological resources, is supposed to be beneficial to employees’ attitudes and performance, both in the workplace and in their personal lives, through the mechanism of improving motivation and cognitive processing” (Da, He, and Zhang, 2020, p. 4).

Avey, Luthans, Smith and Palmer (2010) proposed “that the presence of employees’ positive beliefs and agentic intentions (Bandura, 2008), such as represented by their PsyCap, serve as cognitive resources and a reservoir from which they can draw from to influence their well-being” (p. 19). This reservoir of resources helps to foster “the development of positivity in general, while also providing the opportunity to balance positivity and negativity within the dialectical nature and development of the HERO positive psychological resources that lead to well-being and performance” (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 543).

Why is this reservoir of resources important?

When positive resources such as hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism in PsyCap are developed, positive emotions are not only increased, but there can also be upward spirals of the four positive resources as well. These upward spirals promote the development of overall PsyCap. The broadened thought action repertoires can contribute to the explanation of the synergistic nature of PsyCap beyond the four positive psychological resources that make it up. (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 547)

“If an individual builds abundant resources including personal, social, economic, etc., he or she will be more capable of overcoming obstacles, enduring severe stress, and seeing accomplishments. (Da, He, and Zhang, 2020, p. 4). PsyCap, as a composite construct of component HERO resources can “counteract the distress from resource demands, acting as a suppressor of stress and anxiety” (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 547). In addition, the psychological resources found in the composite construct of PsyCap energize “individuals to perform creatively and to take charge” (Lin et al., 2016, p. 410).

An increase in employees’ psychological capital provides more resources and a stronger foundation for them to draw from and achieve an increase in subsequent performance. Similarly, a decrease in psychological capital may deprive individuals and take away from such a reservoir of resources, resulting in the employee having lower subsequent performance (Petersen, et al., 2011, p. 433)

Positive organizational behavior researchers “believe that capacities such as optimism, hope, confidence, and resilience are not only important to the delivery of important workplace out-comes, but they can be learned” (Peterson et al., 2008, pp. 343-344).

While personality traits . . . are recognized to be relatively fixed and stable over time. . . positive resources, such as those represented by PsyCap, are defined and empirically determined (Luthans, Avey et al., 2008; Luthans, Avolio, et al., 2007) to be statelike (rather than relatively fixed traitlike personality dimensions) and, thus, are open to development and HR management. (Avey, Luthans, Jensen, 2009, p. 687)

PsyCap is “malleable and therefore open to training and development” (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 343). It is a flexible, malleable “bank account of resources a person can draw from” (Petersen, et al., 2011, p. 433). In other words, the reservoir of PsyCap can be drained and filled depending on life experiences and opportunities.

PsyCap at Work.

PsyCap was “first applied to the workplace by Fred Luthans and colleagues at the University of Nebraska’s Global Leadership Institute” (Peterson, et al., 2008, p. 342) as a tool to analyze and strengthen Positive Organizational Behavior (POB) and improve employee performance. “As organizations seek ways to help employees navigate the ever-challenging work environment, they increasingly are recognizing the importance of positivity and concentrating on developing employee strengths, rather than dwelling on the negative and try to fix employee vulnerabilities and weaknesses” (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009, p. 678). Positive organizational behavior strives to look at the human resources within the organization and help individuals manage them by looking at strengths and how they can be improved (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009). Youssef-Morgan and Luthans defined POB as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (2015, p. 180).

PsyCap Outside Workplace Settings.

PsyCap, as a higher order composite construct, building on the synergistic nature of its component resource parts, can be used as a tool to influence individuals outside the work setting as well. For instance, stress and the need to cope with life’s situations do not only occur in the workplace. Luthans and Youssef-Morgan seem to support this possibility.

When these four resources are combined, they form, and have been empirically supported (Luthans et al. 2007), as a higher-order core construct based on the

shared commonalities of the four first-order constructs and their unique characteristics. As indicated above, this is also consistent with Hobfoll's (2002) notion of "resource caravans," i.e., psychological resources that may travel together and interact synergistically to produce differentiated manifestations over time and across contexts. In terms of commonalities, hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism share a sense of control, intentionality, and agentic goal pursuit. They also share the common theme of "positive appraisal of circumstances and probability for success based on motivated effort and perseverance (Luthans et al. 2007, p. 550). (Luthans & Youssef Morgan, 2017, p. 343)

The resource caravans of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism help individuals persist, learn to be "disciplined goal setters, and remain positive in the face of adversity. Further, they have strong beliefs in their abilities and that more good than bad will happen to them and the people around them" (Peterson, et al., 2008, p. 347).

Although PsyCap began in the workplace, "it is also reliably related to a much broader definition of well-being that is more indicative of human happiness, flourishing, and thriving" (Culbertson, 2010, p. 430). "PsyCap measures have also been shown to be adaptable to non-work domains such as health, relationships (Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013), and education (Luthans, B., Luthans, K. & Avey, 2014; Luthans, B., Luthans, K., & Jensen, 2012)" (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015, pp. 182-183). Whether inside or outside the workplace,

individuals with high PsyCap measures have the confidence to take on the task, possess the sustaining belief that they will succeed, can access the motivation to keep going when things get tough or find other ways around problems; and, when the occasional disappointment inevitably occurs, are able to quickly bounce back, recharged and motivated once more. (Lewis, 2011, p. 143)

PsyCap can be applied to "enhancing the individual and collective human condition in all facets of life" both inside and outside of work (Luthans et al., 2015, p. ix). This is an

important point to make since my research looks at PsyCap outside a work setting and helps to fill the gap of PsyCap research in non-work settings.

PsyCap's Component Resource Parts.

About the Resource of Hope.

Hope has been championed by researchers like Snyder (2002), Avey, Luthans & Jensen (2009), Luthans et al. (2007), and Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015). Snyder defines hope “as the perceived capability to derive pathways to desired goals, and motivate oneself via agency thinking to use those pathways” (2002, p. 249). What does agency thinking mean? It is an individual’s determination to achieve the goals they create or adopt for themselves (Avey, Luthans, Jensen, 2009, p 680). Or, more simply said, it is willpower. And what is meant by pathways? Peterson, Balthazard, Waldman, and Thatcher break down the pathway idea. “Hope represents an individual’s determination to set forth and maintain effort and energy toward goals (described as willpower) and the ability to find the best course of action or path to attain those goals (described as waypower)” (2008, p. 344). Waypower thinking means “being able to devise alternative pathways and contingency plans to achieve a goal in the face of obstacles” (Avey, Luthans, Jensen, 2009, p. 680). Hope uses both willpower and waypower to help us persist until we see a ‘way through’ the situations we encounter. It “involves persevering and redirecting paths toward goals” (Culbertson, 2010, p. 423).

Snyder posits a hope model that “contains both feed-forward and feedback emotion-laden mechanisms that contribute to the person’s success in his or her goal pursuits” (2002, p. 255). For Snyder, “there are two general types of desired goals in

hope theory” the type that “reflects positive . . . goals” and the type that “involves the forestalling of a negative goal outcome” (Snyder, 2002, p. 250).

Hope is state-like and can be developed. It can be developed through successfully reaching performance goals and by setting stretch goals. Performance goals “need to be specific, measurable, challenging, and yet achievable. Stretch goals are those that are difficult enough to stimulate your excitement and exploration and yet you feel that they are within your reach.” (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007, p. 18). Hope “is a strategy for identifying goals, garnering the discipline to move toward goals, and removing obstacles that prohibit goal achievement” (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 344). Hope involves both willpower and waypower thinking.

About the Resource of Efficacy.

Bandura is considered by most as the preeminent researcher on the subject of *efficacy*. “Efficacy is based on Bandura’s (1997) social cognitive theory” (Avey, Luthans, Jensen, 2009, p. 680). Bandura defines self-efficacy as “people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives” (Bandura, 1994, p. 71). Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) break it down by saying efficacy is “an individual’s conviction about his or her abilities to mobilize the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action necessary to successfully execute a specific task within a given context” (p. 66). Peterson, et al., suggest that efficacy “refers to one’s confidence in his or her abilities to successfully attain goals or complete courses of action. Confident people engage in challenging tasks, are persistent, and are accepting of improvement feedback when they get off

track.” (2008, p. 344). For Culbertson, et al., “PsyCap efficacy is . . . concerning beliefs about one’s abilities to successfully perform a given task” (2010, p. 423). At the core of each of these definitions is the idea that someone with healthy efficacy understands their strengths and knows how to use them to keep moving forward in the midst of life’s circumstances.

Efficacy can be developed “through mastery experiences, through experiencing success by breaking down complex tasks into successful sub-components” (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007, p. 18) and by “various learning/modeling, social persuasion, and physiological and psychological arousal” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 28). As efficacy is developed, evaluated, redeveloped, and reevaluated, it becomes more robust, and the perception that you have the skills to cope with the stresses of life is strengthened.

About the Resource of Resiliency.

Resiliency has been studied extensively by Masten, Obradović, Avey, Jensen, and Luthans, among others. In a 2006 article, Masten and Obradović defined resilience as “a broad conceptual umbrella, covering many concepts related to positive patterns of adaptation in the context of adversity” (p. 14). Luthans described resiliency with images forever now attached to the concept for me. Resiliency is the “positive psychological capacity to rebound, to ‘bounce back’ from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility” (Luthans, 2002a, p. 702). Resilient individuals tend to handle stress better because they are flexible in their thinking and emotionally stable (Avey et al., 2009). People with high resiliency adapt

quickly to changing situations in life. When they are in the “presence of adversity,” they adapt and grow (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 145).

Resiliency’s “theory, research and measurement are drawn from clinical and developmental psychology. Unique to resilience is that it serves as a reactive function after challenges and setbacks are encountered” (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015, p. 181). “Research indicates that resilient individuals are better equipped to deal with the stressors in a constantly changing workplace environment, as they are open to new experiences, are flexible to changing demands, and show more emotional stability when faced with adversity.” (Avey, Luthans, Jensen, 2009, p. 682)

Resiliency can be developed. The attributes of resiliency include: a) the capacity to make realistic plans and take steps to carry them out; b) a positive view of yourself and confidence in your strengths and abilities; c) skills in communication and problem solving; and d) the capacity to manage strong feelings and impulses. All of these are factors that you can develop in yourself. (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007, p. 7)

“*Resiliency* is one’s capacity to cope successfully in the face of significant change, adversity, risk, or even increased responsibility. Resilient individuals can actually thrive and grow through setbacks and difficulties” (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 344).

About the Resource of Optimism.

When it comes to PsyCap, optimism's primary researchers are Schneider (2001), Luthans, and Seligman (2006). Schneider defines optimism broadly as “the tendency to maintain a positive outlook” (2001, p. 253). She also suggested that optimism can at once be both positive and rational. Schneider warned that optimists could deceive themselves into thinking things are better than they really are (2001). “According to Seligman (1998), optimism is an attributional style that explains positive events in terms

of personal, permanent, and pervasive causes, and negative events as external, temporary and situation-specific” (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007, p. 8). “PsyCap optimism differs from traditional optimism, however, in that it has the caveats of being both realistic and flexible” (Culbertson, et al., 2010, p. 423). People who look at life through an optimistic lens create a positive story even when it is a stressful situation.

It is important to recognize that the negative is not dismissed in PsyCap optimism; it is simply held in tandem, analyzed, and then seen as realistically optimistic.

For example, optimists believe that negative events or failures can be explained as temporary setbacks (“I’m just having a bad week”), while pessimists believe they are long lasting (“I’m never going to get ahead in this organization”). Similarly, when experiencing positive events, optimists attribute success to enduring and lasting factors (“I’m great at what I do, so positive things are expected”). Pessimists, on the other hand, tend to attribute positive events simply to luck or chance (“For once, something went my way”). (Peterson et al., 2008, p. 344)

Optimism can be developed. “Optimism has been conceptualized and measured as both a dispositional trait (Scheier & Carver, 1987) and a state that can be learned and developed” (Youssef-Morgan & Luthans, 2015, p. 181). The “key to developing realistic optimism is: 1) Leniency for the past; 2) Appreciation for the present; and 3) Opportunity seeking for the future” (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007, p 20). Optimism can be encouraged with self-discipline, realistic analysis of past events, “contingency planning, and preventive care” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 124).

Table 2*Summary of HERO Definitions.*

HERO	Definition
Hope	Hope uses both willpower and waypower to help us persist until we see a 'way though' the situations we encounter.
Efficacy	Someone with healthy efficacy understands their strengths and knows how to use them to keep moving forward amid life's circumstances.
Resiliency	Resiliency is the "positive psychological capacity to rebound, to 'bounce back' from adversity, uncertainty, conflict, failure, or even positive change, progress and increased responsibility" (Luthans, 2002a, p. 702).
Optimism	Optimism is "the tendency to maintain a positive outlook" and can be both positive and rational (Schneider, 2001, p. 253).

HERO Summary.

To summarize the four aspects of PsyCap, picture a glass with water filling the vessel about halfway. Is it half empty or half full? Optimism, of course, sees the glass half full. Hope says the glass is never empty. Even without liquid there is still air. Even without air, there are still atoms in the glass itself. Efficacy sees a half-empty glass but does not despair. Efficacy knows it has the motivation needed to refill it. And resiliency sees the glass can be refilled as often as needed. Together, they form a detailed picture of the glass. This is the unique work of the four first-order resources: hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. When HERO works together, they synergistically create PsyCap.

PsyCap Questionnaire.

The Psychological Capital Questionnaire, which looks at both PsyCap and its component resource parts (hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism) is one of the instruments used in this research study. The PsyCap Questionnaire (PCQ) was developed by Luthans, Avolio, and Avey who "drew from recognized, published measures of

efficacy (Parker, 1998), hope (Snyder, et al., 1996), optimism (Scheier & Carver, 1985), and resilience (Wagnild & Young, 1993)” (Luthans et al., 2007c, p. 211). Each of the component tests had demonstrated both reliability and validity and all four were self-assessments based on a Likert scale (Wagnild & Young, 1993; Snyder et al., 1996; Scheier & Carver, 1985; Parker, 1998). A panel of experts from each area of HERO selected six items from each of the four tests. The resulting PCQ is a 24-item test. This test was subject to extensive analysis and both “exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis and reliabilities across four diverse samples provided promising psychometric support” (Luthans et al., 2007c, p. 211).

One of the criticisms of the PCQ is “that much of the psychometric validation for the original scales included in the PCQ was conducted in non-organizational setting” (Dawkins et al., 2013, p. 362). This is beneficial knowledge to me and supports the idea that, although designed for the workplace, the PCQ and PsyCap can be used outside of workplace settings.

Another criticism is that the questions in the PCQ are about hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism, but none are uniquely about the synergistic composite construct of PsyCap. This is problematic. And yet, samples from “service, manufacturing, education, high-tech, military, and cross-cultural sectors” support the internal consistency of the PCQ (Luthans, et al., 2007a, p. 4). “Over the years, this PCQ measure has repeatedly demonstrated its reliability and validity and has been used to statistically determine the higher order nature of PsyCap and its added value over the individual components in predicting outcomes” (Luthans et al., 2015, p. 32). In their

2013 study, Dawkins et al., determined that the “internal reliability for PsyCap has been consistent across studies” (p. 353) while also arguing that more research is needed to “gain a more comprehensive understanding of the composite PsyCap score and how each component of PsyCap contributes to this score” (p. 365).

PsyCap Summary.

PsyCap is complicated. It is both defined by its composite resource parts (HERO) and stands alone as a synergistic higher order construct. It is both/and. It is both a resource caravan and a reservoir of resources. It has been successfully used as a tool across the globe helping individuals and corporations improve their lives and yet it seems there are still questions about how PsyCap is its own unique construct without being defined by its composite parts. It is both strong and not fully known. It is liminal and tangible. It is still in the process of discovery and yet holds resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism that are tangible, moldable, and applicable. The goal of this research study is not to prove or disprove PsyCap. It is not a mixed methods or quantitative study on the validity or reliability of PsyCap. Instead, this dissertation simply looks at PsyCap, as it is known in the world today. It looks at PsyCap and my grief story, how my PsyCap was malleable during that grief journey, and what I can learn about PsyCap and my experience of the stages of grief. It is a liminal space to hold PsyCap in the place of being a strong tool, a reservoir of resources, and a tool that needs more research.

Grief

General Overview.

Grief is a universal experience, but it is not experienced in a universally similar way. Many theorists, practitioners, and researchers have looked at the grief experience through the lens of culture (Seake-Kwawu (2020); Bonanno (2019); Rosenblatt (2017); Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten (2006); Torres (2020); Hernandez et al. (2018); Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe (2007); Catlin (2001)) and health (Bass (2020); Hollander (2004); Bonanno (2019); Davis Konigsberg (2011); Neimeyer (1999); Lobb et al. (2010); Kübler Ross & Kessler (2005)). Researchers have discussed how grief can be experienced through stages, phases, tasks, or none of the above (Kübler Ross and Kessler (2005); Kessler (2019), Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe (2007); Davis Konigsberg (2011); Bonanno (2019); Westberg (2019); Parkes (2002)). My research looks at my own unique participation in the sociological experience of grief as expressed through my stories of grief and my PsyCap. “Narratives are our way of organizing our lives retrospectively” (Davis, 2008, p. 8).

Historical Background: Stages/Phases/Tasks of Grief.

Is grief a journey of stages, phases, and tasks, or is it one with no mileposts at all? This is one of the questions that has historically guided grief researchers. Let’s look at several predominant theories.

Virginia Satir’s work on change has been adapted to the grieving process by Sharon Blevins (2008). Satir’s Process of Change includes the following stages “1) Status Quo; 2) Introduction of a Foreign Element; 3) Chaos; 4) Integration; 5) Practice and 6)

New Status Quo” (Blevins, 2008, p. 92). A seventh stage was added by a colleague, John Banmen, after Satir’s death. The seventh stage is “Transformation after Chaos” (Blevins, 2008, p. 92). Satir, Blevins, and I all agree that change can provide “an opportunity for growth if the people embraced the possibilities within the change” (Blevins, 2008, p. 92).

Blevins (2008) looked at Satir’s work “through the lens of grief and loss” (p. 93). For Blevins, Status Quo is a pre-grief state prior to when a foreign element, “such as death, enters and disrupts the status quo” (Blevins, 2008, p. 93). Chaos is “a state of confusion and mixed feelings due to an outside foreign element” (Blevins, 2008, p. 93). Transformation occurs as an “internal shift in an individual’s basic beliefs or understandings about themselves in relationship to a loss” (Blevins, 2008, p. 93). Integration happens when the “full awareness of what has changed is understood and felt” (Blevins, 2008, p. 94). Practice begins as the individual who experienced loss “tries out new ways to live based upon the new decisions that have been made about the change” (Blevins, 2008, p. 94). New Status Quo is a place of acceptance and integration (Blevins, 2008). Blevins is clear that “although the stages are listed in order, the individual experiencing the death of someone may stay in Chaos for long periods of time and move into the other stages to try them out” (Blevins, 2008, p. 94).

Worden’s (2001) task model consists of four grief tasks. Those tasks are “accepting reality of loss; experiencing the pain of grief; adjusting to the environment without the deceased; and relocating the deceased emotionally and moving on” (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007, p. 1964). Worden’s adjusting task includes adjusting

externally to the “everyday functioning to the world”, internally to a “new sense of self without the identity of the person they lost”, and spiritually to make sense of how “one’s beliefs, values, and assumptions about the world” are affected by the loss (Blevins, 2008, p. 97).

Bowlby described “changes in symptoms of bereavement over time . . . in terms of stages or phases of shock, yearning and protest, despair, and recovery” (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007, p. 1964). Robertson and Bowlby (1952) and Bowlby and Parkes (1970) did research on the pattern of separation when young children are separated from their mothers. Their four-part sequence of separation was “blunting or numbness”, “acute separation anxiety”, “disorganization and despair”, and “recovery” (Parkes, 2002, p. 372). Kübler Ross adapted “these phases of grief to describe the phases of dying” and eventually the stages of grief (Parkes, 2002, p. 372).

One of the books I used in a previous career was *Good Grief* by Granger Westberg. Originally published in 1962, it was my go-to book on grief for several decades. Westberg suggested there are ten stages of grief: shock, emotion, depression, physical distress, panic, guilt, anger and resentment, resistance, hope, and affirm reality” (Westberg, 2019). From this book, I learned that grief occurs for many reasons, not just the death of a loved one. One can grieve changes in work, relationships or living conditions. Grief can even occur when an expectation goes unfulfilled. Westberg calls these all “little griefs” (2019, p. 2).

Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s book, *On Grief and Grieving*, has also been instrumental to my understanding of grief (2005). “Kübler-Ross was heralded as a

revolutionary who shattered the stoic silence that had surrounded death since World War I, and her efforts certainly lowered barriers and raised the standard of care for dying people and their families.” (Davis Konigsberg, 2011, p. 3).

Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s five stages of grief have been foundational. Those stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance may be experienced in order, one at a time, concurrently, repeatedly, or only once. Kessler added a sixth stage, after Kübler-Ross’s death. The sixth stage is meaning making (2019).

In this sixth stage we acknowledge that although for most of us grief will lessen in intensity over time, it will never end. But if we allow ourselves to move fully into this crucial and profound sixth stage - meaning – it will allow us to transform grief into something else, something rich and fulfilling. (Kessler, 2019, p. 2)

Table 3 is a synthesis of the previously discussed historically suggested stages, tasks, and phases into a comparison chart. I was surprised at how much overlap there was between the stages, tasks, and phases. I’m thankful for Blevins (2008), who began this synthesis by doing the primary work of comparing Satir and Worden and Satir and Kübler-Ross. I added Robinson and Bowlby (1952), Bowlby and Parkes (1970), Kessler (2019), Westberg (2019), and Bowlby (in Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe, 2007)

Table 3

Comparison of Historically Suggested Stages, Tasks, and Phases of Grief, Separation, and Change

Robinson and Bowlby and Bowlby and Parkes	Kübler-Ross & Kessler	Westberg	Satir	Worden	Bowlby (in Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe)
Status Quo					
Blunting numbness	Denial	Shock	Introduction of a Foreign Element		Shock
Acute separation anxiety	Anger	Emotion and Anger	Chaos	Accept the Reality of the Loss & Experiencing the Pain of Grief	Yearning and protest
	Bargaining	Physical distress, Panic, Guilt, Resentment, & Resistance			
Disorganization and despair	Depression	Depression			Despair
Recovery	Acceptance	Acceptance of reality	Integration and Practice	Adjusting to the environment without the deceased	Recovery
	Meaning (<i>unique to Kessler</i>)		New Status Quo & Transformation of Chaos	Relocating the deceased emotionally and moving on	

Note. Comparisons between Satir and Worden and Satir and Kübler-Ross were primarily from Blevins (2008).

There are those who, through their own research and life experiences suggest our grief culture also defines grief as a project that must be actively tackled by identifying and vocalizing one's darkest feelings. The opposite may actually be true – one of George Bonanno's studies found that recently bereaved individuals who did *not* express their negative emotions had fewer health problems and complaints than those who did, suggesting that damping them down might have a protective function. (Davis Konigsberg, 2011, p. 15)

In other words, some people do not need or follow any stages, phases, or tasks of grief.

Bonanno, in talking about his interviews with bereaved people shared, "most coped

extremely well with the pain of grief. Yet there seemed to be no clear pattern, no emergent theme in the way they described the past, that might account for their resilience” (Bonanno, 2019, p. 102). Bonanno, however, does suggest there are experiences those who grieve might share.

Shortly after loss, most bereaved people experience intense sadness, along with periodic bursts of positive emotion. These brief swings provide a temporary respite from the pain and keep us connected to other people around us, and by doing so, they help us gradually adapt to the loss. (Bonanno, 2019, p. 109)

Davis Konigsberg suggests that stages should not be a part of the expected grief process.

We have been misled by the concept that grief is a series of steps that ultimately deposit us at a psychological finish line, even while social science increasingly indicates that it's more a grab bag of symptoms that come and go and, eventually, simply lift. (Davis Konigsberg, 2011, p. 11).

For instance, in a study she discusses in her book, *The truth about grief: The myth of its five stages and the new science of loss*, Davis Konigsberg says, “most respondents accepted the death of a loved one from the very beginning” (2011, p. 9). Perhaps she is right. I accepted Robert’s death immediately. As opposed to a grab bag of symptoms though, I have experienced this stage in a circular, concurrent, and repetitive way. I reaccept Robert’s death every time I ache with the desire to talk with him, hold his hand, see his smile, or hear his voice. The acceptance for me now is really a recognition that I am living in a new normal, a new reality that no longer has Robert physically in it. It has been a seismic shift in the way I experience life.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s Stages of Grief.

Of all the stages, phases, and tasks, Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s six stages of grief seem to be the most universally used and acknowledged. When you look up ‘stages of

grief' in Google, they are at the top of the list every time. In addition, their stages seem to encompass all the other stages I've studied (see Table 3). They are also the stages I resonate with, in part, because they have been a part of my life for decades. I have experienced the death of several uncles, my grandfather, both my grandmothers, several friends, and many acquaintances. In those times, when I was grieving, Kübler-Ross and Kessler's stages seemed fairly accurate to me. Even when my Grandma Marie died, a kindred spirit with whom I had been very close, I could see myself walking through each of the stages, perhaps circling back and revisiting a few, but in general experiencing them in a sort of sequential order. Then my husband died.

Robert's death was different from any other death I had experienced before. This was someone I loved with all my being, who had been my daily companion for almost thirteen years. This was someone who was my secret keeper, my lover, my friend, the one I processed ideas and life with through conversations and shared experiences. He was a part of my every day. He was interwoven with who I understood myself to be. His death wrenched my soul and my heart into contortions I have never experienced before. And sequential stages went out the window. In fact, it was about six months into grieving that I thought about stages at all. It was when I realized I was angry, really angry, uneasily angry, that a red flag went up in my mind and I thought, "Wait, I think this is ok. I think this is a stage of grief." We will get to anger in a moment. Even before the first stage of denial, is anticipatory grief.

Anticipatory grief happens before a death or loss occurs, a kind of pre-stage. It can be the beginning of the grieving experience.

Anticipating a loss . . . may help us brace ourselves for what is to come, but we should be aware that the anticipation of an event may be just as powerful as the event itself. Forewarned is not always forearmed. Experiencing anticipatory grief may or may not make the grieving process easier or shorten it. (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p. 4)

The first stage is **denial**. Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005) describe denial as not being able to fathom that your loved one will never walk through the door again, “being paralyzed with shock” or “blanketed with numbness” (p. 8).

Anger, according to Kübler-Ross and Kessler can be anger at your loved one or anger at yourself. It can be anger that you are left behind or anger that bad things happen (2005). “Anger does not have to be logical or valid” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p. 11). “Anger surfaces once you are feeling safe enough to know you will probably survive whatever comes” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p. 11).

Bargaining, another stage in grief, took the form of wishes and should have for me. Kübler-Ross and Kessler suggest part of bargaining is guilt. “The ‘if onlys’ cause us to find fault with ourselves and what we ‘think’ we could have done differently” (2005, p. 17).

Depression is another stage in grief. How is this stage in grief different from clinical depression? Clinical depression is typically characterized by a “sad and hopeless depressed mood and other symptoms, such as marked increases or decreases in appetite, sleep patterns, and level of activity, loss of interest in usual activities, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness, or recurrent thoughts of death or suicide” (Price et al., 1987, p. 471). Depression, as a stage of grief, has some parallel symptoms, but it is not an illness. Included in the grief stage of depression are empty feelings, withdrawal from

life, living in a “fog of intense sadness”, and questioning whether to go on (Kübler-Ross, 2005, p. 20).

Both clinical depression and the depression that comes with grieving the death of a loved one are intense. Both change how you experience life. Depressive grief, for me, was the feeling that life went from technicolor to dull and muted colors. It was not something I necessarily needed help with, but instead, was something I needed to, and occasionally still need to, quietly walk through.

Although I still experience anger, occasional bargaining, and depression, I live mostly in **acceptance**. For Kübler-Ross and Kessler, acceptance includes realizing “this new reality is the permanent reality” (2005, p. 25). It includes learning to “reorganize roles, reassign them to others or take them on ourselves” (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p. 25).

Kessler’s additional sixth stage of grief is **finding meaning**. “For most of us, the first step in making meaning out of loss is fully experiencing all the stages of grief, which means feeling the depths of pain and taking the time to live there for a while” (Kessler, 2019, p. 68). What is meaning? “Meaning is a reflection of the love we have for those we have lost” (Kessler, 2019, p. 10). Our thoughts help to create the meaning we find in loss. “Imagine the thoughts in your mind as being like a garden. Whatever thoughts you water are the thoughts that will grow” (Kessler, 2019, p. 73). “Our narratives are not a result of our experiences but rather our attempt to put a framework around our experiences” (Davis, 2008, p. 8). It is through “remembering, interpreting, and framing” our experiences that we begin to find meaning” (Davis, 2008, p. 8).

As Davis, Wortman, Lehman and Cohen Silver conducted their study on the search for meaning, they discovered most people who experience loss look for meaning, “finding meaning is an important issue for most people who have experienced a loss” (2000, p. 509). For a minority, however, meaning does not seem to be a concern.

Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson discuss “meaning-as-comprehensibility” and “meaning-as-significance” (1998, p. 562). “Meaning-as-comprehensibility refers to the extent to which the event makes sense, or fits with one’s view of the world” (Davis, et al., 1998, p. 562). This occurs when the survivors make sense of the death of a loved one based on their understanding of how the world works. They are able to assimilate death into already existing understandings (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1998). “Meaning-as-significance refers to the value or worth of the event for one’s life” (Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1998, p. 562). This occurs when the survivors find benefit from the death of a loved one. To do that they have to accommodate their loved one’s death by creating new understandings.

If you choose to search for meaning in loss, how will you know when you find it? “What does meaning looking like? It might take many shapes, such as finding gratitude for the time they had with loved ones, or finding ways to commemorate and honor loved ones, or realizing the brevity and value of life and making that the spring-board into some kind of major shift or change” (Kessler, 2019, p. 3).

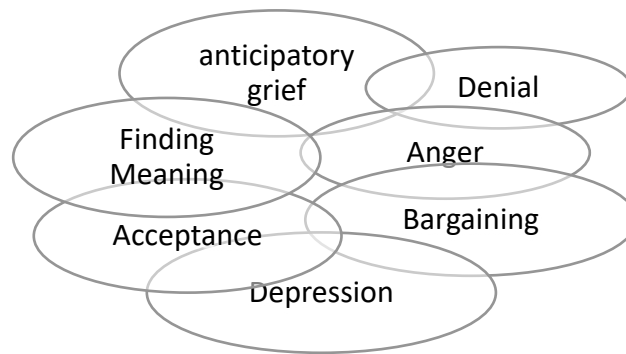
One way to find meaning is to let the story in your mind guide you. “The story you tell yourself as well as the story you tell others . . . [has] the power to bring attention to the memories most meaningful to you” (Kessler, 2019, p. 71 and 73).

Another way is to acknowledge the brevity of time we share with our loved one and ask, “What would best honor the years they didn’t get?” (Kessler, 2019, p. 248).

Figure 2 is a visual representation of Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s stages of grief. It is not, however presented in a linear fashion. Instead, it hints to a different way of thinking about the ‘stages.’

Figure 2

Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s Stages of Grief



Note. This figure includes a pre-stage of anticipatory grief and the new sixth stage, finding meaning.

How do you move between the stages? Is it a jarring motion? A smooth transition? The movement between the stages is sometimes obvious and sometimes undetectable. Stroebe and Schut discuss the idea of oscillation as a possible way to move through grief.

It is postulated that oscillation is necessary for optimal adjustment over time. A number of reasons why this alternation should take place can be suggested. The person may choose to take “time off,” be distracted, or need to attend to new things, or at times it may be too painful to confront some aspect, leading to voluntary suppression or more involuntary repression. . . There is supportive evidence that it may be impossible to avoid grieving unremittingly without severe costs to mental and physical well-being, from which it would follow that oscillation is necessary. (Stroebe and Schut, 1999, p. 216)

Stroebe and Schut (1999) have suggested that mourners oscillate “between experiencing the emotional pain of grief and attending to the practical and possibly radically new tasks of living” (Walter, 1999, p. 22) between “feeling the pain (at home, behind closed doors) and getting on with life (in public)” (Walter, 1999, p. 145).

This model identifies two types of stressors, loss- and restoration-oriented, and a dynamic, regulatory coping process of oscillation, whereby the grieving individual at times confronts, at other times avoids, the different tasks of grieving. This model proposes that adaptive coping is composed of confrontation–avoidance of loss and restoration stressors. It also argues the need for dosage of grieving, that is, the need to take respite from dealing with either of these stressors, as an integral part of adaptive coping. (Stroebe and Schut, 1999, p. 197)

Oscillation then is the back-and-forth movement between loss and restoration, between confronting and avoiding. “At times the bereaved will be confronted by their loss, at other times they will avoid memories, be distracted, or seek relief by concentration on other things” (Stroebe and Schut, 1999, pp. 215-216). Perhaps as we oscillate, moving through grief and taking a break with a well-planned or spontaneous distraction, we find ourselves in a different mindset, a different stage of grief, a different way of looking at the loss we’ve suffered.

In summary, most researchers seem to agree that each person’s grief journey is unique. Kessler could not be clearer, “the stages don’t prescribe, they describe. And they describe only a general process. Each person grieves in his or her own unique way” (Kessler, 2019, p. 2). In addition, “grief is not a steady state” (Rosenblatt, 2017, p. 622). In discussing his book *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories* (1983), Rosenblatt says,

in the diaries, after the earliest days following a loss, grief was not continuous but erupted recurrently, often because of encountering reminders of the person who had died or from whom the diarist was separated. Thus, grieving generally is not constant, but repeatedly wanes and then becomes intense. (p. 622)

No matter our level of experience with grief, whether it is our first grief experience or our hundredth, each of our grief experiences is unique. In the end, whether we find stages, phases, or tasks helpful, or whether we find our own path through grief,

we grieve only what we remember of the relationship. And the accuracy of our memories does not determine how we grieve; that is determined by what we do with our memories, how we experience them, and what we take from them during bereavement. (Bonanno, 2019, p. 104)

Grief and Culture.

Culture, as defined by Merriam-Webster, is “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group and also the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time” (Merriam-Webster, 2020, definition 1. a.). Cultures can be many things, including geographic, genetic, religious, organizational, within a small group of friends, or within a family. Cultures can be formed on the basis of common shared experiences. People within different cultures deal with grief differently and, in a way, have their own grief micro-culture.

In anthropology, the unique or radical relativistic approach has maintained that no cultures are alike . . . Each culture must be considered as a unique configuration and may be understood only in its totality. A cultural element has no meaning except in its context. Thus, the single elements may be understood, and can only be understood, within the network of interpretations that the culture itself represents . . . All cultures are special and unique. (Jørgensen & Nafstad, 2005, p. 892)

Whether in a macro-culture or a micro-culture, “grief occurs in a cultural context” (Seake-Kwawu, 2020, p. 5). It occurs in its own unique cultural context. Often the rituals and expectations of grief are passed from one generation to the next in the stories of our culture. “Narratives with other symbolic mechanisms such as rituals must have played the crucial role of cultural vehicles for sharing and transmitting values, ideas, and practices that enhanced the chance of survival at the group level” (Yang, 2013, p. 143).

In looking broadly at grieving practices in cultures, it is clear that some of the ways cultures honor grief are very different from one another. Some cultures, like the South African Zulu, require women “to live a very constrained life for a year or more following her husband’s death, even though it is extremely inconvenient and even though she may have been estranged from her husband” (Rosenblatt, 2017, p. 619). Some, like the culture in South Korea, require all debts owed to a dying parent be paid (Rosenblatt, 2017).

Some cultures require the clothes of the grieving to be a certain color. Haitian Americans require families to show they are mourning by dressing in dark colors or white, whereas African Americans traditionally dress in white “as a sign of resurrection” and Native Americans traditionally dress in red or black (Grief Speaks, paras. 9 & 11). In Asian cultures, “family members may wear white clothing or headbands for a period of time” (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006, p. 45).

How emotion is expressed is different in various cultures. For instance, in patriarchal cultures, there are often “strict rules and sanctions promoting ‘gender

appropriate' emotional displays for men and women" (Aros, Buckingham & Rodriguez, 1999, p. 87).

Food is also a part of the grief journey in many cultures. Many cultures include meals with family and friends as part of the grieving process. Some, like African Americans, Haitian Americans, and Asian Americans, share a meal after the funeral or wake (Grief Speaks, para. 7, 9 & 10).

"Mexicans have more understanding and acceptance of death . . . death is portrayed in Mexican statues, art, literature, and history, and Mexican children are socialized early to accept death" (Lobar, Youngblut & Brooten, 2006, pp. 44-45). The Mexican culture has woven its threads through my life for more than 40 years. When I was ten years old, we moved to El Paso, Texas after living in Europe for five years. El Paso was mostly Hispanic. Predominantly white Europeans like me were the minority culture. I fell in love with the Hispanic culture, the music, the festivals, the rituals, the food. It was not until I moved to Albuquerque, New Mexico, though, almost three decades later, that I was introduced to a significant Mexican contribution to the journey of grief, Día de los Muertos.

Día de los Muertos is a melding of Aztec, Spanish and Catholic cultures and rituals. During the three-day celebration, October 31, November 1, and November 2, "it is believed that the border between the spirit world and the real-world dissolve" allowing those who have died to visit those who are alive (History.com, 2019, para. 6). Offrendas are set up to celebrate the visit of the guests. Candles, flowers, food, pictures, skulls, toys, and special mementos that the deceased loved are carefully placed

on the altar to welcome the deceased family members (Torres, 2020, transcript).

Because of this spiritual opening, it can be a time to talk with the dead, heal wounds, and celebrate the continuation of the relationships (Torres, 2020, transcript; Hernandez et al., 2018, para. 6). It is a time to play, to sing, and to share stories. It is a ritual that helps to heal grief through remembrance and honoring. I am thankful to be able to share in these sacred customs.

“There are differences in cultural patterns of grief and grieving, with some differences attributable to religious beliefs” (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007, p. 1964). Religious communities also have their own culture of grieving. I have several Roman Catholic friends who celebrate the one-month anniversary of the death of their loved one with a Mass. They also annually celebrate what is considered the birthday of their loved one having gone to heaven. In the Jewish tradition, “the period of mourning lasts for one year” (Grief Speaks, para. 16). In the Islamic tradition, no TV or radio is allowed for 40 days at which point there is a religious prayer said. A religious prayer is again said after 52 days (Grief Speaks, para. 19). Protestants, the religious culture I grew up in, do not, in general, have any specified rituals after the actual funeral or memorial service is over. However, the United Methodist Church, the Protestant denomination I called home for 40 years, does typically remember those congregation members who have died in the past year with a special worship ritual on the Sunday prior to Memorial Day. Some churches also observe All Saints Day celebrations as close to November 1 as possible. Both “culture and religion may dictate practices, expressions, and length of grieving” (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006, p. 48).

There are differences, and there are commonalities as well. In the 78 cultures studied by Rosenblatt, he found that most believed, “the dead were thought of as actually or potentially present among the living in the form of something like ghosts” (2017, p. 618). I know I talk to Robert all the time in my head, and sometimes out loud, as if he were present, listening to my every word.

Lobar, Youngblut, and Brooten conducted research with nursing students who “identified themselves as Black American, Caucasian (European descent), Columbian, Cuban, Filipino, Jamaican, Mexican, Nicaraguan, Trinidadian, Guyanan, and Thai” (2006, p. 46). They found several commonalities among participants including the idea that “beliefs about the soul of the deceased lead families to perform rituals and ceremonies that foster passage to God, the ‘light’, or into another life” (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006, p. 46). Another commonality was that in “every culture, families get together to pray, talk, and/or reminisce about the deceased” (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006, p. 49). Finally, there seemed to be a “respect for dying family members, as well as for the deceased, and protection of the soul, were of most importance to all of the participants and their families” (Lobar, Youngblut, & Brooten, 2006, p. 49).

In summary, different cultures have different ways of celebrating the life of a loved one who died. Sometimes those differences are not just unique to a culture, but to a micro-culture within a larger culture. I believe that each of us lives in a confluence of cultures. How we choose to grieve and how we are allowed to grieve are things largely determined by the cultures in our lives. “Regardless of the source, it is evident that through socialization individuals become prepared to respond to the death of a

loved one in a certain way. When the event occurs, those notions appear to guide the actual response” (Catlin, 2001, p. 182). I have been blessed that most of my cultures let me grieve in the way that seemed best for me at that given moment. It is through gentle nurturing and meaningful connections that I have found and continue to find the broken pieces of my heart forming a new whole. Despite the varied ways people from various geographic and religious cultures grieve, grief has a unique way of bringing us all to a common place of rawness. As I continue on the journey of grief, I am discovering that the sociological experience of grief, like music, is a universal language that almost all of us have experienced in one way or another.

Grief as a Culture.

I researched how culture is reflected in grief experiences, but is grief a culture in and of itself? “Like an onion, culture can be seen as having different layers: visible and invisible. At the surface are various practices that can be observed and compared. At the core . . . is the mental software that people are not fully aware of” (Minkov, 2012, p. 17). Is there a culture of grief? Is the visible outer layer composed of dress codes, rituals of burying the deceased, food, and emotions? While stages, tasks, and phases form the inner, invisible core?

Winkel (2001) called grief an emotional culture and discusses it as a socially established symbolic code. He pointed to the bureaucratization and commercialization of grief and indicators of grief as a culture. “The professionalization of mourning and death work is based on systems of knowledge which have dominated the social

perception of death and dying since the late 19th century” (Winkel, 2001, p. 67). These are visible layers of a culture of grief.

Doss (2002) used the term culture of grief and discussed the visual, performative, and material dimensions of the culture of grief in her article, “Death and art in the public sphere: the visual and material culture of grief in contemporary America.” In her discussion of permanent memorials and spontaneous roadside shrines she suggests that the American public, “often hesitant and fearful about death and dying has equated the visual and material culture of grief with the transformative milieu of the sacred” (Doss, 2002, p. 70). Doss is describing visible and invisible layers of a grief culture.

Tateo (2018), in *The cultures of grief: the practice of post-mortem photography and iconic internalized voice* discusses the culture of grief and its visible characteristics such as dress codes, length of mourning, and professional and para-professional services related to grief. Tateo also discusses a more invisible part of the grief culture, beliefs about afterlife.

Walter, in his book, *On bereavement: The culture of grief* also describes the visible and invisible aspects of a culture of grief. In the nineteenth century these aspects include “mourning dress, the required periods of mourning, beliefs about reunion in the next life and so forth” (1999, p. xvii). In the twentieth century Walter adds the visible layers of “the panoply of professional, para-professional and voluntary services that one might term ‘bereavement care’” and the invisible layer of “both expert and lay beliefs about ‘the grief process’, ‘resolution’ and so forth” (1999, p. xvii).

Culture “consists of what people do (behaviors), what they say (language), the potential tension between what they do and ought to do, and what they make and use, such as artifacts (Spradley, 1980)” (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 96). Merriam-Websters definition 1.c. of culture puts another spin on the idea. Culture is “the set of values, conventions, or social practices associated with a particular field, activity, or societal characteristic” (Merriam-Webster, 2020, definition 1. c.). White (1959) believes culture is things and events that are directly or indirectly observable, that exist in space and time, and that exist within human organisms, within processes of social interaction, and within material objects. Kessing in his 1958 work, “Cultural Anthropology”, defined culture as “the totality of learned, socially transmitted behavior” (p. 427).

“Culture is shared mental software, ‘the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another’ (Hofstede, 2001)” (Minkov, 2012, p. 11). Perhaps the similarity between grief stages (see Table 2), the expectations of those who are grieving, and the ways grief is ritualized, point to the idea that a culture of grief, a shared mental software, is somehow transmitted between generations within broader ethnographic cultures. It is possible that a definition of grief culture could be something like: the experience of mourning the loss of someone or something including the physical, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, tangible, and intangible realities of that experience. In this way, grief culture is manifested through the traditions, rituals, and expectations of each person’s unique circumstances, including their ethnographic culture, work culture, family culture, and religious culture.

Grief and Health.

Grief is a whole-body, intellectual, spiritual, and physical experience. Many researchers support the idea that the grief journey impacts our body (Bass, 2020; Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe, 2007; Neimeyer, 1999; Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005; Moskowitz, Folkman & Acree, 2003; Wortman and Cohen Silver, 1989; and Lobb et al., 2010).

Bass in her guidebook for navigating grief suggested there are physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms of grief. Physical symptoms include: “head and body aches, exhaustion, loss of appetite or overeating, insomnia, oversensitivity to noise, shakiness, dizziness and shortness of breath” (Bass, 2020, para. 13). Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe report

a greater occurrence of physical health complaints in bereaved people (compared with matched controls), ranging from physical symptoms (eg. headaches, dizziness, indigestion, and chest pain) to high rates of disability and illness, greater use of medical services . . . and drug use. (2007, p. 1963)

Emotional symptoms can include: “guilt, anger, anxiety, panic, resentment, helplessness, shock, fear and unable to feel” (Bass, 2020, para. 14). Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe suggest affective and physiological somatic reactions to grief may also occur. Affective reactions include “depression, despair, dejection, distress, anxiety, fears, dreads, guilt, self-blame, self-accusation, anger, hostility, irritability, anhedonia - loss of pleasure, loneliness, yearning, longing, pining, shock and numbness” (Stroebe, et al., 2007, p. 1964). Many of these affective reactions parallel the stages, phases, and tasks of grief. Physiological somatic reactions can include “loss of appetite, sleep

disturbances, energy loss, exhaustion, somatic complaints, and physical complaints similar to deceased” (Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe, 2007, p. 1964).

Behavioral symptoms include: “crying, unable to talk to others, avoidance, panic, withdrawal, substance misuse or abuse” (Bass, 2020, para. 15). Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe add “agitation, tenseness, restlessness, fatigue, overactivity, searching, weeping and sobbing” (2007, p. 1964).

Cognitive symptoms can include “disbelief, confusion, disconnection from self, preoccupation with deceased and vivid dreams, both disturbing and not” (Bass, 2020, para. 16). Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe add “ruminations, sense of presence of deceased, suppression, denial, lowered self-esteem, self-reproach, helplessness, hopelessness, suicidal ideation, sense of unreality, and memory and concentration difficulties” (2007, p. 1964). Of all the symptoms of grief, physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive, I think cognitive symptoms are the ones I have experienced the least in grieving Robert. That is, until COVID became a regular part of everyday life. I have unquestionably experienced the COVID fog. I believe that fog is a cognitive symptom of grief.

The other cognitive symptoms I have experienced are a sense of otherness and being abnormal. Hollander described this in a way that resonated with me.

In one sense, I am absolutely all right. I am sane, I am alive, I am physically healthy, I am thinking and working, I am in touch with many wonderful people, and my heart is broken. I am badly damaged. I may never be ‘all right’ in the way I once was again. (Hollander, 2004, p. 202)

I am also badly broken and alright. Those two ideas are not mutually exclusive. Part of my own grief story has included trying to find words that both speak truth to my

situation (mentally, emotionally, spiritually, physically) and at the same time do not worry or upset those listening, but instead help them connect to my experience.

Not all researchers see a clear impact of grief on the health of the body. Davis Konigsberg quotes research by Bonanno who discovered “about 45 percent of his sample of bereaved spouses showed no symptoms of grief (depression, yearning, despair, anxiety) six months after their spouses died” (2011, p. 156). Bonanno observed that the spouses were able “to maintain relatively stable, healthy levels of psychological and physical functioning despite extremely disruptive events” (Davis Konigsberg, 2011, p. 156). This was not my experience.

Grief in the body can also take an unhealthy turn. Bass talks about what happens when people keep their grief symptoms hidden from others, even from themselves. The result is sometimes “inhibited grief” and can “manifest in the body, often with somatic complaints” (Bass, 2020, para. 10). Neimeyer suggests another aspect of that idea by looking at the grief caused by a traumatic loss, a grief that is sometimes difficult to discuss. When that occurs, “the psychological and physical burden of harboring painful memories without the release of sharing can prove far more destructive in the long run” (Neimeyer, 1999, p. 79). Whether purposefully or unintentionally hidden, grief symptoms can overwhelm the physical body.

Lobb et al. discuss the physical manifestations of grief and how they are different between genders. Specifically, they looked at complicated grief. “The term complicated grief refers to a pattern of adaptation to bereavement that involves the presentation of certain grief-related symptoms at a time beyond that which is considered adaptive”

(Lobb et al., 2010, p. 674). Lobb et al. quote research by Chen and colleagues who found that widows with complicated grief typically showed more symptoms of complicated grief, but that widowers tended to have more hospitalizations and physical health events “such as cancer, stroke, or heart attack” (Lobb et al., 2010, p. 684). Insomnia was often a predictor of complicated grief, “along with the nature of the death (whether violent or not), the younger age of the deceased, level of closeness with the deceased, recency of the loss, relationship to the deceased, and gender of the bereaved” (Lobb et al., 2010, p. 684). It is helpful to know the physical symptoms and be aware of the possibility that grief might pivot in an unhealthy direction.

Kübler-Ross and Kessler also talk about the physical ramifications of grief, especially in those times when grief can be overwhelming. Our instinct is to run from overwhelming grief, but that can be an unhealthy choice for our emotional, physical, and mental wellbeing. “Resistance to pain only serves to amplify it. Try sinking into it and feel it become more spacious. Allow it to wash over you and feel the strength return to your body and your mind.” (2005, p. 104). I tried this one time when I was driving home, and the traffic was especially light. I had started to sob at hearing a song that Robert loved. I consciously decided to let myself cry for as long as I needed to. I turned off the radio and tried to live in that moment of despair. By the time I got home, my soul was quieted, and I felt my body take a deep emotional breath.

Moskowitz, Folkman & Acree suggest that social support, religiosity, and personality characteristics can make a difference in the health of the person grieving

(2003). This seems especially true if they are positive supports and characteristics.

Wortman and Cohen Silver concluded in their 1989 study that

society frowns upon open displays of distress and has a 'requirement of cheerfulness' that in fact contradicts its simultaneous 'requirement of mourning.' It is likely that this subtle yet sometimes explicit message discourages the person who has encountered loss from expressing distress to others at all. (p. 355)

Grieving, in its many and often cyclical stages, has impacted my health physically, emotionally, spiritually, and mentally. Kübler-Ross and Kessler suggest, "facing a loss takes an enormous amount of strength and determination that gives meaning to our loss and honors our loved one" (2005, p. 105). I know this has been true in my experience. Grief is hard work.

I expect other griefs, like the one I am currently experiencing with COVID, will come and go and I will experience them physically, emotionally, mentally, and behaviorally. And I suspect that I will grieve the loss of Robert in various ways for the rest of my life. Hollander speaks of the idea of life-long grieving in her story.

Please do not expect me to come back to "normal" if "normal" is what I was. I am unable to ever return to what I was before these tragedies occurred, although the aches diminish with time. Nonetheless, I am changed forever by what has happened and I cannot dissemble. Nor do I expect to come to a time when I am absolutely done with this. Closure is not my goal. (Hollander, 2004, pp. 202-203)

I will never be who I was when I was a teenager, or a single adult, or a married woman, and that is ok. It is part of the physical, emotional, mental, and behavioral journey of grief. "A wide range of psychological reactions are associated with bereavement" (Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe, 2007, p. 1966). Those reactions "range from mild and comparatively short-lived to extreme and long-lasting over the months and even years

of bereavement” (Stroebe, Schut, and Stroebe, 2007, p. 1966). It is clear from the research on grief, that no two people will experience the physical, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive symptoms of grief in quite the same way. Personal experiences, relationships, culture, and health are just some of the contributing factors to these differences. Perhaps one of those contributing factors is also psychological capital.

Grief and PsyCap.

To my knowledge no studies of PsyCap, as a composite construct of four component resources and grief have been conducted. Davis Konigsberg suggests that “probably the most accurate predictors of how someone will grieve are their personality and temperament before the loss” (2011, p. 15). PsyCap could be a predictor. Although the composite construct of PsyCap has not been studied in relation to grief, the components of PsyCap have been looked at in relation to grief.

Grief and Hope.

Hope is a component resource of PsyCap and can be part of the grief experience. Kessler suggests “hope can be like oxygen to people in grief. For others, however, especially in the early stages, it can feel invalidating” (Kessler, 2019, p. 32). Hope can also help move the grieving person along the grief journey. “Finding a sense of hope about the future is important in grief, because people continually replaying negative memories signifies that they are stuck in the past” (Kessler, 2019, p. 79).

Studies on grief and hope are abundant. In a recent look for peer-reviewed research, there were more than 400 on grief and hope. If you add mourning,

bereavement, and death to the search you will find more than 4600! Articles appear in all sorts of journals, from spirituality to health care, from mental health to social work, from aging and mental health to death studies, from organizational literature to geographic studies. They are found in many languages including Spanish, Portuguese, Turkish, French, German, Russian, Chinese, Afrikaans, Polish, Italian, Korean, Dutch, Ukrainian, Lithuanian, Romanian, Croatian, Bosnian, Latvian, Arabic, Macedonian, Serbian, and Filipino texts. It is clearly a worldwide interest. Although abundant, none speak of grief and PsyCap and the synergistic mix of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism.

Grief and Efficacy.

Efficacy is another component resource part of PsyCap and can be something people, who are grieving, experience. One characteristic of efficacy is confidence. People who cope well “also tend to be confident” (Bonanno, 2019, p. 113). This is true in any situation where coping is necessary, including grief.

Efficacy and grief are well researched. There were more than 1500 peer-reviewed texts in a recent search. When you add mourning, bereavement, and death to the search, the figure jumps to almost 34,500! These papers also span the gambit of topics in journals and can be found in Chinese, Russian, Spanish, French, Persian, Turkish, Portuguese, German, Korean, Polish, Czech, Romanian, Croatian, Italian, Afrikaans, Bosnian, Iranian, Slovak, Slovenian, Ukrainian, Serbian, Hebrew, and Arabic texts. Again, clearly a worldwide concern, but there were no texts on grief and PsyCap within the mix.

Grief and Resiliency.

Bonanno refers to several component parts of PsyCap in his various research studies. “Research on people who cope well with bereavement and other forms of adversity has identified several key psychological characteristics. One such characteristic is the ability to adjust to the shifting demands of different situations” (Bonanno, 2019, p. 113). This is also a characteristic of resiliency. In fact, Bonanno focuses a lot of attention on resilient people. “Simply put, they seem to have more tools in their toolboxes” (Bonanno, 2019, p. 114).

Resiliency is, surprisingly, not as well researched. In a recent search for peer-reviewed resiliency and grief research, only 147 were found. When the terms mourning, bereavement, and death were added to the search, the number was still low, just 486. Research could be found in a variety of journals including those about family, psychology, death, music therapy, medical and health journals, social work, counseling, and aging. Articles could be found in several languages including French, Korean, Spanish, Czech, Portuguese, and Turkish. Although not as broad in terms of research venues and languages, clearly, grief and resiliency are still a concern for many. However, there were again, no articles that included the complete construct of PsyCap and grief in the mix.

Grief and Optimism.

Optimism is a component resource of PsyCap. “Many studies have reported significant association between dispositional optimism-pessimism and the tendency to report benefits, or positive life changes, following trauma or loss” (Davis, Nolen-

Hoeksema & Larson, 1998, p. 562). Bonanno identified “being optimistic” as a characteristic of people who cope well with bereavement (Bonanno, 2019, p. 113).

Optimism is, surprisingly, also not as well researched. In a recent search for peer reviewed optimism and grief research only 44 were found. When the terms mourning, bereavement, and death were added to the search, the number was still low, just 421. Research could be found in a variety of journals including those about psychiatry, family, palliative care, women’s studies, health research, psychology, pain management, stress, nursing, religion, cultural studies, judgment and decision making, death, aging, and population economic studies. Articles could be found in several languages including Spanish, Russian, Lithuanian, Arabic, Croatian, Polish, and Portuguese. Although the research venues and languages are not as broad as the research on grief and hope, clearly, grief and optimism are still an interest for many. However, again, there were no articles that included grief and PsyCap in the mix.

In summary, although there have not been any formal studies, to my knowledge, on grief and psychological capital, “there has been growing interest in the phenomenon of positive psychological states during bereavement, and in the role, they may play in the process of adaptation after the death of a loved one” (Moskowitz, Folkman & Acree, 2003, p. 472). Bonanno (2019) comes closer than any other author I have found to connect PsyCap and grief although he does not make specific mention of PsyCap. This gap in research on PsyCap and grief, is something my autoethnography fills. “By including positive psychological states in bereavement research, or, for that matter, all stress research, we will have the opportunity to learn more about coping processes that

generate and sustain positive states as opposed to those that regulate negative states” (Moskowitz, Folkman & Acree, 2003, p. 496).

Grief Summary.

Grief is a both/and. Most people identify with the experiences described in the stages, even if they do not experience them in a step-by-step fashion. Some people do not experience every stage. And some people experience grief in a whole different way. Grief is liminal.

Grief is also tangible. “With grieving, the more we know, the more richness of thinking we can bring to bear” (Rosenblatt, 2017, p. 628). It is clear from the research on grief, that no two people grieve in exactly the same way. Personal experiences, relationships, culture, and health are just some of the contributing factors to these differences. In spite of the differences, grief is real and life-changing. Perhaps a tangible contributing factor to the grief journey is psychological capital?

Whatever form it takes, telling the story of the loved one’s life helps the mourners to accept the reality of death. It also helps us through the process of grieving. We need to hear the story from others, which helps us see things from a different perspective, and we need to tell it ourselves. (Kessler, 2019, p. 45)

Telling the story of grief is an important aspect of the grief journey. Telling my story of grief and PsyCap is a foundational aspect of this research.

Chapter 2 Summary

I have not learned everything I can about grief, psychological capital, and stories. I consider myself a life-long learner, so I expect I will continue to study these topics for the rest of my life. I am, however, at a place where I’ve learned enough to stop and share what I know. That is what I’ve tried to do in this literature review. In the next

chapter we will look at the methodology of this research, the specific tools, and thought processes I used to do my research.

Chapter 3: Methodology



I saw this unique cloud formation as I left my office a few days ago. I immediately saw a question mark in the clouds and I've been thinking about it ever since. It seems like an appropriate symbol for me.

I've always loved questions. . . both in the asking of them and the discovery of the answers (which inevitably leads to more

questions.) It's part of being a lifelong learner. I often use questions as a primary teaching tool for myself and in groups. In my classes, I'm constantly tossing an idea, in the form of a question, into the mix so that the students and I can chew on it together and learn from one another.

The love of questions was in part why Robert and I had the kind of deep, loving relationship we had. We loved to ask questions of each other and of the world. We also loved working together to discover the answers, uncover the story or be silly and make up answers if we couldn't find or think of them right away.

I always seem to be in a place of questions spiritually. Since my early teenage years, I've been bold in asking questions about God and of God. If God is God, then surely even my hard and radical questions are joy and delight for the Ultimate Teacher. If God is God, then surely my questions of grace, sustenance and love are held tenderly, just as I am, under the shadow of the Mother Eagle's wings. If God is God, then surely the playful, fanciful questions are danced into answers by the One who knows the depth of my sorrow and the depth of my joy.

What was most interesting to me as I reflected on the question mark in the sky, was the realization that right now, I'm in a place of questions emotionally. 'Why' and 'what could I have done differently' surface almost daily in my thoughts. 'How' questions related to my energy levels, ability to concentrate and motivation are regular friends too. 'Is this normal?' is a question I thought worth pursuing and discovered through both conversations and research that 8-12 months after a beloved's death is often a time of deeper grief because the permanence of the loss has become all too real. I also learned in that research that often the second year is harder. The first year is sometimes just simply getting through all the "first's". The second year can be more difficult because it is about acknowledging the beloved's absence and stitching life's ups and downs, its celebrations, its craziness, and its troubles together in new ways. Questions, like much that is important in life, can be both a burden and a delight. Perhaps it's hanging out in that liminal space between burden and delight, unknowing and knowing, chaos and peace, that makes questions so poignant and important? (Albright, Facebook, October 4, 2018, "Liminal space of questions")

Introduction

Strong methodology flows from a strong research question, which in turn guides the research design. My research explored what can be learned from my grief story and experiences of the stages of grief, including how PsyCap was malleable. This exploration of grief and PsyCap has, to the best of my knowledge, not yet been investigated. As a new topic, not yet researched, it could be approached in a variety of ways. After my husband died in December 2017, I decided to research my own grief journey and PsyCap's role in that journey. This decision led to the choice of using qualitative research and specifically autoethnography as the research method. I chose to use an autoethnographic research method to focus on an individual's personal experience of grief and PsyCap to understand how a unique cultural experience of grief could enhance social understanding. In other words, I took a deep researched dive into my story, experiences, and social world to gain transformative understanding for myself and those who read the dissertation.

Qualitative research focuses on the examination and interpretation of experiences. It can be used when you are interested in investigating and understanding the complexity of a problem or issue through the stories of individuals. It is often written in a flexible, literary, and informal style (Creswell & Poth, 2018). "Qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, p. 3). Qualitative research works to give us a broad and deeply detailed picture of the problem or issue.

Qualitative research begins with assumptions and the use of interpretive/theoretical frameworks that inform the study of research problems addressing the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. To study this problem, qualitative researchers use an emerging qualitative approach to inquiry, the collection of data in a natural setting sensitive to the people and place under study, and data analysis that is both inductive and deductive and that establishes patterns or themes. The final written report or presentation includes the voices of participants, the reflexivity of the researcher, a complex description and interpretation of the problem, and its contribution to the literature or a call for change. (Creswell, 2013, p. 44)

The problem addressed in this research focused on the intertwining of PsyCap in grief experiences. Specifically, it looked at what the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our PsyCap, what we can learn about our PsyCap from our experiences of the stages of grief described by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005), and what our grief stories reveal about the malleable characteristic of PsyCap.

Yin (2016) discusses five features of qualitative research. These five features help provide the boundaries of the large research container called qualitative research.

Those five qualities are:

1. Studying the meaning of people's lives, in their real-world roles
2. Representing the views and perspectives of the people. . . in a study
3. Explicitly attending to and accounting for real-world contextual conditions
4. Contributing insights from existing or new concepts that may help to explain social behavior and thinking, and
5. Acknowledging the potential relevance of multiple sources or evidence rather than relying on a single source alone. (Yin, 2016, p. 9)

Qualitative researchers go to where the experiences are happening, the "natural setting" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 43). Their research is contextually dependent on a specific moment in time no matter the actual length of that moment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My research study looked at the real-world experience of grief from the contextual perspective (i.e. 'natural setting') of one person as she navigated the illness

and death of her husband and the years following his death. Looking at grief and PsyCap in this longitudinal study can contribute new insights into PsyCap and grief. Multiple sources, including journals, Facebook posts, photographs, fieldnotes, and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire were used to bring a deep and rich perspective to the research. Qualitative research is an appropriate method to use to discover the answers to my research questions since my study looked at a real-world contextual situation, representing my views and perspectives, through multiple data sources. It has the potential to contribute new insights on existing concepts to help explain behavior and thinking through PsyCap and grief.

Autoethnography, a qualitative research method, “allows researchers to draw on their own experiences to understand a particular phenomenon or culture” (Méndez, 2013, p. 2). Using this research method enabled me to take a rich, thick, and vivid look at my research questions. I considered using a narrative research design since stories would be key to the research. I also considered using ethnography since I had originally planned to look at PsyCap in the workplace and the effect stories potentially had on it. After my husband died, I realized that my passion for stories and my interest in PsyCap could be illuminated through my grief journey. It was at that point I chose to use autoethnography as my qualitative research design. Autoethnography allowed me to research using insider knowledge of my grief journey and my PsyCap. As a research method, autoethnography has helped me to address my research questions more richly and thickly.

“As a method, autoethnography combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 3). In ethnography, a researcher study’s the culture, values, beliefs, and shared experiences of a group of people (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). “Themes, issues, and theories provide an orienting framework for the study of the culture-sharing group” in ethnography (Creswell and Poth, 2018, p. 93). Ethnography “seeks to promote embedded research that fuses close-up observation, rigorous theory, and social critique . . . [F]osters work that pays equal attention to the minutiae of experience, the cultural texture of social relations, and to the remote structural forces and power vectors that bear on them” (Ethnography, 2021; Yin, 2016).

Richardson suggests writing an ethnography “is both scientific – in the sense of being true to a world known through the empirical senses – and literary – in the sense of expressing what one has learned through evocative writing techniques and forms” (2000, p. 253). “Ethnographic writing is all about directing readers toward novel modes of seeing the world” (Sanjek, 1990, p. 86). Autoethnography “refers to a particular form of writing that seeks to unite ethnographic (looking outward at the world beyond one’s own) and autobiographical (gazing inward for a story of one’s self) intentions . . .” (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16, Yin, 2016, p. 68).

Autoethnography has several key features including “authorial visibility, reflexivity, evocative writing, relational engagement, vulnerability, and openness to new directions” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 80). It is a study of the sociological understandings and experiences of a person in a particular place and time. When done

well, it “can lead to emotionally and intellectually powerful texts that extend out beyond the page or the stage to affect audiences and communities” (Tullis, 2016, p. 246).

As an autoethnographer, I am responsible to analyze the story of an individual in such a way as to help those who read the research see their own story reflected in it. When I was a Christian Education Director, my favorite form of bible study was In-Depth Bible Study. This style of bible study was developed by Dick Murray. Over the years I morphed the four steps of the bible study into three simple questions: (1) what did the text say to the folks that heard it told in ancient days, (2) what does it say to us now, and (3) if we took the learnings seriously, how would we need to change our lives? (Murray, 1987, pp. 35-39). It seems to me that autoethnography follows a similar trajectory. What were my experiences? What did they mean when they happened? What do they mean now? If I took the learnings from this research seriously, what changes would I acknowledge had occurred along the way? And as the reader, what changes might occur in your life because you read this dissertation?

In summary, autoethnography is a research method that “uses personal experience (*‘auto’*) to describe and interpret (*‘graphy’*) cultural texts, experiences, beliefs, and practices (*‘ethno’*)” (Adams, et al., 2017, p. 1) in a specific context (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 57). It “combines characteristics of autobiography and ethnography” (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011, p. 3) and strives to understand a unique cultural experience (Ellis, et al., 2011), or cultural phenomenon (Méndez, 2013), or extend sociological understanding (Sparkes, 2000, Tullis, 2016). In longitudinal autoethnography, “the researcher uses her experiences over a longer period of time to

provide an understanding about self” (Eriksson, 2013, p. 4). Autoethnography examines groups or individuals but tends to be written from the perspective of a single researcher by moving “along a continuum from a more separate *researcher-and-researched* to that where the *researcher-is-researched*” (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009, p 4). By choosing to use the autoethnographic research method I was able to look the sociological context of my own grief journey, and research the interaction between my grief and my PsyCap over the course of several years.

Purpose of the Study

This autoethnographic research took a qualitative longitudinal look at the interaction between grief and PsyCap and adds to the knowledge of both subjects. It took a nuanced look at lived experiences over the course of several years. It looked at the malleability of PsyCap and the interplay of its four component resources, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. It also looked at PsyCap outside workplace settings and gave voice to PsyCap and grief through my unique grief story. By sharing my story, I have extended social understanding of both grief and PsyCap. In addition, my story might inspire others to face their own grief experiences with fresh insight and understanding. Finally, this research answered the call for more studies of positive psychological states in bereavement.

The ramifications of such a study have the potential to influence how Human Resources might use PsyCap and PsyCap training. Think about it this way, if PsyCap is a part of the stories we choose to tell during grief and our experience of the stages of grief, and if PsyCap is malleable within the experience of grief, then the way PsyCap

training is developed might be radically affected. The results of this longitudinal study might be used in advancing the continuing development and use of PsyCap as a beneficial aid throughout the ups and downs of life.

Table 4

Gaps This Research Helps Fill

Gap in Research	References
Providing a longitudinal study of PsyCap	Avey, Luthans and Mhatre, 2008; Avey, et al., 2008; Carduff, et al. 2015; Calman, et al., 2013; Miller, 2015; Eriksson, 2013
Providing a longitudinal study on the malleability of PsyCap	Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, and Hirst, 2014; Carduff, et al. 2015; Calman, et al., 2013; Miller, 2015; Eriksson, 2013; Avey, Luthans and Mhatre, 2008
Qualitative research of the interplay of PsyCaps four component resources, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism	Dawkins, et al., 2013; Bajwa, 2018; Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, and Avolio, 2015; Luthans, et al., 2010; Lin, et al., 2016; Dyrdek Broad, and Luthans, 2020
Giving voice to PsyCap and grief through my unique grief story	Holman Jones, et al., 2016; Ellis et al, 2011; Tullis, 2016; Sparkes, 2000; Wall, 2008
Showing the interaction between the composite construct of PsyCap and grief	no studies
Research of PsyCap outside workplace settings	Luthans et al. 2007, Culbertson, 2010, Luthans, Youssef, Sweetman, & Harms, 2013, Luthans et al., 2015
Providing information about positive psychological state in bereavement	Moskowitz, Folkman & Acree, 2003

Research Questions

In exploring the relationship between PsyCap and grief I specifically looked at the following:

1. What do the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our psychological capital (our hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism)?

2. What can I learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stages of grief?
3. What do my grief stories and the psychological capital questionnaire reveal about the malleable characteristics of PsyCap?

Research Design, Rationale, and Procedures

Plano Clark and Creswell (2015) and Creswell and Poth (2018), suggest several characteristics of good qualitative research. It begins with a desire to explore a situation or idea. A compelling research question guides the research and strives to help fill a knowledge gap. A strong, ethical design, with careful thought about participants, is an important component of good qualitative research. Another component of robust research is rigorous data collection procedures including multiple forms of rich and thick data, and an in-depth analysis that looks at as many angles as possible. Finally, good qualitative research persuasively shares results, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

This research began with several research questions. From there a plan was proposed regarding what stories would be collected. Chang (2016) suggests that in autoethnography the researcher's personal experiences are the primary source of data. Since I had been journaling through Facebook posts and in my Notes App on my iPhone, I decided to use those journal entries as the data for my grief story. Journaling is "a tool for introspection, powerful especially because it allows the person to withdraw from an experience in order to reflect on it, then reenter active life with a new or deeper understanding of that experience" (Clark, 2001, p. 89). For me, journaling is about

capturing a moment in time in writing or with photography. It makes sense then, that another data source I have chosen to use is photographs.

I also used fieldnotes created in the margins of books and articles I read for this research. Fieldnotes were also a part of the memos I wrote while coding. “Field notes are the words and images recorded by the researcher during an observation in a qualitative study” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 344). They are, at their core, observations. “Fieldnotes describe places and people and events. They are also used as textual space for the recording of our emotions and personal experiences” (Coffey, 1999, p. 119). Those fieldnotes, a kind of “remembered observation” or “headnote” in the margins of books and articles and the memoing that happened during coding became a kind of observation of myself throughout the research (Sanjek, 1990, p. 5).

In this case, my field notes are memories that add to and expand the data in the journal entries, Facebook posts, and photographs. They were often inspired by something I read in the text that brought more details of something already written in a journal or post, or a whole new memory which had been temporarily forgotten. Field notes are basically, “one selective story about what happened written from a particular point of view at a particular point in time for a particular purpose” (Ellis, 1999, p. 673).

In addition, I chose to use three results of the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ), developed by Luthans, Avolio, and Avey. This twenty-four question test measures hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism using “six items adapted from existing published measures (efficacy – Parker, 1998; hope – Snyder et al., 1996;

optimism – Scheier & Carver, 1985; and resilience – Wagnild & Young, 1993)” (Luthans, et al., 2007a, p. 4).

I took the test three times, several years apart. The first was in 2017, as part of a friend’s dissertation research. That turned out to be several months prior to Robert’s death. The second was in 2020, after I’d decided to use the autoethnographic research method and before COVID became a household word. I realized the data revealed by the PCQ might be interesting in addressing my research question on the malleability of PsyCap. The third was taken in the Fall of 2021, the final semester of my research and writing. The first test was before Robert’s death, the second after settling on my research focus and research method, and the third test was taken near the end of my data set. This time span helped me to look longitudinally at the three results and changes that occurred and added to my data on the malleability of PsyCap.

Generally, in qualitative research, once a variety of data forms are in hand, they must be analyzed. Analysis includes both a “description of the data” answering the question “what is” and an “interpretation of the data” addressing the question “what is to be made of it all?” (Chang, 2016, p. 118). Analysis of the data is “inductive, interpretive, simultaneous, and iterative” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 356). To be analyzed the data must be prepared, which involves reading and playing with the data, and marking it by hand or by computer. Next the data is explored. This step includes keeping memos “short phrases, ideas, concepts, or hunches that occur to the researcher” and coding (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 358). Yin talks about this

process of working with the data as compiling, disassembling, and reassembling the data (Yin, 2016).

I analyzed the data by making six different coding passes through the data. Coding is not a typical component of autoethnography. To the best of my knowledge, no one has used coding in this way as part of autoethnographic research. By using the in-depth, iterative process coding provides, I gained both a refreshed look at my own words and an intense interpretation of possible connections within the data that helped me begin to draw conclusions. Since autoethnography is not a common research method, I also knew coding was a familiar way of analyzing most qualitative data and would help those who read this research see the rigorous process and build trust in the results.

The final step of analysis involves validating the results. This means using “strategies to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 364). These strategies include building trustworthiness and rigor, triangulation, how the research resonates with the reader (a kind of validation of the results), the accuracy of how the research reflects life (a way of generalizing the results from my experience to the experience of others), and reflexivity. Let’s take a deeper look at the ways accuracy and credibility can be gained.

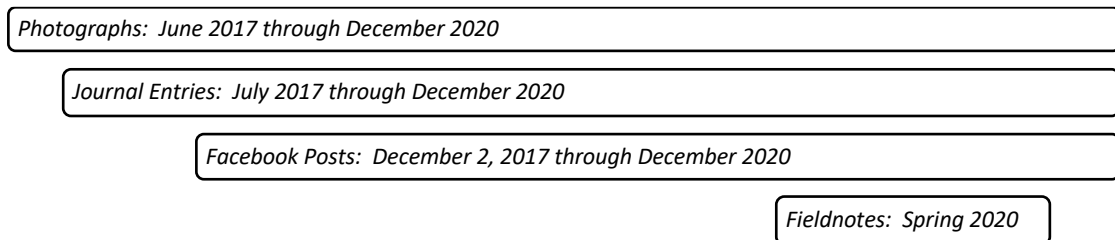
Trustworthiness and rigor are keys to successfully presenting good quality research. Demonstrating authenticity in research and specifically in data sources is one way to encourage trustworthiness and rigor. Rigorous methods helped build the data’s

authenticity and build trustworthiness by showing how data selections were made and how challenges were dealt with (Yin, 2016).

In this research some of the challenges included which journal entries and pictures to use and how far back to go. I selected the data based on relevancy to my grief journey. Since my research focus was PsyCap and grief, I decided to use all the Facebook posts related to my grief journey from the moment of Robert's death until December 2020. I also decided to only use the journaling in my Notes app that was specific to my grief story. The journal entries I chose to use in the Notes app started in July 2017 when Robert had a formal diagnosis of alcoholic cirrhosis and continued through December 2020. The field notes, written in the margins of books and articles from readings I did in preparation to write the dissertation, were transferred to an annotated bibliography created during a course taken in Spring 2020. And the photographs I used were only those that were tied to specific memories or emotional upheavals experienced from July 2017 through Robert's burial. For a visual timeline of my data, see Figure 3.

Figure 3

Brief Timeline of Data Gathered

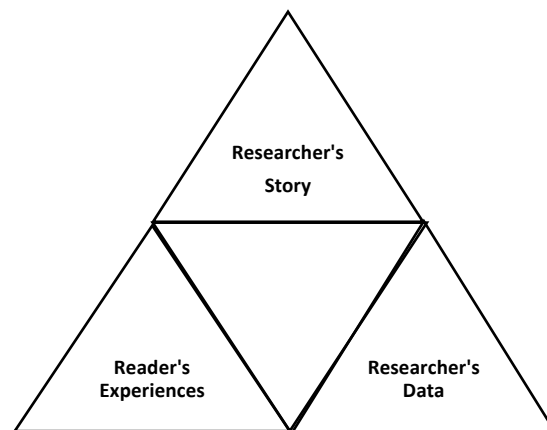


Triangulation of the data also helps to strengthen trustworthiness.

“Triangulation is the process of corroborating evidence about a finding from different individuals” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 364). This means that several sources of data all point to the same patterns and themes. In autoethnography, one of the data sources in triangulation is the reader. If the data shared through my Facebook posts, journal entries, memos, and/or memory make a connection with the experiences of the reader, there is a sort of triangulation that happens. My story, the research data, and the readers experiences merge to form a triangle of knowledge and understanding (Figure 4). This triangulation of corroboration builds trustworthiness and shows rigor.

Figure 4

Autoethnographic Triangulation



“Some autoethnographers may choose to engage in a process akin to a member check” (Tullis, 2016, p. 253). This is an opportunity for those implicated in the research to check the factuality and accuracy as well as the researchers’ interpretation of events and experiences. I asked family members who know me and knew Robert to proofread both for grammar and the accuracy of the content in my stories. They did not find any

discrepancies between my memories and their own. This too, is a way to triangulate the data to ensure trustworthiness and rigor.

“For autoethnographers, validity means that a work . . . evokes in readers a feeling that the experience described is lifelike, believable, and possible, a feeling that what has been represented could be true” (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 10). This feeling of connection, plausible authenticity, and accuracy help to bring credibility when judging the research as trustworthy and rigorous. Although difficult to quantify or measure, *how the research resonates with the reader* is a kind of validation of the results. Resonation relates to the interpretation of the data. In autoethnography, the responsibility falls, in large part, on you, the reader, to determine whether the study resonates with you or not. Do the findings “accurately reflect and represent the real world that was studied” (Yin, 2016, p. 88)? Does the research make the reader think of similar experiences in their life? Do my grief experiences ring true to your grief experiences? Is there overlap in our stories or a similarity? Are they vastly different but yet vaguely familiar? Do you resonate with what I am sharing in this research study? If so, you might feel the research is trustworthy and rigorous.

“In autoethnography, the focus of generalizability moves from respondents to readers, and is always being tested by readers as they determine if a story speaks to them about their experience or about the lives of others they know.” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 10). *Looking at the accuracy of how the research reflects life experience* is a way of generalizing the results from my experience to the experience of others. Looking at the study’s generalizability can be used in autoethnography to bring a sense of

trustworthiness. Are the stories I am telling, the experiences I am sharing, and the lessons I am learning generalizable to your life as the reader? Are my stories an accurate reflection of your stories? Do you have a sense of an intertwining of the stories read and your stories lived? Does this research encourage you to tell and retell your own stories? If so, you will find the research trustworthy and rigorous. In some ways, “the questions most important to autoethnographers are: who reads our work, how are they affected by it, and how does it keep a conversation going?” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 11)

Reflexivity is another tool in the researcher’s toolbox that can be used to help ensure trustworthiness and rigor in their research. Reflexivity “requires careful and rigorous thought, rhetorically constructed to present a personal narrative in all its emotional and intellectual capacities” (Pelias, 2016, p. 387). Reflexivity “entails taking seriously the self’s location(s) in culture and scholarship, circumspectly exploring our relationship to/in autoethnography, to make research and cultural life *better* and *more meaningful*.” (Berry, 2016, p. 212). Reflexivity is considered by some to be a significantly compelling aspect of autoethnographic research design (Berry, 2016). In being willing to be transparent about “how we are ‘in’ this praxis, autoethnographers have made available cultural portraits previously unavailable and, at times, unimaginable.” (Berry, 2016, p. 214). When we write reflexively “we note our own social location in relation to the participant, the nature of our relationship with this person, and our emotional responses.” (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257). Thinking and writing reflexively as an autoethnographer was probably the most difficult aspect of this research journey. Not only did I try to share my grief journey, but I analyzed it and

looked behind and beneath the stories I have journaled and photographed to listen anew to the experiences that prompted the story.

“The boundaries between self-indulgence and reflexivity are fragile and blurred. There will always be the question about how much of ourselves to reveal” (Coffey, 1999, p. 132). Coding the data in multiple ways was one of the tools I have used to set boundaries and be reflexive. By looking at the data through various lenses I was able to step outside of myself and see the stories in the data from a different perspective, albeit a perspective that is still colored by my own life experiences.

Explicitly and methodically reporting details, triangulating the material, including member checking, showing resonance, accurately reflecting life experiences, and reflexivity, are concepts I have used to encourage rigor and trustworthiness. By using these techniques, I have encouraged trust and shown rigor while honoring the subjectivity, emotionality, and researcher influence that autoethnography encourages. In addition, these techniques assisted me in looking at every step of the research process from as many perspectives as possible so I could provide rich and thick research experiences that both fill the gap in knowledge and make the research accessible to a wide audience.

“Rather than produce inaccessible, esoteric, and jargon-laden texts, autoethnographers work to connect with multiple and diffuse audiences by writing and performing in clear, concise and engaging ways. . . They appreciate storytelling as a way of knowing, sharing, and relating, and value a variety of representational mediums . . . Not only do these practices make research more accessible – and, we believe, more valuable in that more than just a select few can engage particular works – but they also help satisfy some autoethnographers’ commitment to cultural critique and social justice.” (Holman Jones, et al., 2016, p. 37)

One of the best ways to evaluate autoethnographic research, its design and procedures, is to ask, “whether a piece tells a compelling story, shows more than it tells, treats others fairly, reflects on the privilege of the author, holds out hope, and/or changes the fortunes of the disenfranchised” (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2016, p. 621). These are all evaluations the reader, in large part, will need to make. If the autoethnographic research design is not carried out in a way that encourages the reader to open themselves, “to being changed by it, to heeding its call to surrender your entitlement” (Gingrich-Philbrook, 2016, p. 618) it is flawed. The onus lies with both researcher and the reader.

Ontological, Epistemological, Axiological and Methodological Assumptions

Every researcher brings four philosophical assumptions to their research, whether they know it or not (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Those four assumptions affect how the research is carried out. To create robust research, it is important for researchers to think about the methodological, ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions they bring to their research.

Methodological Assumptions.

Methodological assumptions are a critical aspect of robust research design and are quite literally what this entire chapter are about. Methodological assumptions “are characterized as inductive, emerging, and shaped by the researcher’s experience in collecting and analyzing the data” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). One of my methodological assumptions is that narrative learning and understanding life experiences through stories is key to telling an autoethnographic research story. In this

case, it is a story of grief and PsyCap. Another methodological assumption is that through autoethnography, the telling of my story can make a difference to how you understand and tell your story.

Stories and what we can learn from them are an integral part of the autoethnographical research design I have chosen. Learning through stories is also an integral part of narrative learning theory. We learn from hearing stories, telling stories, and “recognizing the narratives in which we are positioned” (Clark, 2010, p. 6).

Narrative learning “presumes that our thinking is shaped by sociocultural forces; recognizing our narrative situatedness enables us to identify and critique how that shaping takes place” (Clark, 2010, p. 6). As the researcher of an autoethnography on grief and PsyCap, I must be cognizant of the sociocultural forces and narrative situatedness in order to critique my data and experiences. As the one researched, I write knowing the narrative of my specific situation has the power to open the door of understanding for others.

However, we must remember that this dissertation story is just one story. It is just my story. No matter how common or familiar it might seem, it is just one story. “The single story creates stereotypes, and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (Ngozi Adicie, 2009). To not create a story stereotype, you, as the reader must add your story to the narrative and to any understandings gained by reading and experiencing my story. In doing so, our stories become shared stories in which we can find ourselves and one another.

Ontological Assumptions.

Ontology is “thinking about what makes up the world” (Kimball, 2012, p. 133). It “relates to the nature of reality” and encourages the researcher to think about the various realities and worldviews present in his/her research (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 20). I brought a constructivist framework to my research. This means I wanted to understand the world in which I live, love, function daily, and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and how meaning is constructed from those experiences (Merriam & Bierema, 2014).

Ontologically, I recognized that our multiple realities are constructed in a sociocultural context through our experiences and relationships (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Bierema, 2014). My socio-cultural context was grief and how PsyCap interacted with that grief journey. As we learn and experience new things, we construct knowledge by assimilating or accommodating that knowledge. Piaget (1952), a father of constructivist thinking, used these terms in his studies on intelligence.

When we assimilate the knowledge, we “incorporate the new experience into an already existing framework without changing the framework” (Rothwell, 2008, p. 16). We fit the knowledge into existing containers in our minds (Terry Heick, 2014). A new idea is assimilated into an old schema (Piaget, 1952). When we accommodate the knowledge, we have to reframe our understanding and “mental representation” of the learning or experience (Rothwell, 2008, p. 16). My grief journey was filled with moments of assimilation and accommodation, moments of familiarity and unfamiliarity,

of experiences easily placed into existing understandings and of experiences that created the need for entirely new mental file folders.

My reality, specifically my grief reality, is constructed by the relationships I find myself in. In this research study, I only specifically referred to one of those relationships, my beloved husband, Robert, and therefore you only heard a portion of my relational reality.

However, through this autoethnography I was able to look at various other realities in which I live. I did not just look at the reality of death and the grieving process, I also looked at the reality of PsyCap and how it is a part of our grief stories and stages of grief, and how it is malleable within our grief experiences. Grief is a reality of life each of us will experience and is intricately entwined with the relationships in which we find ourselves. PsyCap, as a state-like trait, is moldable, and very likely shaped by our experiences as well as relationships. Grief and PsyCap are something we all experience in one way or another and have been part of my ontological assumptions.

Epistemological Assumptions.

Epistemology is how we can know the world (Kimball, 2012). “Epistemology comes from the Greek words *episteme* (knowledge) and *logos* (discourse) and is applied to that part of philosophy concerned with the extraordinary number of issues surrounding the origins and nature of human cognition and knowledge” (Harvey, 1964, p. 79). An epistemological perspective helps guide researchers to look carefully at “how knowledge is known – through the subjective experiences of people” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). With the social constructivist framework in mind, epistemologically, I

understand that my knowledge of the world is constructed and shaped through life experiences, including the research of those life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Epistemology can be understood through Magolda's epistemological reflection model. This model helped me see the depth and breadth of my own epistemological assumptions about grief. The model has four knowledge states: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing (Bock, 1999). I found myself in each of the four knowledge states.

"For the absolute knower, knowledge exists as a certainty and is possessed by certain authorities" (Bock, 1999, p. 31). I was an absolute knower in that one of my epistemological assumptions is an example of absolute knowing, of complete certainty . . . everyone experiences grief.

Transitional knowers recognize that "some areas of knowledge are certain and some are uncertain" which allows the knower to begin the process of understanding complex and sometimes conflicting ideas (Bock, 1999, p. 32). For instance, although grief is often defined by stages, it is typically not experienced linearly, but in a more cyclical way. In addition, some do not experience the stages at all. As I began wrap my head around idea of grief and PsyCap, I was a transitional knower.

Independent knowers understand that "most knowledge is uncertain" (Bock, 1999, p. 34). Taking the grief example, authorities write both about stages of grief and the idea that no one experiences any stage of grief. As an independent knower, I simply placed this potential conflict in the "most knowledge is uncertain" box and held it liminally until more knowledge could be gained.

Contextual knowers consider context as a critical part of knowing. Continuing with the grief illustration, I experienced stages of grief, but not necessarily in order or one at a time, and not necessarily once. My contextual knowledge tells me that stages of grief are accurate as long as they are not forced into a linear only format.

Magolda's model of four knowledge states: absolute knowing, transitional knowing, independent knowing, and contextual knowing (Bock, 1999) helped me understand epistemologically how I know grief through the lens of PsyCap. My grief story and my understanding of PsyCap was molded and shaped in the telling. In reading about my grief story and seeing your grief story in my story, you will also begin to know and understand how PsyCap and grief intersect.

Axiological Assumptions.

Axiological assumptions are another of Creswell's philosophical assumptions. "In a qualitative study, the inquirers admit the value-laden nature of the study and actively report their values and biases as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field" (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 21). Axiological assumptions are revealed through a statement of positionality, including values and ethics. I value relationships and the unique stories each person brings to those relationships. I acknowledge the belief that stories and our interpretation of them shape us in ways we may never fully recognize or understand.

Positionality.

A significant part of my axiological assumption is my positionality. I am a strong, white female from a mostly European background. Being white opens doors to me that

others do not have the luxury of seeing open. Just the fact that I can tell my story shows a kind of power. I can attend a university. I am privileged to be able to share my story as part of working toward a doctorate degree. I do not take the privilege and power lightly.

It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. There is a word, an Igbo word, that I think about whenever I think about the power structures of the world, and it is 'nkali.' It's a noun that loosely translates to 'to be greater than another.' Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali: How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power. (Ngozi Adicie, 2009).

Being a strong female and a person of privilege has brought blessings and challenges. I remember being told I was perfect for a job and when I asked for the salary I thought I was worth, I was told that I was blackmailing the supervisor by asking for that amount.

I have also experienced ageism. For many years I was the youngest full-time Christian Education director in all the New Mexico and West Texas United Methodist churches. I thought I had a lot to say and that I brought a lot of new ideas. Many thought I was too young to know anything worth imparting and that I did not have enough life experience to be a strong leader. This led me to choose to further my education in the hopes that a degree would strengthen my voice and authenticate my leadership. I attended Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary and received a Master's in Theological Studies with an emphasis in worship and a Master of Arts in Christian Education.

I have always been curious, and I like to use my imagination. I love to hear stories about how things work and why they work. Robert did as well. If we did not have access to those stories, we used our imagination and created a story!

I am well-traveled, having lived in or traveled to many of the states in the United States, several European countries, and Mexico. I make enough money to live comfortably. Finances, although sometimes a huge burden to those dealing with the death of a loved one, have not been problematic for me.

I trust there is a higher power that I call God and think of as Spirit, who walks through life with us. I do not believe God is wrathful or that God steps into human affairs at the whim of personal requests. I do believe that God laughs with me, cries with me, and intimately knows all my actions, thoughts, and words.

I am a musician. I play the piano and sing. I started playing the piano when I was five years old. My undergraduate degree was in sacred music. I am classically trained although I love playing and singing all sorts of music. I have worked professionally as a musician, but currently use playing the piano as a way to meditate. Robert was also a musician. He took organ and piano lessons starting at age twelve and was a natural. He innately understood how music is created and regularly invented beautiful piano pieces on the spot. He called it noodling. I thought it was magical. For several years we worked together as musicians at a church and playing for weddings at a retreat center in the East Mountains outside Albuquerque. It was pure joy to share our musical talents in the same space at the same time.

My emotions have always been basically even keeled and never too extreme. My family jokes that my rage is like most people's anger. As Robert's physical and mental health deteriorated and it was clear I would not be able to do anything about it, I began experiencing extreme sadness and my mind would not shut off. These were things I had experienced before but was always able to move through quickly. This time it was different. The sadness was making it more and more difficult to function, and my furtive, constantly "on" mind made it difficult to sleep. On the advice of my physician, I began taking an anti-depressant. Although medicine is not the right choice for everyone, I have been thankful for the balance it has brought back to my life. Robert, who also experienced depression tried several anti-depressants, but each of them made him feel like a "dull-minded robot", so he stopped taking them.

Some other parts of my story that might help you connect with me, and my story include the fact that I am an animal lover and a cat mom. I currently share my life with a cuddly, talkative, curious, orange tabby named Theo (tay-o).

Fall is my favorite season because it is filled with the most change and excitement. The weather changes, leaves change, routines change and in Albuquerque, we have a huge state fair and the International Balloon Fiesta in the Fall.

Christmas was my favorite holiday until Robert's death in December of 2017. One of the main reasons it was my favorite holiday was all the various ways Robert and I prepared and led congregations in the season of Advent and Christmas. At the church where we met and fell in love, I served as the Christian Education director. During Advent I was responsible for all the studies and educational programs. I was also

responsible for any of the worship services that included or were led by children. Robert oversaw the publications of the church including bulletins and newsletters. Together we created a yearly Advent devotional written by the members of the congregation. During the four years prior to Robert's death, he and I were blessed to be musicians together at a different church. In that capacity we often led or had a significant role in all the Sundays of Advent as well as four Christmas Eve worship services. Providing leadership and helping the congregation live the season was both a joy and a gift. The day after Robert's death was the first Sunday in Advent. He had resigned in early November for health reasons, and I had agreed to continue to play through the end of the year if needed. Robert helped me choose music, practice, and prepare before each worship service. He wanted to hear all the stories of how it had gone after I got home. Playing that first Sunday in Advent service and then all the worship services throughout Advent and Christmas Eve alone, without his advice and guidance was very difficult and important. I still enjoy the music of the season and love to give gifts, but without Robert and all the ways we worked together to experience the season of Advent and Christmas, the magic of the season is no longer present for me.

I am a Sci-fi lover, especially Star Trek and Star Wars. So was Robert. We also loved watching television shows and movies about archeology, historical documentaries, and murder mysteries. I still watch those sorts of shows as a mental escape.

My love language is touch followed by quality time. Those were Robert's as well and may be, at least in part, why we so deeply and quickly connected to one another. We knew how to fill one another's love tanks.

I appreciate tools like the Psychological Capital Questionnaire and the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator. I find that they often help me see myself from a different perspective. The first time I took the Myers-Briggs was when I attended graduate school in Evanston, Illinois. My results were ENFJ. I was off the charts as an E (extrovert) and J (judging) and borderline N (intuitive) and F (feeling). Robert and I took the test several times while we were married and although those indicators on the borderline have sometimes crossed the border, my E and J have remained a strong part of my personality type. Robert was an extreme introvert (I) and an extreme P (perceiving, sometimes defined as spontaneous). Over the years I became more and more comfortable with his introverted nature (I) and his willingness to be open to whatever happened (P). I had the occasion to take the test again in the months that followed Robert's death. Interestingly, I tested as a strong INFP. I knew my grief journey had made a change in the way I was energized (outwardly is extroverted, inwardly is introverted) and how I made decisions (comfortable with deciding is judging and comfortable staying open to possibilities is perceiving/spontaneous), but I did not expect to see my personality type change so drastically.

Since this is an autoethnography and I am both the researcher and the one researched, I am hopeful these insights about me give you a sense of my positionality and the perspectives I bring to this research. These are aspects of who I am, the lenses

through which I see life. My methodological, ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions have helped to frame and create a foundation for the research in this dissertation. Knowing the lens you are looking through is important in research to both the researcher and the reader, especially in autoethnographic research. Each of us look at things differently and through different life lenses. Even so, the things I have shared and will share in this dissertation are truths for me, since I have experienced them, but they “are subjective in that they may not be true for everyone else. . . ‘small t’ truths are factual experiences you have been through and are consequently influenced and filtered by your worldview” (Nuriddin, 2018, p. 24). My truth will hopefully resonate with your truth through the stories shared and the triggering of your stories remembered. This mixing and mingling of truths through the various lenses and positionalities we bring, is part of the joy of sharing our stories with one another.

Target Population and Sample

Population

In research, “a population is a group of individuals or organizations who have the same characteristic” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 234). The target population of a qualitative research study includes the people who experience the central phenomenon researched in the study. In the case of this research, the population included all those who have experienced the phenomena of grief and who have experienced or wanted to experience hope, efficacy, resiliency, and/or optimism in their lives.

Sample

The sample I chose to study is a sample of one person, me, although it could be argued that it is a sample of two, my husband and me. Either way, the small sample lends itself to autoethnography. Although the sample is appropriately small, the phenomena are global, and the depth of information provided has the potential to speak meaningfully to those who share the experiences of grief and psychological capital.

Participant Selection

After years of knowing I wanted to focus my research on stories and psychological capital and brainstorming with my husband, Robert, about different variations of what that research could and should look like, I was still not settled on a specific path forward. We considered ethnography and narrative research as methods. We looked at mixed methods, quantitative research designs, and qualitative research designs. With Robert's help as a sounding board and with insights from various course requirements, I even wrote up the research procedures for several of those variations. Then my beloved Robert died.

Several months after he died, I learned about autoethnography in one of my classes. It was like a bright light illuminated the path ahead. I remember asking in class if we were allowed to pursue autoethnography as a research method for our PhD. When the answer was yes, I could feel my heartbeat faster. I do not remember much of the rest of that class. Could I tell my grief story in a meaningful, research-based way? As the months progressed and I read more and more about autoethnography, the

answer became a resounding, “Yes!” My research questions and the desire to research a sociological experience fit the autoethnographic research method. The small sample size and the use of story to tell a unique perspective of a cultural phenomenon fit the autoethnographic method as well. At that moment, autoethnography became my research method and, appropriately, the main participants were me and my deceased husband.

Protection of Participants

“Protecting participants’ identities and keeping their private information confidential is an essential component of ethical research” including autoethnographic research (Tullis, 2016, p. 250). Robert and I were the only formal participants in this research, however, our family and those who have read and responded to some of my data sources, especially my Facebook posts, could be implicated and must be protected. “On the one hand, readers or audience members who engage others’ autoethnographic scholarship are often rhetorically implicated through the engagement, presenting a need to reconsider and therein potentially transform how we understand ourselves and our cultural worlds” (Berry, 2016, p. 215). I have tried to protect those potentially implicated by not naming them or referring to their comments.

Personally, I have protected myself by surrounding myself with people who are willing to talk about my thoughts and emotions. I have also given myself time to process, to think, to feel, and to remember. Sometimes this has meant deadlines have not been met, but my sanity and emotional stability have been and continue to be too

important to risk. Protection of participants, those potentially implicated, and self is part of the ethical role of an autoethnographic researcher.

Data Collection

There are typically four forms of data in qualitative research, interviews, observations, documents, and audiovisual materials (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 160).

“We must not look at the actual collection of data as something neutral or as something that cannot be changed. Good ethnography requires flexibility. The collection of data may be one area where flexibility is the most crucial, because our study can be no better than the data we collect” (Thomas, 1993, p. 41).

The same is true for autoethnography, a branch of ethnography. “Autoethnographers use their personal experiences as primary material (data) for social investigation. They draw from autobiographic data such as memories, memorabilia, documents about themselves, official records, photos, interviews with others, and on-going self-reflective and self-observational memos” (Chang, 2016, p. 108). In a longitudinal autoethnography “the data can be located in your memory and in your personal writings such as diaries, notes, speeches, blog postings, and other materials that you have written along the way for various purposes” (Eriksson, 2013, p. 4). My data was primarily personal journals kept on my iPhone in the Notes app and through Facebook posts. My data sources also included field notes written in the margins of books and articles, photographs, and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire. To see how the characteristics of ethnography and autoethnography fit with research questions and my data choices, see Table 7.

The choice to journal on Facebook was an innocent happenstance. It was the only way I knew to connect with Robert’s friends for whom I did not have phone

numbers or emails, and it was the best way I knew to let the vast majority of my friends know he had died. Then I shared a few of the experiences in the weeks that followed his death. At the start of the new year (one month after he died) I realized I was going to be faced with many “firsts” that had become significant celebrations in Robert’s and my life. I did not know how I could face them alone, so I again turned to my Facebook community. Those posts became a sort of journal of the experiences and emotions of my grief journey.

Journaling in my Notes app was a quick way to get thoughts written down and out of my system so that I could move on with the needs of the day. Having the journal entries on the Notes app allowed me to easily access them as well.

In addition to using my iPhone to post on Facebook and journal in the Notes app, I also used it to take pictures. Some I took so I could have a general remembrance of a moment. Others I took so I could remember a specific detail.

Another data source was my results from Luthans, Avolio and Avey’s Psychological Capital Questionnaire (2007). I answered the questionnaire three times. Once in 2017, again in 2020 and finally in the Fall of 2021.

I also took fieldnotes in the margins of books and papers as I read and researched the concepts of this study. This also occurred as I coded and took the form of memos. Often the text would trigger a memory or inspire me to journal about an idea or emotion. Those unique margin notes and memos became field notes, a way for me to observe myself in that moment. “While recalling captures autobiographic data from the past, self-analysis, self-observation, and reflection bring out present thinking,

attitudes, perceptions, habits, emotions of autoethnographers” (Chang, 2016, p. 114).

This recalling became a form of autoethnographic field notes. “A characteristic of the data collected in qualitative longitudinal research is its richness, resulting from the telling of subjective experiences around personal events and change” (Miller, 2015, p. 301).

Data Protection

How did I protect my data? The Facebook posts are already public documents. All of my photographs were and continued to be stored on my computer and in iCloud. My notes in the app, have been saved to Word documents and have been saved on my computer. The results of the questionnaire were also stored on my computer. My field notes, although still in the margins of the books and articles read, were primarily transferred to an annotated bibliography which continues to be a living document, constantly being updated with new information. It too is stored on my computer and in the cloud. The documents on my computer have also been saved to external hard drives and Dropbox.

The nature of autoethnography is to be vulnerable and open. It does not concern me that data is readily available to anyone who wants to read it, or stumble across it as would likely be the case of notes made in the margins of books and articles.

Data Analysis: Coding the Data

“As autobiographic data grow in the form of texts, artifacts, media materials, researchers organize and work with them to make sense of what all these ‘snapshots’ are about” (Chang, 2016, p. 115). In autoethnography, this data is not typically coded. I

have chosen to code my data in a variety of ways to get into my own narrative from a new perspective and open the data to deeper insights. Coding helped me to see patterns in my data related to my research questions. I also chose coding as a way to see if PsyCap, as a construct, was represented in my data or if only the component resource parts of PsyCap (hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism) were represented in the data.

I began with holistic coding. In this coding pass over the data, I looked at whole journal entries and entire pictures to see the big ideas, themes, issues within the larger blocks of text or picture. Chang suggests that “to make meaning of seemingly unconnected data, researchers need to transcend minute details and see a big picture, hear an overtone, or imagine a smell that is not buried in the data” (2016, p. 116). Holistic coding allowed me to do that.

“Holistic Coding is an attempt “to grasp basic themes or issues in the data by absorbing them as a whole [the code as ‘lumper’] rather than by analyzing them line by line [the code as ‘splitter’]” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 166). It is a way to approach the data before detailed coding is employed (Saldaña, 2016). According to Saldaña, “holistic coding is appropriate for . . . studies with a wide variety of data forms (e.g., interview transcripts, field notes, journals, documents, diaries, correspondence, artifacts, video)” (2016, p. 166). Holistic coding allowed me to put a kind of headline on the data to summarize its content. It was a good fit for the various forms of data I used.

Next, I engaged in emotional coding to get at the emotions within the journal entry, field note, or picture. “Emotion Codes label the emotions recalled and/or

experienced by the participant” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125). This “careful scrutiny of a person’s emotions reveals not just the inner workings of an individual, but possibly the underlying mood or tone or a society – its ethos” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125). The codes often use words found in the data (In Vivo Codes) and the emotions and emotional reactions present in the data (Saldaña, 2016).

“Emotion Coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that explore intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions, especially in matters of social relationships, reasoning, decision-making, judgment, and risk-taking” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 125). This made it a good choice to help me get to a deeper level of understanding my own journaling and photography, but it was tough. Coding for the emotions in my own story brought the emotions to the surface again. I found that to assume the role of the researcher, and not the one being researched, I had to use lists of emotions I found on the internet from which I chose the emotion that seemed most appropriate to the text I was coding.

My next coding pass was values coding to look deeply at the attitudes, beliefs, and values represented in the data. “Since emotional responses are intricately woven with our value, attitudes, and belief systems, Values Coding also becomes a critical concurrent method” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 128).

What do I mean by values? According to Saldaña, “a *value* is the importance we attribute to ourselves, another person, thing, or idea. They are the principles, moral codes, and situational norms people live by” (2016, p. 131). In comparison, Saldaña defines an *attitude* as “the way we think and feel about ourselves, another person,

thing, or idea” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). Finally, “a *belief* is part of a system that includes our values and attitudes, plus our personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 132). So, values relate to the importance given to someone or something. An attitude is about our thought process and feeling about those things and people. Our beliefs are about how we interpret the world around us.

“Values coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for those that explore cultural values and belief systems, identity, intrapersonal and interpersonal participant experiences and actions in case studies, appreciative inquiry, oral history, critical ethnography, sociology, and longitudinal qualitative studies” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 132). It “is applicable not only to interview transcripts, blogs, vlogs, and other participant-generated materials such as journals, diaries, and social media entries, but also to field notes in which naturalistic participant actions are documented” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 132).

While I coded for values, beliefs, and attitudes, I had a chart of the definitions of each beside me (see Table 5). Then I looked in the text to see if a value, belief, or attitude was present. For example, on March 4, 2018, I posted on Facebook:

I am doing my best to mentally and emotionally prepare for several “firsts” (first time without Robert) coming up. Robert and I had lots of silly but significant anniversaries in March and April: the day our Lovebird, Cadeau found us by knocking on our porch sliding glass door, our first date, our first kiss, and the day he asked me to marry him. As each of those days creep closer, I am trying to find ways to honor them, remember Robert, his love and compassion, and hold myself gently. Grief is hard. (Albright, Facebook, March 4, 2018)

The values code on my coding chart looked like this: “B: Grieving is hard work” signifying that a belief I saw in the text was grieving is hard work. Values coding was a great follow-up to emotion coding and was appropriate for the data and focus of my research. Values coding helped me see the values, attitudes, and beliefs behind my own words and pictures.

Table 5

Values Codes

Values (V)	“The importance we attribute to ourselves, another, person, thing, or idea . . . principles, moral codes, situational norms people live by”
Attitudes (A)	“The way we think and feel about ourselves, another person, thing, or idea”
Beliefs (B)	“Personal knowledge, experiences, opinions, prejudices, morals, and other interpretive perceptions of the social world”

Note. From Saldana, 2016, p. 131-132

Next, I moved to hypothesis coding for my fourth pass in analyzing the data. “Hypothesis Coding is the application of a researcher-generated, predetermined list of codes to qualitative data specifically to assess a research-generated hypothesis” (Saldana, 2016, p. 171). This coding allowed me to specifically code for hope, efficacy, resiliency, optimism, and PsyCap. To be as consistent as possible when making decisions regarding what should be coded as hope, or efficacy, or resiliency, or optimism, I gathered synonyms for each term. When coding I held all these terms in mind by having the information in Table 6 beside me as I decided what, if anything, should be coded hope, efficacy, resiliency, or optimism. My coding showed the hypothesis code, phrase from the text, and the synonym(s) that best fit that code. For example, in a Facebook post cited at the beginning of this chapter I coded the following sentences as efficacy:

“I’ve always loved questions. . . both in the asking of them and the discovery of the answers (which inevitably leads to more questions.) It’s part of being a lifelong learner . . . What was most interesting to me as I reflected on the question mark in the sky, was the realization that right now, I’m in a place of questions emotionally. ‘Why’ and ‘what could I have done differently’ surface almost daily in my thoughts. ‘How’ questions related to my energy levels, ability to concentrate and motivation are regular friends too.”

The code on my coding chart looked like this: “E: lifelong learner = keep moving forward” and “E: in a place of questioning emotionally . . . = belief about capabilities.” As a higher-order composite construct, PsyCap was coded if hope, efficacy, resiliency, AND optimism were present in the text or photograph.

Table 6

Synonyms for the Component Resource Parts of PsyCap

Hope	Efficacy (or Self-Efficacy)	Resiliency (Resilience)	Optimism
expectation	faith	plasticity	cheerfulness
longing	self-assurance	durability	positive attitude
wish	confidence	toughness	rational
waypower	conviction	adaptation	lenient
willpower	self-reliance	bounce back	appreciative
anticipation	belief about capabilities	rebound	opportunity-seeking
desire	keep moving forward*		

Note. These synonyms were gathered from google searches ‘synonym for hope,’ ‘synonym for optimism,’ etc., and the definitions of each term shared in Chapter 2. * Why is the “keep moving forward” code for efficacy and not resiliency? Efficacy is about knowing you can. The code was used to describe the internal push to keep moving forward. Resiliency is the ability to bounce back. Resiliency gets you back on track, efficacy moves you forward. This is part of the synergistic relationship of the component resources of PsyCap.

Saldaña suggested that this coding can be used to confirm or disconfirm assertions or theories and can be used strategically in a study that acknowledges it is focused “on narrowly defined parameters of investigation” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 171). By using hypothesis coding, I analyzed and coded the content of the data specifically for PsyCap or its component resource parts.

Next, I coded for Kübler-Ross and Kessler's stages of grief. This allowed me to see when the different stages of grief occurred with my grief story. While I was coding, I had constant access to a list of the six stages of grief and the pre-stage, anticipatory grief (see Figure 2 chapter 2.) I used the list regularly as a reference. I also coded for anticipatory grief as it was relevant to several of the data entries that occurred prior to Robert's death.

Finally, I used pattern coding to see patterns across all the previous codes. "Pattern Coding, as a second cycle method, is a way to group those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or concepts" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236). These codes "are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from first cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 236).

Saldaña suggests "pattern coding is appropriate for: condensing large amounts of data into a smaller number of analytic units, development of major themes from the data, the search for rules, causes, and explanations in the data . . ." (2016, p. 236). The development of major themes was especially appropriate for this research. The patterns within all the codes began to show the story behind the data.

Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg, and Bertsch discuss the Listening Guide as "a method of psychological analysis" (2006, p. 253). For this team of researchers,

each person's voice is distinct – a footprint of the psyche, bearing the marks of the body, of that person's history, of culture in the form of language, and the myriad ways in which human society and history shape the voice and thus leave their imprints on the human soul (2006, pp. 253-254).

I also adapted this method of looking at text to assist me in reflexively getting under and behind my own writings.

The first step is “listening for the plot” (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 257). This is a concentrated effort to attend to what is happening and what stories are being told. In many ways, that is what I did in the holistic and emotional coding. However, to help me look at the text with fresh eyes, I asked myself what was happening at the time I wrote the journal entry or field note, or when I took the picture. What story was I trying to tell with my words or photograph? These reflections were written in the memo section of my coding chart.

The second step of the Listening Guide analysis is to create an “I Poem.” To create the “I Poem” I gathered all the “I” statements and kept them in the order they appeared in the codes and in chronological order. This was an extra step I took while emotion and values coding. From the journal entries and field notes I was able to create an “I Believe Poem” which was a powerful description of my inner thoughts (see Appendix A).

The third step is to listen for contrapuntal voices. In this step the researchers listen “for the counterpoint in the text we are analyzing, or the multiple facets of the story being told” (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 262). This idea of multiple facets of the story or counterpoints within the text, was kept in mind as I did both the value and hypothesis coding and was often reflected in my memos.

The final step is composing an analysis. This is where “an interpretation of the interview or text is developed that pulls together and synthesizes what has been

learned through this entire process” (Gilligan et al., 2006, p. 266). This composing step was combined with my pattern coding.

By using these various coding and analyzing methods, and “through the process of moving in and out of small and large categories and of fragmenting, grouping, and resorting activities” (Chang, 2016, p. 116) I was able to see the themes that were woven between the journaling, Facebook posts, and photographs and determine how PsyCap was a part of my grief journey and my experience of the stages of grief.

To answer my research question about the malleability of PsyCap, I looked at the Psychological Capital Questionnaire results and looked at the data sources from around the same time I took each questionnaire. I also looked at the coding for those data sources. By looking at the results and what was going on in my life at the time, I was able to explore the patterns present and analyze how my PsyCap changed during my grief journey.

Although coding is not typically a part of autoethnographic research, the variety of coding helped me to reflexively see between the lines of the data. By looking at the big picture in holistic coding, the emotions within the text in emotion coding, the values, attitudes, and beliefs embedded in the stories, the HERO and PsyCap codes in the data, the stages of grief codes, and by creating an “I Poem,” I was able to see patterns that would likely have eluded me without taking extra steps.

Instruments & Data Sources

“An instrument is a tool used to gather quantitative data by measuring, observing, or documenting responses to specific items” (Plano Clark & Creswell, 2015, p. 240). A data source is the place you get the data (Yin, 2016, p. 55).

Myself

I have been the main research instrument, collecting data including journaling and field notes in margins of books/papers, observing, and documenting my own experiences (Yin, 2016). As the researcher, I have also been an instrument of decision making both in what to use and not use, as well as how to code data. It was my intuition and experience that guided the decisions that affect this research.

Facebook App

The Facebook App was a data source. My Facebook posts were part of my journaling and were initially a way to let those who were concerned about me after Robert’s death, know how I was doing en masse as opposed to one text or phone call at a time.

Notes App

The Notes app on my iPhone was a data source. It was an easily accessible place to write a thought, grab and keep a quote, and jot down my deepest emotions in the midst of my grief journey.

Camera App

The camera on my iPhone was also a constant companion and helped me to document my experiences throughout Robert’s illness and death.

The Psychological Capital (PsyCap) Questionnaire (PCQ)

The PsyCap Questionnaire itself was an instrument, but the results were a data source. The PCQ was developed by Luthans, Avolio, & Avey (2007). You can take the test as an individual for a small fee and get results by going to <https://www.mindgarden.com/136-psychological-capital-questionnaire>.

Table 7 gives a summary of the specific data I used in this research, the instruments I used to collect the data, and data analysis plan for each of my three research questions. The details of each area are described in previous sections. It also shows autoethnographic connections by sharing some characteristics of autoethnography that are represented in the research question.

Table 7

Summary of Research Questions, Autoethnographic Characteristics, Data, Instruments, and Data Analysis

Research Question	Autoethnographic Characteristics	Data	Instruments / Data Sources	Data Analysis
RQ1: What do the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our psychological capital (our hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “emerged to account for the role of personal experience in research, to illustrate why the personal is important in our understanding of cultural life, and to more fully articulate the complex research and decision-making process researchers engage in in the conduct of their work” (Holman Jones et al., 2017, p. 33) • Based upon and emerges from relationship and context” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 57) • Tells “a story in a way that reveals the self as a central character with rich emotional evocation that serve to ground the story being told” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 65) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facebook posts • Journaling • Photographs • Field notes as observations remembered and written into the margins of books and articles then transferred to annotated bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Myself • Facebook App • Notes App on my iPhone • Photo App on my iPhone • Annotated bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Holistic Coding • Emotion Coding • Values Coding (values, attitudes & beliefs) • Hypothesis Coding (hope, efficacy, resiliency, optimism, PsyCap) • Creation of an “I Poem” • Pattern Coding

Table 7 (cont.)

Research Question	Autoethnographic Characteristics	Data	Instruments / Data Sources	Data Analysis
RQ2: What can I learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stages of grief?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strives to understand a unique cultural experience (Ellis, et al., 2011) or a particular phenomenon (Mendez, 2013) Highly personalized accounts that draw upon the experiences of the author /researcher for the purposes of extending sociological understanding (Sparkes, 2000) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facebook posts Journaling Photographs Field notes as observations remembered and written into the margins of books and articles then transferred to annotated bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myself Facebook App Notes App on my iPhone Photo App on my iPhone Annotated bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Holistic Coding Emotion Coding Values Coding (values, attitudes & beliefs) Hypothesis Coding (hope, efficacy, resiliency, optimism, PsyCap) Stages of Grief Coding Pattern Coding
Research Question	Autoethnographic Characteristics	Data	Instruments / Data Sources	Data Analysis
RQ3: What do my grief stories and the psychological capital questionnaire reveal about the malleable characteristics of PsyCap?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflects a wider cultural emphasis on self-revelation and confession, and an appeal to subjectivity and lived experience (Coffey, 1999, p. 117) "Use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experiences, and in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders" (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 4) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) Facebook posts Journaling Photographs Field notes as observations remembered and written into the margins of books and articles then transferred to annotated bibliography 	<p><i>For the Questionnaire:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myself PCQ from the results given after taking the PCQ <p><i>To place the taking of the questionnaires into the bigger picture of what was happening in my life at the time:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Myself Facebook App Notes App on my iPhone Photo App on my iPhone Annotated bibliography 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Look at the PCQ changes between the three test results Look at data to place PCQ into my story of grief Pattern coding

Role of the Researcher

My role as a researcher is tied up with the thoughts, ideas, past experiences, and assumptions I bring with me to every situation I encounter. As a qualitative researcher, I

acknowledge these assumptions and have tried to make sure my data choices and analysis are as unbiased as possible.

As an autoethnographer, my role is slightly different. “Working from insider knowledge, autoethnographers use *personal* experience to create nuanced and detailed ‘thick descriptions’ of *cultural* experience in order to facilitate understanding of those experiences” (Homan Jones, et al., 2016, p. 33). Grief is the cultural experience I looked at through my personal experience. Others have done that too. Although different individual cultures bring distinctive nuances to the research, my unique lens is PsyCap and how it has been a part of my personal cultural experience of grief and how it has changed during that experience. I’ve also looked at how PsyCap was a part of my experience of the stages of grief.

Autoethnographers also “work to connect with multiple and diffuse audiences by writing and performing in clear, concise and engaging ways” (Homan Jones, et al., 2016, p. 37) I have tried to write in an easily accessible and understandable way and to do my best to avoid starting at step 10 when some of readers might be at step 1. My goal as an autoethnographer was to “tell a story in a way that reveals the self as a central character with rich emotional evocation that serve to ground the story being told” (Anderson & Glass-Coffin, 2016, p. 65). I did that by using my “personal experiences as primary material (data) for social investigation” and by drawing “from autobiographic data such as memories, memorabilia, documents about themselves, official records, photos, interviews with others, and on-going self-reflective and self-observational memos” (Chang, 2016, p. 108).

“Autoethnography encompasses a wide-range of different auto-ethno relationships . . . moving along a continuum from a more separate *researcher-and-researched* to that where the *researcher-is-researched*” (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009, p. 4). Doloriert and Sambrook suggest those are two different forms of research along an autoethnography continuum. In my experience, they can be combined into a single autoethnography, making it richer, more transparent, and trustworthy. In the *researcher-is-researched* aspect of autoethnography, “the researcher is the central focus of the research and therefore ‘auto’ becomes the ‘ethno’” (Doloriert & Sambrook, 2009, p. 4). In the *researcher-and-research*, there is a separation between the researcher and that which is being researched. The researcher becomes an observer of the experience and setting being explored. A strong autoethnography needs aspects of both *researcher-is-researched* and *researcher-and-research*.

As both the researcher and the topic of the research, there is a great vulnerability in authentic autoethnography. “Autoethnographers . . . must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience, and, in so doing, make characteristics of a culture familiar for insiders and outsiders” (Ellis, et al., 2011, p. 4). Without that vulnerability and willingness to share personal experience, connections cannot be made between my story and your story, nor can the goal of both qualitative and autoethnographic research, that of making meaning, be achieved.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics is also a significant consideration in designing good research. In ethnography the research is primarily “describing and interpreting a culture-sharing

group” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 104). In autoethnography, the focus can be narrowed to the unique culture of an individual. Ethics in research includes how the participants are chosen, what is revealed, how the information and the people involved are perceived, and how the data is collected and stored. In autoethnography, ethical considerations also include “moral ethics, ethical mindfulness, an ethic of trust, an ethic of care, and an ethic to look out for the well-being of ourselves as well as the other as we engage in emotionally laden journeys” (Douglass & Carless, 2016, p. 99). Many of these ethical considerations are relational and involve thinking about others.

Because my research involved only myself and my deceased husband, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) said the research is not subject to human research protections. I have shouldered the full responsibility of determining whether the research is ethical.

To take the appropriate precautions, there are several questions about ethics that I felt, as an autoethnographer, were important to take the time to think through. The following are questions Tullis (2016) asked and my responses, in relation to this research.

- “Do you have the right to write about others without their consent” (Tullis, 2016, p. 256)? I cannot ask Robert for consent and did not mention anyone else by name.
- “What effect do these stories have on individuals and your relationship with them” (Tullis, 2016, p. 256)? I believe it is possible that some people could be saddened by the knowledge that Robert and I chose to keep his health issues

quiet. I also think that some readers might be surprised by my choices regarding Robert's drinking. Although the conversations may be difficult, I believe most of my friends will talk with me about this and weigh their experiences with my decisions. In addition, there may be some things said in the dissertation that might be a surprise to family members and close friends. Since we feel we know each other well, those potential surprises might result in hurt feelings. I trust that my family and close friends will not allow the potential hurt feelings to get in the way of the love we have for one another, that we will discuss such feelings and, as we have done many times in the past, grow in our knowledge of one another and move on. Having said that, it was incumbent on me to make sure that I wrote with these ethical considerations in mind to mitigate the potential for harm and hurt feelings.

- “How much detail and which difficulties, traumas, or challenges are necessary to include to successfully articulate the story's moral or goal” (Tullis, 2016, p. 256)? The goal was to show how my PsyCap was a part of my story throughout Robert's illness, death, and my grieving experiences. Other parts of my life, Robert's life and our life together have been weighed in relation to this goal.
- “Are you making a case to write (or not to write) because it is more or less convenient for you” (Tullis, 2016, p. 256)? This is hard to answer, since I probably live my life, as I believe most of us do, in a way that is most convenient for me in balance with what I believe is the most convenient for others. I have tried to write with honesty, integrity, and in as deep and rich a way as possible.

That is likely to not be the most convenient way for me, but it is the better path for a rich and thick autoethnographic inquiry such as this.

- “Should you and will you allow participants to read and approve all of the stories about them? Or just those stories that you think are problematic or potentially hurtful” (Tullis, 2016, p. 256)? I have tried to write in a way that those mentioned will be honored. However, when possible, I have tried to reach out to those implicated for a member check of the written material.

Chapter 3 Summary

In this chapter we have looked at the methods I used to answer my research questions. The autoethnographic research method allows the researcher to look both inward and outward (Schwandt, 2007, p. 16, Yin, 2016, p. 68). It allowed me to look at my specific sociological context, my grief journey (*auto*), and intricately analyze and interpret (*graphy*) those experiences (*ethno*) (Adams, et al., 2017).

I also described the data, how it was analyzed, my positionality, and my ethical perspectives. In the next chapter, I will discuss the results of the data analysis. Then in the final chapter, I will interpret the results, link them back to the literature, discuss how the information can be used, and the potential implications and recommendations for future studies.

Chapter 4: Results . . . The Data and The Stories

I've been thinking about the phrase "new normal". People around me use it a lot to describe their life, politics, the weather, situations at work, or any number of things. XXXXX and I had a conversation about her health and my grieving and what our new normal's looked like. I realized in that conversation that I have very little sense of what my new normal is. Most days I still talk myself into getting out of bed. I'd much rather sleep in. Most days I talk myself into going to work or into going to class or into doing my homework. I'm stubborn and I want to fulfill people's expectations of me as well as the commitments I've made, so I do get up, I go to work, I go to class and I get my homework done. But most days I come home exhausted, achy, and ready to curl up quietly in the corner of my bedroom on my comfy chair. Sometimes I do.

This routine, however, does not feel like a new normal. It still feels like a transitional place. A waiting place. Perhaps, it's a liminal space. A place that is both/and? Like a threshold to a room, neither in the room or in the hall. Perhaps I'm in a place that is neither past or future, but filled with the needs of now? Every so often I'll have a cry day. Most days have at least one miss Robert moment. Every so often I'll think about some future plan. But most of the time I'm just sitting on the threshold of the day, surrounded by 'now' stuff. It doesn't feel normal. It doesn't really feel at all. It just is. And that doesn't feel normal either. (Albright, Journal, September 14, 2019, "New normal is not normal / Transitional and liminal places")

Introduction

This chapter of results is a transitional place. The literature and methodology inform the discussion and interpretation of the results, as well as ideas for future research. It is a telling of my story of grief and PsyCap through the data. It is liminal and like being at the threshold of a room, neither the room we are leaving nor the hall we are entering. It is a new, in between space. It is a space of story, reflection, and insight.

Before we delve into the results, and because autoethnography is such a misunderstood research method, it is important to remember the details of this unique and rich method. Autoethnographies "use personal experience to examine and/or critique cultural experience" (Holman Jones, Adams & Ellis, 2016, p. 22). In some ways

“autoethnographies are case studies that follow the tradition of ethnographic research” (Duncan, 2004, p. 29). However, “the essential difference between ethnography and autoethnography is that in an autoethnography, the researcher is not trying to become an insider in the research setting. He or she, in fact, is the insider. The context is his or her own” (Duncan, 2004, p. 30). Autoethnographies focus on *researcher and research* and the *researcher is researched*. Autoethnographies

use ethnographic analyses and writing to explore the self. They centralize rather than add the self. The emphasis is on the analysis and the writing of the self, and the relationship between the self and the field. These texts do not apologize for the presence of the self, nor are they simply accounts of the research process. (Coffey, 1999, p. 125)

“Autoethnography offers a way to giving voice to personal experience to advance sociological understanding” (Wall, 2008, p. 39). This is accomplished through story. Autoethnography is “research, writing, story, and method that connect the autobiographical and personal to the cultural, social, and political” (Ellis, 2004, p xix, Yin, 2016, p 68).

This chapter includes an in-depth look at my grief story and what I discovered about the fields of grief and PsyCap while analyzing data from my Facebook posts, journaling, field notes, and photographs. “Ethnography creates a shared, and unusual, intimacy that – when studying the end-of-life and the mourning that follows – can be both emotionally uncomfortable and intellectually productive” (Silverman, et al., 2021, p. 4). This perhaps is an even more significant truth in autoethnographies. In my role as both researcher and the one being researched, reflexivity, the ability to move between being an observer and analyzer and being the subject of that observation and analysis,

has been a critical tool. I have managed to do this by using a variety of techniques, including detailed and multi-level coding. Coding is not a typical aspect of autoethnography, but I found it a useful tool in helping me be reflexive. The results of that coding will be shared in this chapter. A detailed interpretation of the findings and conclusions, in other words, the full interpretation of the results, will be part of the next chapter.

The data and analysis, reveal my epistemological assumption that the world is constructed and shaped through life experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Our understanding of our world can be known through the stories we tell about our experiences. In this case, the results reflect my grief stories and the changes that occurred as my knowledge of the world around me changed. It is possible that by using this autoethnographic research method, you might have an epistemological aha as you see and understand your world in a new way through my grief experiences.

Description of the Sample

As I mentioned briefly in chapter 3, the sample for this research study was small . . . just two people, myself and my deceased beloved husband, Robert. You have learned some about me through my positionality statement but let me introduce you to Robert.

If Robert were here, he would joyously tell you he was born in France, in a small town near Nancy (pronounced Nahn seh – Robert would be quick to correct you if you pronounced it like an American girl's name). His mother married a military man. Robert believed that was her way of getting out of the small French town and to America. It turned out, as Robert found out in his 30's, that he was not the son of the military man

he considered his father. In some ways that was a relief because Robert always felt different. But it was also an affirmation, in his mind, that he had never really been wanted. You see, after his parents arrived in the United States, his mother and father divorced. Robert was brought up by his father's parents. His grandmother was a Rosie the Riveter, active and strong, passionate, but not necessarily compassionate. She was the matriarch of the family and her words and actions directed what everyone did. His grandfather was a gentle soul with whom Robert found love and companionship. He died when Robert was 11. Just a few months later, his mother died.

Robert had been married twice and said that each time his previous marriages failed, he felt, in large part to blame, and left everything behind when he started over. When I met him, he had moved to New Mexico on a whim and was homeless. He came into the church where I worked and asked if he could play the piano. Several of us listened and were astounded by his mastery. Within a few days, a member of the church had set him up in an apartment. Within a few months, he was working at the church in an administrative capacity, as well as filling in musically wherever he was needed.

After a whirlwind of dating and romance we were married on September 2, 2005, at the church where we were both now employed. The ceremony included all the people we considered friends or family at that time in our lives.

In 2010, Robert was let go from his job at the church. I believe it was the result of a poorly handled personnel issue, but we were told it was for financial reasons. Many members of the church were surprised, and one offered Robert a job, which he took.

We had just purchased a house six months before and Robert and I agreed I needed to stay at my job at the church for the income. During Advent of 2012, I was let go from my job at the church. I believe it was because I had become more vocal about several issues like inclusiveness and willingness to talk deeply and ask hard questions. I was told it was for financial reasons. I found a job in the local school district, in March of 2013. At that point, we realized that my new job would cover all our bills and Robert decided to quit his job to focus more time on music. He began playing regularly for weddings, both religious and non-religious.

In 2009, Robert became the organist at another church in the city. After I found I had extra time on my hands in the Spring of 2013, they invited me to join Robert as a worship pianist. From the Spring of 2013 until the Fall of 2017 Robert and I made beautiful music together every Sunday morning.

In 2013, Robert began to complain of physical symptoms that seemed to be related to balance and physical tiredness. Over the next several years we worked with several doctors and tried to find cures for his symptoms. He had a narrowed disc in his spine, some plaque in his aorta, an inner ear issue. A few of the cures worked, others did not. At some point, his drinking increased. We had many conversations about getting him to help to deal with the increase in drinking and to sort out the emotions and life scars that might be at the core of why he was drinking. Most of those conversations either ended with Robert telling me that he knew what the counselors, psychiatrists, or psychologists would say and that he did not have the energy to recreate himself, or the conversation ended with Robert initiating a silent treatment that would

sometimes last for hours. It was clear that he did not want help and would not accept help if given or forced on him. He just wanted to be loved and do the things he loved. Those, thankfully, included being with me and making music. And so that's what we did.

By the Summer of 2017 he was diagnosed with cirrhosis, although he refused to believe the diagnosis. He thought his physical symptoms were still due to his back or inner ear issues. In August, the family took a trip to Hawaii. It was Robert's and my first time to the islands. It was a great experience and things started to look up. In September 2017, just a few weeks after we got back from Hawaii, we celebrated our 12th anniversary, or as Robert told everyone, it was our "dozenth." His drinking was more intense than ever. In late October his drinking was affecting his ability to make music. Several Sunday's he just was not physically able to go to work. After several discussions we decided he needed to resign his musician job at the church. Robert was concerned that if we both left it would be unfair to the congregation with Advent and Christmas already in the preparation stages. He and I agreed that I would continue to play until the end of the year, or until they found a replacement, whichever came first.

On the Sunday after Thanksgiving Robert was not doing well. He insisted I go to play the piano at the church and help lead the congregation musically in worship. I called a family member to come and be with Robert while I was gone. By the afternoon Robert said, "I think we need to call 911." His blood pressure was low, like 95/55, and his kidney and liver function were both low. He was admitted and, in the morning, after more tests, they realized he also had pneumonia and internal infections. In the midst of trying to treat all these separate and serious health problems, he began to experience

detox. The combination of all of it was too much for his body and Robert died on December 2, 2017.

Robert Harrison Albright III (born in, Rosieres en Hayes, Alsace-Lorraine, France 1959), a beloved, gentle and brilliant husband, son-in-law, brother-in-law, uncle, and friend died Saturday morning, December 2, 2017, after a long illness. Robert was an extremely gifted pianist and organist. He did not think his talent was anything special; however, his music both breathed life and inspiration into those who were blessed to hear it. He was a talented chef, who was always concerned that his meals were enjoyable to all. His spaghetti sauce, oatmeal bread, and homemade Mac and Cheese were much requested favorites. He was a pacifist who passionately pursued why people went to war. He was a talented computer and technology guru who was often called upon to fix computers or offer advice on software tricks. He was a student of mythology, science, nature, history, comparative religions, languages, sci-fi and the universe. He loved learning new things and delighted in discussing ideas and asking questions. He wanted to make a difference and although he never thought he succeeded, in reality, he made the lives of strangers and those who loved him, better. He was a gentle and wonderful man full of contradictions and wisdom. He will be greatly missed. (Albright, Journal, December 2, 2017, "Robert's Obituary")

This information about Robert helps to give a transparent look into the two hats I wore as researcher and the one being researched. Robert and I were the only two people in the sample for this research. In being introduced to this information about Robert, I'm hopeful that you will understand the results with more clarity. It provides some information about the baggage of life experiences Robert carried and our relationship together. Robert's story and our story together, inform my grief story.

A Broad Look at the Data

In this section I will describe the 10,000-foot view of the data results based on my research questions. The data presented in this section represent my Facebook posts, journal entries in a Notes app, field notes made from remembered observations while reading research texts, and photographs – a sort of visual journaling.

Table 8 is the 10,000-foot view of all my data. There are fifty-one Facebook posts (eleven of which have photos as a part of the post), fourteen journal entries, sixty-seven field notes, and twelve photos totaling 144 individual pieces of data. The title of each data in Table 8 is my Holistic code for the data. The twenty-two with a shaded background were coded as having all four component resources of PsyCap visible in the data. In other words, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were unmistakably present in the data. In Table 8 “P” stands for picture. “NA” stands for Notes app, my journal entries. “FB” stands for Facebook. “FN” stands for fieldnotes, my remembered observations. The items in bold italic font were the three times I took the Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ).

Table 8

My 144 Data Sources and the Three Dates of My PCQ Chronologically Ordered

2005, 2010, June 2017 A change of light in Robert's eyes - P	6-25-17 Baseball game smiles - P	7-3-17 Injured Thumb - P	7-4-17 Scream -ing on the inside / God's help - NA	7-4-17 Rising sense of Panic - NA	7-22-17 Favorite line in the universe - P	7-17-17, 10-1-17, and 11-1-17 Sleeping Robert - P	8-5-17 Hawaii flight – facial expressions - P	8-7-17 Robert contem- plative in Hawaii - P	8-10-17 Robert at USS Arizona Memorial - P	8-17-17 Took PCQ for the first time
8-27-17 Robert playing piano in worship - P	11-27-17 Robert in the hospital - P	12-1-17 Robert's health issues - NA	12-2-17 Robert's obituary - FB	12-3-17 Funeral infor- mation / Solo Pianist - FB	12-6-17 Robert in the coffin - P	12-6-17 Shoulding on yourself - FB	12-10-17 Being a strong woman - FB	12-10-17 I don't want to continue participa- ting in life without Robert, but I will - FB	12-11-17 Decorated organ during the Memorial Service - P	12-14-17 We let you go – NA

Table 8 (cont.)

12-16-17 Going on and finding a life balance - FB	12-17-17 Theo - FB	12-25-17 Robert’s Christmas stocking 2017 - FB	12-27-17 Firsts – grieving is hard - FB	12-31-17 Solo pianist – tears through the last service - FB	1-3-18 On my own / Undis- cussed firsts - FB	1-18-18 Literal physical grief pain - NA	1-18-18 Could have, should have, might have / Grief is exhausting - FB	1-19-18 Joy “go to’s are connected to Robert - FB	3-4-18 Physical sickness without Robert / Grief is hard -FB	
3-8-18 Cadeau’s Finders Day memory - FB	3-14-18 I miss Robert - NA	3-18-18 Mental and emotional roadblock – NA	3-21-18 Conver- sations with Robert / Better me for loving Robert - FB	4-2-18 Hard time holding it together - NA	4-2-18 Every day I miss him - FB	4-7-18 Memory quilt - FB	4-10-18 First Kiss - FB	4-22-18 Owning a home - FB	4-26-18 Memory of Robert asking me to marry him - FB	4-27-18 Every- thing changes / Widow brain / My weird- nesses endeared me to Robert - FB
6-3-18 New routines / I miss him - FB	6-14-18 Regrets / Grief is hard work - FB	6-26-18 Missing Robert on my birth- day - FB	6-27-18 Missing Robert on my birthday / Grief as a mute / Grief changing my life’s tone and timbre - FB	8-30-18 Moving from Bright Star - FB	9-9-18 Goodbye to Bright Star - FB	10-4-18 Liminal space of questions - FB	10-31-18 Robert and Halloween - FB	12-2-18 Robert and weather / Wearing Robert’s clothes and rings / New normalcy / I miss him - FB		
12-9-18 Laughter, joy, peace and wonder in the midst of grief / Every moment is different / Emotional vertigo / 3 seconds off / Person I’m becoming because of the person I loved – unexpected gift - FB		12-14-18 Remem- bering is a blessing - FB	1-1-19 Quiet heart on New Year’s Eve / supportive village - FB	1-12-19 Taking time off from being a student and instructor / let my soul catch up / talking to Robert - FB		2-5-19 Could have/ should have / Too strong of a woman? - FB	2-21-19 Wishing for the old me and who I used to be / Learning to embrace the me I’m becoming - FB	3-16-19 The world is lucky about how put together I am - FB	3-19-19 Missing Robert - FB	
3-21-19 Significant dates / Body and soul knowing - NA	4-4-19 Roads, re- creating self, and the winds that assist us - FB	4-15-19 Rings and missing Robert - NA	4-15-19 Afterlife / Norte Dame conver- sations / missing Robert - FB	5-23-19 Feeling old physically and mentally / DNA changes during stress and DNA grieving - FB	7-26-19 Contemplatively numb, raw and aching physically for Robert’s presence / Closing Robert’s accounts / Determination to keep on keeping on - FB	9-14-19 New normal is not normal/ Transitional and liminal places - NA	10-31-19 Halloween - FB	12-2-19 Death sucks / Celebrating milestone without Robert - FB		

Table 8 (cont.)

1-16-20 Robert's help in finding missing earrings - FB	Jan/Feb 2020 Non- verbals restau- rant obser- vation - NA	2-23-20 Took PCQ for the second time	3-15-20 Nephew's drawing of Robert - FB	4-26-20 Lessening heaviness and sadness / Anniver- saries are easier - NA	Spring 2020 High PsyCap helped me through - FN	Spring 2020 Position- ality: strong woman, primary income bringer, change in religious perspective - FN	Spring 2020 Avoid- ance - FN	Spring 2020 New normal - FN	Spring 2020 Making sense of life - FN
Spring 2020 Resilient griever? - FN	Spring 2020 Widow- hood is not a tempor- ary condition - FN	Spring 2020 Conversa- tion about dying with Robert - FN	Spring 2020 Hospita I call to come now - FN	Spring 2020 Being other's version of me - FN	Spring 2020 Covering up - FN	Spring 2020 Could have, should have / Silent treat- ment / Choosing to love him where he was - FN	Spring 2020 Angry at Robert's stubborn- ness and lack of resilience, and his previous life circum- stances / Angry at myself - FN	Spring 2020 Left behind - FN	Spring 2020 Robert deserved to have life and health - FN
Spring 2020 Prozac - FN	Spring 2020 No one else will know us the way we knew each other - FN	Spring 2020 Robert's death freed me - FN	Spring 2020 Unexpected walls of grief- FN	Spring 2020 Physically feeling and smelling Robert after his death - FN	Spring 2020 Grief for Robert was all consuming - FN	Spring 2020 Losses beyond the loss of Robert in my life - FN	Spring 2020 Grieving the life we were supposed to have - FN		Spring 2020 connecting to Robert in private mental conversations with him - FN
Spring 2020 Checking "widow" box on a form - FN	Spring 2020 Isolation and com- munity - FN	Spring 2020 Robert's secret relation- ships - FN	Spring 2020 Keeping Robert's real health issues a secret - FN	Spring 2020 Control and lack of it - FN	Spring 2020 Forcing Robert to seek help - FN	Spring 2020 Missing the best of who Robert was - FN	Spring 2020 Being strong during grief - FN	Spring 2020 Afterlife, becoming energy - FN	Spring 2020 Afterlife – reincarnation (Theo and nephew) - FN
Spring 2020 Anniver- saries - FN	Spring 2020 Attending funerals and visiting with those who are grieving / Attending celebrations of those who knew Robert / No coping energy - FN	Spring 2020 Donating Robert's clothes / T-shirt quilt - FN	Spring 2020 To keep or not to keep Robert's items - FN	Spring 2020 Guilt not shame - FN	Spring 2020 Suicidal thoughts - FN	Spring 2020 I am not responsible for Robert's decisions - FN	Spring 2020 Living and grieving - FN		Spring 2020 Unresolved grief and Robert - FN

Table 8 (cont.)

Spring 2020 Robert's imprints on me - FN	Spring 2020 Keepsakes - FN	Spring 2020 Who am I now, without Robert - FN	Spring 2020 Guilt - FN	Spring 2020 Forestalling the inevitable / Hope and positive goals - FN	Spring 2020 High hope vs low hope thinker - FN	Spring 2020 Robert's mom and grandfather's death and hope - FN	Spring 2020 Robert's divorces and hope / Lack of significant conversations - FN	Spring 2020 Robert and the loss of work, hope - FN	Spring 2020 Robert's lack to tools to help him process and move on - FN
Spring 2020 Robert's lack of emotional and empathetic boundaries - FN	Spring 2020 Robert never acknowledged the true reason for his health issues - FN	Spring 2020 My culture includes past, present, and future - FN	Spring 2020 Inward and outward anger - FN	Spring 2020 Robert's presence is still known (earring) - FN	Spring 2020 Unexpected remembrances - FN	Spring 2020 I still talk to Robert - FN	Spring 2020 Confronting the reality of his illness - FN	Spring 2020 Writing Robert's obituary - FN	Spring 2020 Seeing changes in Robert through photos of him - FN
Spring 2020 Not able to recreate himself - FN	Spring 2020 Robert and lack of mental and emotional tools to activate metacognitive activity - FN	Spring 2020 Overwhelming empathy and Robert - FN	Spring 2020 My high PsyCap - FN	8-16-21 Missing Robert during life milestones - FB	9-19-20 "Go on" out-numbers the "gone" days - FB	11-22-20 Celebrating milestones / Robert would be proud - FB	12-2-20 Mad at God / Morphed theology / Less hope-filled - FB	12-31-20 No vision for the future / No purpose - NA	11-1-21 Took PCQ for the third time

Note. Titles of each data is the holistic code for that data. The twenty-two data with a shaded background were coded as having all four component resource parts of PsyCap (hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism). The three in bold italic and a slightly larger font are the dates I took the PCQ. P stands for picture. NA stands for journal entry in my Notes App. FB stands for Facebook post. FN stands for field notes.

A Deeper Look: The 1000-foot View and Two-Inch View

In this section I will take a deeper look at the data. I will look at the overall data set from a 1000-foot view and look at the data coded at PsyCap and its component resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism from a 2-inch, up close and personal view. Both the 1000-foot and 2-inch view will be discussed based on my research questions. The data presented in this section represents my Facebook posts, journal entries, field notes, and photographs. It is an intense look at the interplay of

PsyCap and my grief stories and shines light on what that says about the interplay, what can be learned from my experiences, and the malleability of PsyCap. It is a deeper look into my grief stories through the lens of all three research questions.

Before we take a deeper look, we need a few definition reminders. Grief is a response to the death of a loved one, friend, acquaintance, pet, a relationship, the end of a job, or the completion of a season of life. It can begin before a person dies (anticipatory grief) and last a lifetime (see Table 1).

Psychological capital (PsyCap) is a composite construct created from the resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism (Bajwa et al., 2009; Peterson et al., 2008; Luthans et al., 2015). For the purposes of this research, psychological capital was coded when the component resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were found in the data.

I focused on seven stages of grief found in Kübler-Ross and Kessler's works (2005, 2019). The seven stages were a pre-stage of anticipatory grief, the five traditional stages of grief – denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and Kessler's sixth stage, finding meaning (2019).

10,000-Foot View of the HERO Resources

In this research, I looked for what the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our psychological capital and what can I learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stages of grief. I also looked for what my grief stories and the psychological capital questionnaire reveal about the malleable characteristics of PsyCap.

The next four sections take a 1000-foot look at each of the component resource parts of PsyCap. It explains where I got the subcodes I used to look more deeply at HERO in the data. It also briefly discusses the frequency of those codes.

Hope Codes.

Hope is both waypower and willpower thinking (Peterson, et al., 2008). It can be both hoping to avoid the negative and working expectantly toward the positive (Snyder, 2002). Synonyms for hope include longing, wishing, anticipation, and desire. Hope was part of my grief journey stories and experiences. In the twenty-two data that were coded as PsyCap, the component resource of hope was coded twenty-five times. The hope codes of longing, wish, waypower, and willpower were found the greatest number of times in the PsyCap data.

Efficacy Codes.

Efficacy is having confidence (Peterson, et al., 2008; Bonanno, 2019), conviction, (Stajkovic & Luthans (1998), and belief about your capabilities (Culbertson, et al., 2010; Peterson et al., 2008). Synonyms for efficacy include having faith in yourself, self-assurance, self-reliance, and an ability to keep moving forward in the midst of life's circumstances. The component resource of efficacy was part of my grief journey stories and experiences.

In the twenty-two data that were coded as PsyCap, efficacy was coded twenty-nine times. The efficacy code for belief about capabilities far surpassed any of the other efficacy codes. It was triple the next highest code of keep moving forward.

The number of times I coded for belief about capabilities surprised me. Being surprised was a confirmation of my attempt to be reflexive. In coding, I tried to be separate from the data, imagining, inasmuch was possible, that the data was about someone I cared about, but not necessary me. Once I finished coding, I was startled and honored that I'd found so many examples of efficacy, and specifically of believing in my own capabilities. That knowledge still gives me a little bounce in my step.

Resiliency Codes.

Resiliency is the ability to bounce back (Luthans, 2002a), rebound (Luthans, 2002a), adapt (Luthans et al., 2015; Bonanno 2019), and have plasticity (Avey et al., 2009). Synonyms for resiliency include durability and toughness. The component resource of resiliency was a part of my grief stories and experiences. In the twenty-two data that were coded as PsyCap, resiliency was coded twenty-five times. I found the resiliency codes of toughness and adaptation more than any other resiliency code.

Optimism Codes.

Optimism is a positive attitude (Schneider, 2001). It incorporates being rational (Schneider, 2001), lenient (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007), appreciative (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007), and opportunity-seeking (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007). A synonym for optimism is cheerfulness. The component resource of optimism was part of my grief journey stories and experiences. In the twenty-two data that were coded as PsyCap, optimism was coded 30 times. I found the optimism codes of 'positive attitude' and 'appreciative' more than any of the other optimism codes.

Research Question 1: What Do the Stories We Tell Ourselves During Grief Say About Our Psychological Capital?**1000-Foot View of Research Question 1.**

PsyCap, as a composite construct, occurred when the component resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism (HERO) were all actively present in the grief story data. I found PsyCap 22 times out of the whole 144 grief story data set, that is, 22 of 144 journal entries, Facebook posts, field notes, and photographs showed hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. Table 9 describes the 1000-foot view of the HERO codes as found in the full 144 data set and the PsyCap data set of 22. It also shows the timeline of when hope, efficacy, resiliency, optimism, and PsyCap were found in the data.

From the beginning of my data set all the way through to the end, the component resources of PsyCap: hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were a part of my grief story. In looking at my grief story longitudinally, efficacy was the most common PsyCap resource over the course of all my grief stories (see Table 9). It was found almost twice as much as any of the other three HERO resources in the full data set. When just looking at the 22 grief story data coded as PsyCap, optimism was the most common PsyCap resource.

Table 9

Number of Hope, Efficacy, Resilience, and Optimism Codes Found and Timeline for When the Code was in the Data

HERO Code	Number of Times Found in the Full Data Set (144)	Number of Times Found in the PsyCap Data (22)	Time frame of the HERO code (see Table 7 for more details)
Hope	46	25	2005 – Aug 16, 2021
Efficacy	99	29	2005 – Aug 16, 2021
Resiliency	54	25	2005 – Dec 31, 2020
Optimism	63	30	2005 – Dec 31, 2020
PsyCap	22	22	2005 – Dec 31, 2020

Note. Although the majority my grief data is mostly from 2017 to 2020, There are two pictures from 2005 and 2010 in the data titled ‘2005, 2010, June 2017 A change of light in Robert’s eyes.’

Interestingly, seven of the grief story data did not show any signs of the psychological capital resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, or optimism. Six of those were about Robert specifically and did not mention me. These six were not coded since I was specifically looking for my PsyCap in the data. For instance – a journal note listing Robert’s health issues did not show my hope, efficacy, resiliency, or optimism.

Robert’s Health Issues:

- Sepsis
- Acute kidney failure
- Low blood pressure - most recent 95/57
- Liver failure
- Pneumonia
- Potassium is high, on meds to reduce
- Tarry stool (means old blood)
- Hepatol renal function
- Yeast and bacterial infection in fluid (Albright Journal, December 1, 2017).

One data entry was surprising. It was a journal note on July 4, 2017. For some reason I titled it “Living in the Now” at the time I wrote it.

I could feel a sense of panic rising within my core. Panic is not a normal emotion for me and so I was startled by the slow boil. What if Robert dies? What if he gets mean? What if he loses his intellectual curiosity and complexity? What if he falls and is severely injured? What if he needs constant medical care? All of these questions flooded my heart and began a slow boil of panic in my mind.

Robert was diagnosed with alcoholic cirrhosis, liver disease caused by the huge amounts of alcohol he drinks. Each week he goes through 1.75 liter bottle of vodka and one of rum. Sometimes it's also a box of wine or a bottle of Ouzo. That's in addition to the drinks we have at restaurants.
(Albright, Journal, July 4, 2017, "Rising sense of panic")

The journal entry was raw. I coded emotions of panic, sorrow, unsettled, and questioning. I coded "What if he falls . . . needs constant medical care. . ." as the value of 'care.' I coded the attitude of compassion. I coded "What if he gets mean? What if he loses his intellectual curiosity and complexity?" as a belief with the memo note: "This shows my opinion that being mean is not good and/or difficult to deal with and that his intellectual curiosity and complexity were important to how I saw our relationship." But I did not see hope, efficacy, resiliency, or optimism reflected in the text.

2-Inch View of Research Question 1.

My grief story had a considerable amount to say about my PsyCap. I've chosen a few to highlight here. The header of each grief story data is the date of the data and the Holistic Code "headline" I gave each individual data. After each data is outlined in the two-inch view, I share my reflections on my emotion coding and values coding. These codes help tell a bigger picture of that moment in my grief journey. I also share reflections on what my grief story says about my PsyCap and what I've learned about PsyCap from my stages of grief at the end of each data example. A summary of the reflections will conclude this section on research question 1.

6-25-17 Baseball Game Smiles.

It was usually an effort to get Robert to do things like trips and family activities. Then, once there, he loved it and I was constantly on the watch to make sure he had what he needed and was safe.

Before I took this picture, Robert looked sort of stoic, partly concentrating on the game and partly distant in his own world. When I said “smile” I got a blank stare. So, I whispered in his ear, “Pretend like you love me and that you are having fun.” And I got this (Figure 5). He was more engaged the rest of the night. It was as if that reminder was something he needed to snap back into the here and now.

Figure 5

6-25-17 Baseball Game Smiles



Note: This picture was taken at an Isotopes game the family went to for my birthday, June 25, 2017.

Reflection on 6-25-17 Baseball Game Smiles.

I found the emotion codes of joy, gratitude/thankful, and exhaustion in this picture. Even in the most awkward of moments and the toughest of times, Robert could spark joy and gratitude in me. I was so very thankful for his love, the way it molded and shaped me and made me better and stronger. I was also exhausted from the effort of

getting him to go to the game. It took reminding him that he loved baseball and that we could leave early if he wanted to. I also always tried to park close to the entrance, so he didn't have to walk very far. Falling was always a concern. By the time we were there and seated I was tired!

In value coding I found the belief that 'shared life experiences' means gathering more memories together. Gathering more memories, in turn, helps us feel more deeply connected to one another. I also coded the belief that photography tells a story. I found the attitude of gratitude and the value of both doing things together and relationships.

What does this part of my grief story tell me about PsyCap? I coded this PsyCap data as hope, specifically a longing and desire for future experiences with Robert. I also coded it as efficacy, specifically the belief that I had the capability to help Robert engage in the here and now and enjoy himself. I found resiliency, specifically my ability to bounce back and adapt after saying "smile" and getting nothing. And I found optimism, specifically the cheerfulness of the moment and appreciation for the moment.

Were my HERO equally active in this moment? No. My optimism, positive attitude, leniency to let Robert be who he was, and cheerfulness were the most active of my HERO. Optimism helped me believe I was capable in helping Robert engage and enjoy himself. Its rational characteristic helped to think clearly about the goal of making a memory. This led me to be resilient, adapt, and try again. Hope, especially waypower thinking helped me to see a way through and take the picture a different way.

11-27-17 Robert in the Hospital.

Five weeks after Robert injured his thumb the family went to Hawaii. It felt like things were looking up. I took my first Psychological Capital Questionnaire for a friend in August after we got back in town. By late October, however, Robert was unable to make music. By Thanksgiving, the family was seeing drastic changes in Robert. The Sunday after Thanksgiving, Robert said he thought we needed to call 911.

Figure 6

11-27-17 Robert in the Hospital

***Reflection on 11-27-17 Robert in the Hospital.***

Once we were checked into a room, I asked Robert if he wanted anything from home. The purple bear in the photo was the only thing Robert asked to have. It was a prize I won that he became very attached to. Robert's favorite color was green and mine is purple. I have often wondered if the purple bear somehow represented an extension of me to Robert. The nurses realized it had a special significance too and made sure I received the bear after Robert died. It now has a place of significance on a permanent offrenda I have for Robert.

I coded this data with the emotions of compassion, love, sorrow, hope, and longing. Each of those emotions were present at the time I took the picture. I was sorrowful that we had come to this place in Robert's health journey, but hopeful he would pull through. I longed for him to be healthy. My compassion and love for Robert compelled me to stay in the hospital with him every day and most nights. Unfortunately, the worst was yet to come.

I coded the data with a value that medical professionals are critically important and often angels among us. I coded it with the belief that a photograph can tell a story and that finding ways to remember a loved one is part of the grieving process. I also coded the belief that Robert had no idea how dire the situation was at this moment, and neither did I. I also coded my attitude as being a non-anxious presence.

What can this data say about my PsyCap in the midst of this part of my grief story and in the stage of anticipatory grief? I coded this photograph as hope, specifically that Robert would recover, and we would forestall any serious health complications. I also found efficacy, and specifically coded a belief in my capability to help him recover. I coded resiliency at my being in the hospital every day and most nights, specifically the toughness and bounce back that was required. And I coded optimism, that even as the light was fading from his eyes, I was appreciative for all the time we had together and the time we still had to share.

Did one of these HERO codes stand out? I believe in this part of my grief story, hope was the part of PsyCap that pushed the others into action. My hope in his recovery was strong. It encouraged my resiliency to stay with him in the hospital day

and night. My hope also activated my efficacy to bring on the confidence and conviction that I could be what Robert needed me to be during this moment of time. Finally, my hope pushed me to be optimistic about the outcome. Each update from the doctors was viewed as an opportunity for better health. My PsyCap was an active part of this moment in my grief story.

12-16-17 Going on and Finding a Life Balance.

Robert and I were sci-fi junkies. We loved Star Trek and Star Wars. When a family member suggested we go to the new Star Wars movie I thought it would be a nice break and might be a way to honor Robert, by doing something he'd love. In the movie Luke dies, an emotional blow in good times, but an almost overwhelming one just two weeks after Robert's death.

When I came home, to a person-less house, I needed to think about something else, so I turned on PBS, another thing Robert and I loved to do together. A show about Einstein helped me to put words to my feelings from the movie. Here's what I posted on Facebook:

This morning I went to see the new Star Wars movie. It was hard to see it without Robert, but important to see it with XXXXX and XXXXX. At one point in the movie Rey asks Leia how they can go on after suffering so much loss. Leia responds by saying they have everything they need. Her statement hit hard as I realized deep in my core, that there are many moments when I do not feel like have everything I need after suffering the loss of my beloved.

This afternoon I watched a TV show about Einstein's' struggle to balance his equations about the universe. It struck me as I watched that I am also struggling to balance an equation, the equation of my life without Robert.

Right now my life's balance is fragile and fails regularly. I am thankful for everyone who is helping me physically and/or prayerfully create this new balance that I must now seek. Perhaps, with time, I will become fully aware of the fact that I do have everything I need to find that new balance. But in this moment, as with most moments these days, my prayer is simply, "Breathe of

Heaven, hold me together.” (Albright, Facebook, December 16, 2017, “Going on and finding a life balance”)

Reflection on 12-16-17 Going on and Finding a Life Balance.

I coded the following emotions: unsettled, ungrounded, fragile, sorrow, and heartbroken. I also found the value that balance is important for healthy living and the belief that God has the power to intervene in life’s circumstances, as well as the belief that it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do.

I found PsyCap represented in this text too. An expectant, longing hope was found in the statement, “perhaps with time.” The struggle to balance the equation of life without Robert was coded as a self-reliant efficacy. Going to the movie was coded with resiliency, especially a toughness and durability to bounce back and experience going to a movie without Robert. Optimism was found in the statement of thanks.

What was the interplay of HERO that resulted in the composite construct of PsyCap in this part of my grief story? Resiliency was primary in this part of the story. Without resiliency I would not have gone to the movies and begun this process of reflection. Resiliency inspired hope that things would get better and hope in turn sparked efficacy and optimism. But, in this moment of grief, a spark is all it was. Both my efficacy and optimism were just a low glimmer. Present, but almost as if they were a distant echo of remembrance of strong efficacious and hopeful times. Even so, that is still a snapshot of PsyCap at work in my grief story.

1-19-18 Joy Go To's Connect to Robert.

Do you have things to you do to help you get out of a rut and feel joyful? I do.

My realization in this post was that all my go to's that typically helped me get back to joy were reminders of Robert.

An insight about liminal harmony: I was talking to a friend about choosing joy. Sometimes it's a real challenge. In those times I use "go to" music, pictures or thoughts to guide my heart back to joy almost instantly. In our conversation I realized that many of my "go to" things are tied to Robert. So, for the moment, they bring joy and sadness. I know this will change and I will likely find new "go to's". But for the moment it was a helpful aha about the liminal place I find myself and my struggle to find harmony within it. (Albright, Facebook, January 19, 2018, "Joy go to's connect to Robert")

Reflection on 1-19-18 Joy Go To's Connect to Robert.

I found the feeling of being depleted and the emotion of hope in this part of my grief journey. I also found several beliefs. I found the belief that choosing joy is important for healthy living. I also found the belief that liminal, and harmony are helpful concepts.

I coded waypower thinking in the hope-filled statement that "I know this will change." The phrase spoke to finding a way through difficult circumstances, setting goals, and future thinking. I coded "sometimes it's a real challenge" as an efficacious acknowledgment to keep moving forward with confidence. I coded "I will likely find new go to's" as both a statement of conviction and the desire to keep moving forward (efficacy) and a statement of resiliency showing a bounce back. I coded "choosing joy" as an optimistic positive attitude.

In this part of my grief story, I was struggling to find meaning, to find ways to acknowledge Robert's contributions in my life, and to honor them. In order to do that I

had to be efficacious and resilient. Again, these two components of PsyCap were working together in tandem to help me find joy. The act of finding joy, in and of itself is an act of hope and optimism. All four aspects of my PsyCap were working together in different, but equal ways during this part of my grief journey.

6-3-18 New Routines / I Miss Him.

Yesterday was the six month anniversary of Robert's death. A lot has happened since that day. I've learned new morning and evening routines. I've learned to cook for myself, again. I've discovered new TV shows and watched new movies. I've learned new piano music. I've had new experiences at work and in life. I've even taken a vacation with the family. And every day I miss him. I talk to him. That's probably weird, but I don't care. Sometimes I feel nudges to do things from him and when I follow them, I'm always blessed. I still miss sharing the everyday moments of life with him. I miss hearing his take on things. I miss holding his hand. I miss coming home to the smell of his cooking. I miss his laugh and his compassion for others and his love for me. Yes, my life continues to be blessed with new challenges and new adventures. Each day is filled with interesting learnings and ever growing memories. My life is better, fuller and richer because of his love. I just wish he was here, in person, to share life with me. (Albright, Facebook, June 3, 2018, "New routines / I miss him")

Reflection on 6-3-18 New Routines / I Miss Him.

In this data I found the emotions of longing, sorrow, exploring, curiosity, and being reflective. I found the attitudes of perseverance, reflection, being a life-long learner, and curiosity. I coded value in 'listening to Robert in life and in death,' in being a life-long learner, and in being perseverant. I coded two of the mantra codes: it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one. I also coded the belief that talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity, but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love.

What does this part of my story tell us about my PsyCap? Efficacy was present in the idea that “the day is filled with interesting learnings”. This reflected a belief about my capabilities and a desire to keep moving forward. Resiliency was shown in the new learnings, new discoveries, and new experiences. This part of my story showed a bounce back and durability. An appreciative, positive attitude optimism was in the story, especially in the phrase “my life continues to be blessed.” Hope was also present in the timbre of the post which expressed longing, as well as waypower and willpower thinking. At this point in my story, I showed efficacy in believing I could do new things without Robert. Resiliency helped me to bounce back, be adaptive, tough, and try those new things. Hope provided the way and will to step out and do something new. Optimism undergirded them all with a positive attitude.

12-9-18 Laughter, Joy, Peace and Wonder in the Midst of Grief / Every Moment Is Different / Emotional Vertigo / 3 Seconds Off / Person I’m Becoming Because of the Person I Loved – Unexpected Gift.

In the days preceding this post, a friend I’d known since I was 10 years old died suddenly, the mom of a friend I’d known since I was about 13 years old died, and the wife of a friend in his late 80’s died. These three deaths almost exactly one year after Robert’s death got me thinking about grief and my journey so far.

Many of my friends are facing the heart-wrenching grief that comes with the death of a loved one. I’ve been thinking a lot about them and about the emotions of my own grief journey.

There was big belly-jiggling laughter as well as can’t-catch-my-breath sobbing on the day Robert died. There were also several long moments of heart-stilling peace. I remember being slightly startled that it didn’t seem weird or disrespectful to laugh or feel peace. Thinking about the emotions of that day has helped me discover a few aha’s about the emotions of life in grief.

In the midst of the sadness, heartbreak, and depression of grief there is also joy, wonder, and peace. I have learned, over the course of this past year,

with the help of close family, dear friends, and a few furred and feathered loved ones, that all of these emotions are important in the journey of healing and discovering ways to live life without my beloved.

Each day, and sometimes each moment is different. And that's ok. I'm learning to go with it, to be ok with the moment I'm in, and to allow my heart to move to the next moment when it's ready.

As the year has progressed there has been more joy, wonder, and peace, and less sadness, heartbreak, and depression. I am a different person than I was a year ago. I've been forever changed by the loss of my life partner and soul mate. I'm not as balanced spiritually and intellectually as I once was. I often experience a sort of vertigo of emotions and memories. I sometimes feel about 3 seconds off from the rest of the world.

But the me I'm becoming is stronger and more vulnerable, deeper and more contemplative, more observant and more willing to take care of myself when needed. The journey of love through grief is the hardest thing I've ever experienced, but the person I'm becoming, because of the person I loved and still love, is an unexpected gift. (Albright, Facebook, December 9, 2018, "Laughter, joy, peace and wonder in the midst of grief / Every moment is different / Emotional vertigo / 3 seconds off / Person I'm becoming because of the person I loved – unexpected gift")

Reflection on 12-9-18 Laughter, Joy, Peace and Wonder in the Midst of Grief / Every Moment Is Different / Emotional Vertigo / 3 Seconds Off / Person I'm Becoming Because of the Person I Loved – Unexpected Gift.

This moment in my grief story was filled with emotions. I coded happy, delighted, sobbing, peaceful, heartbreak, depression, wonder, exploring, discordant, unsettled, vulnerable, contemplative, observant, capable, reflective, sad, and gratitude. I found in the data a value of honoring the various ways people grieve. I found beliefs that grief is not one-size-fits-all, that the death of a loved one changes you, and that the person I am becoming is a gift from Robert's love. I also found the mantra of three beliefs: it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, grieving is hard work, and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one. In addition, I found attitudes in the concepts of being a strong, vulnerable, deep, contemplative, observant woman who has the will to take care of herself. I coded each

of those characteristics as attitudes. This data was also coded with the grief stages of depression, acceptance, and finding meaning.

This story of my grief had an expectant, desire-filled hope in the phrase, “allow my heart to move to the next moment when it’s ready.” It showed a resilient belief about my capabilities and interest to keep moving forward in the discussion about discovering and learning. I found a plasticity and adaption in the resilient phrase “I’m learning to go with it.” I also found resilience in the durability and plasticity filled phrase, “I am a different person than I was a year ago.” There was optimism in the phrase “the me I’m becoming is stronger and more vulnerable, deeper and more contemplative, more observant and more willing to take care of myself when needed.” It showed a positive, opportunity-seeking attitude. There was also a positive attitude and appreciative optimism in the phrase “the person I’m becoming because of the person I loved and still love, is an unexpected gift.” Robert was and still is interwoven with who I am and who I know myself to be.

In this part of my grief journey, I believe optimism was the instigating force within my PsyCap. Optimism inspired hope, which in turn inspired resiliency and then efficacy. My positive attitude (optimism) fueled my waypower thinking (hope) which kicked my resiliency into action and enabled my efficacy to push me forward along the journey.

2-21-19 Wishing for the Old Me and Who I Used to Be, Learning to Embrace the Me I'm Becoming.

This post was deeply heartfelt. It was a synopsis of a very difficult time of adjustment. I literally felt like I was being torn between who I was and who I felt I might be becoming. The rip was physically painful.

I used to be one of those people who energized the people around me at work. Now I feel like I'm just one of many quietly doing their job. Fourteen months after Robert's death and I still have to talk myself into 'getting up and going' most days. True, I've never been a morning person, but, I used to be excited about the possibilities of the day. It's not that my days are any less exciting. It's just that I'm less excited about them. To be completely honest, I'm genuinely thankful to have made it through the day without too many mistakes, faux pas', or misunderstandings.

I used to be the person people would often come to when they were stressed and just needed a safe place to vent and regroup. That too seems to have changed. Now those visits to chill out and reset are few and far between. Perhaps I am no longer a non-anxious presence. Perhaps people think they'd be a burden if they shared their stresses with me. They wouldn't. Sure, sometimes those kinds of conversations are exhausting and emotional, and yet, they are always, always worthwhile. Whatever the reason, folks rarely seek me out. As a widow, I've discovered people have some intriguing thoughts about what people who are grieving need and don't need.

I used to rarely get sick in a way that stopped me in my tracks or even slowed me down. Since Robert died I've had the flu, two 'put me in bed' colds, pneumonia and now bronchitis. Clearly, my body is exhausted and perhaps my soul as well. Slowly, intentionally, I am trying to find ways to gently provide opportunities for both to rest.

I used to be confident in my beliefs and thoughts on God and religion. Now, as I endeavor to talk with Robert and wonder what he's doing, what he might be experiencing, and how he now sees the world, I feel my theology morphing. God is more omnipotent and beyond understanding instead of "the friend next to ya". That too is ok, and it is a radical shift in thought and practice for me.

I kept thinking, even hoping, that in time the old me would resurface. Perhaps it still will. But, I have a sneaky suspicion that I am no longer who I was. It's kind of unsettling. Perhaps it's time to start embracing who I am now and love myself into who I am becoming. (Albright, Facebook, February 21, 2019,

“Wishing for the old me and who I used to be, learning to embrace the me I’m becoming”)

Reflection on 2-21-19 Wishing for the Old Me and Who I Used to Be, Learning to Embrace the Me I’m Becoming.

I coded this Facebook post with the emotions of disappointment, gratitude, frustration, exhaustion, inadequacy, feeling unsettled, discouragement, sorrowful, and being reflective. I also coded the text with the values of taking time to rest when you are exhausted and loving yourself both for where you are and who you are becoming. I coded the phrase “making it through the day without too many mistakes, faux pas’, or misunderstandings” as a value and that the importance of doing so was a belief regarding a healthy work environment.

A mantra of beliefs was present in this part of my story: that it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, that grieving is hard work, and that grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one. I also coded the belief that your soul can be exhausted and that your beliefs about God can change. I coded the phrase “people have some intriguing thoughts about what people who are grieving need and don’t need” as a belief. I also coded the idea that talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity, but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love as a belief.

A hopeful longing was present in the phrase “I kept thinking, even hoping, that in time the old me would resurface.” Efficacy was shown as a belief about my capabilities in all the “I used to be” ideas. Efficacy was also present in the sentences, ‘clearly, my body is exhausted and perhaps my soul as well. Slowly, intentionally, I am trying to find

ways to gently provide opportunities for both to rest.” An efficacious belief about my capabilities was present in the idea of making a radical shift in thought and practice. Resiliency, hope, and optimism were present in the phrase, “Perhaps it’s time to start embracing who I am now and love myself into who I am becoming.” This idea showed plasticity and a willingness to adapt (resiliency), waypower and willpower thinking (hope), as well as a positive, opportunity-seeking attitude and a leniency (optimism.) I also coded the idea of being genuinely thankful as appreciative optimism.

What can this data say about my PsyCap? Efficacy was the big player here, however, it was an efficacy about what my capabilities had been as well as a desire to keep moving forward slowly and intentionally. Once efficacy was in action, resiliency to adapt and tough it out went to work. Thankfulness and a quiet optimism that the changes were ok was gently woven through the grief moment, as was an unassertive and inconspicuous hope-filled waypower and willpower thinking.

Summary of the 1000-Foot and 2-Inch Results from Research Question 1.

What did the stories I told myself during grief say about my psychological capital, my hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism? This data shows PsyCap was present throughout the stories of my grief experience. The HERO component resources were found as the synergistic construct of PsyCap. My expressions of hope, especially those of longing, wishing, waypower and willpower were active in my grief. Examples of efficacy, especially, and surprisingly, showing a belief in my abilities were active in my grief stories. Resiliency was also present in my grief experiences, especially through

examples of toughness and adaptation. Optimism too, was present throughout my grief stories, especially the ideas of having a positive attitude and being appreciative.

Although the resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were present in my stories of grief, their interplay was different in each story. Sometimes optimism was strong and pushed resiliency, hope, and efficacy into action. Sometimes, hope was strong and encouraged resiliency and activated efficacy. These then pushed me to be optimistic. Sometimes resiliency was strong and led to hope. Hope then sparked efficacy and optimism. Sometimes efficacy led to resiliency and resiliency was supported by hope and optimism. Sometimes optimism inspired hope, which in turn inspired resiliency and then efficacy. Sometimes efficacy inspired resiliency while optimism and hope quietly continued working. And on occasion, all four HERO resources were equally present and active. Together the resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism seemed to help me navigate my grief experiences and continue the journey.

Research Question 2: What Can I Learn About My PsyCap from My Experiences of the Stages of Grief?

1000-Foot View of Research Question 2.

Grief is part of an iterative “process of meaning-making, social narratives, and cultural norms” where “rituals of mourning and remembering are not only shaped by cultural discourses but also, in turn, shape communal narratives” (Silverman, et al., 2021, p. 5). The following discussion of results uses the codes from each stage of grief: anticipatory grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and finding meaning, to get into the results of the 22 data also coded as PsyCap. Table 10 shows an

overview of the stages of grief codes in the full 144 data set and the PsyCap data set of 22. It also shows the timeline for when these codes appeared in my data.

Table 10

Number of Grief Stage Codes Found and Timeline for When the Code was in the Data

Grief Stage Code	Number of Times Found in the Full Data Set (144)	Number of Times Found in the PsyCap Data (22)	Time frame of the Grief Stage code
Anticipatory Grief	22	5	June 25, 2017 – Dec 2, 2017
Denial	2	0	Dec 10, 2017, and Spring 2020*
Anger	22	2	July 4, 2017 – May 23, 2019, and Spring 2020
Bargaining	4	1	Dec 16, 2017, and Spring 2020*
Depression	80	14	Dec 6, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020, and Spring 2020
Acceptance	102	22	July 4, 2017 – Aug 16, 2021, and Spring 2020
Finding Meaning	70	6	Dec 10, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020, and Spring 2020

Note. In the Spring of 2020, I wrote field notes, as observational memos, as I read and researched. Those notes are generally not specifically dated so are all dated Spring 2020. *One of the field notes was remembered observation about the morning I was called to the hospital, December 2, 2017. That note was coded bargaining and denial.

Anticipatory Grief Data.

Robert had been sick for a while before he died. I could see that without opening himself up to the idea of getting help, he was likely to die soon. Anticipatory grief began to prepare me for the inevitable. This is a kind of silent grief that we often keep to ourselves as we anticipate the loss to come (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005). Even though I had anticipated Robert's death, there were times in those first days after his death when I came home after a quick errand or family connection and walked in the house half expecting to see him sitting in his usual place on the couch. When he was

not there, my heart tightened, and my eyes welled up with tears. Anticipatory grief had helped prepare me for Robert's death, but it had not prepared me for the emptiness I felt without him.

Several of the data I coded as anticipatory grief were photographs. Photographs have been part of the grief experience for centuries. From pictures of deceased loved ones posed with living relatives, to displaying photo's during a memorial service, funeral or a Día de los Muertos offrenda, photos have an important role in the culture of grief (Tateo, 2018; Torres, 2020; History.com, 2019).

Photographs can also serve as a sort of journal, a memory of the moment caught with images instead of words. Most of the photos in the full 144 data set were coded as anticipatory grief. They are each a kind of journal entry into a moment of time I wanted to remember.

There were twenty-two anticipatory grief codes in the full 144 data set. Five of those were also coded in the PsyCap data set of 22. Table 11 shows the full breakdown of all the HERO codes represented in the five data that were coded both as PsyCap and anticipatory grief. Resiliency is the most used code, and toughness is the most used subcode of resiliency.

Table 11

Hope, Efficacy, Resiliency, and Optimism Codes Found in the Data Coded as Anticipatory Grief and PsyCap

Anticipatory Grief HERO Codes in PsyCap Data Set							
Hope	anticipation 1	desire 0	expectation 2	longing 2	waypower 0	willpower 0	wish 2
Efficacy	belief about capabilities 3	confidence 2	conviction 0	faith 0	keep moving forward 0	self- assurance 1	self- reliance 0
Resiliency	adaptation 3	bounce back 2	durability 2	plasticity 0	rebound 0	toughness 4	
Optimism	appreciative 4	cheerfulness 1	lenient 0	opportunity- seeking 1	positive attitude 2	rational 0	

Denial Data.

Denial is a sort of paralyzing unwillingness to believe your loved one has died.

This first stage of grieving helps us to survive the loss. In this stage the world becomes meaningless and overwhelming. Life makes no sense. We are in a state of shock and denial. We go numb. We wonder how we can go on, if we can go on, why we should go on. We try to find a way to simply get through each day. (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p. 10)

I never really experienced a paralyzing denial. In fact, I only found two data in the full 144 data set that could be coded denial. One was also coded acceptance and the other was also coded depression, anger, and bargaining. I think there was one experience soon after Robert's death that likely helped me move quickly past denial.

When the funeral home called me in to view Robert's body several family members went with me. While there I asked if it was weird to take a picture of Robert in the casket. They all agreed it was not weird and that I should do whatever I needed to do. So, I took two pictures of him lying there peacefully, in his favorite heather green suit, and so very still. I put my hand on his chest to make sure he really was not

breathing. When I put my hand on his hand it was very cold and hard. That snug, hand-conforming, comforting touch that had come to mean so much over the past thirteen years no longer existed. It was clear to me that he was gone and that his body, although it resembled Robert, was no longer the Robert I loved.

Every once and a while I come across those pictures of Robert, cold and completely motionless (see Figure 5). When I see them, my chest tightens, and I get the beginning of a lump in my throat. I have often contemplated deleting them, but something in my heart says to keep them. They are part of my healing. They are memories of the journey Robert and I shared. They are part of my grief story.

Figure 7

A Picture of Robert at the Viewing



There were no denial codes in the twenty-two data coded as PsyCap. Denial was not, as it turns out, a stage of grief that I experienced with any regularity during my grief journey.

Anger Data.

“Anger has no limits” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 13). It “affirms that you *can* feel, that you *did* love, and that you *have* lost” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 16).

Anger was a stage that I definitely experienced. I have several field notes about being angry at Robert for the choices he made that resulted in his death, or angry at his stubbornness and unwillingness to choose health. Some of the notes were observations that I was angry at myself for not being strong enough to help Robert make healthy life choices.

I was angry at Robert for being so stubborn and refusing help for all the different avenues from which it was offered, family, friends and doctors. I was angry that he had never been in a relationship that offered him a space to heal before we met. I was angry that he was not resilient. I was angry that I wasn't smart enough to figure out a way to help him. (Albright, Fieldnote, Spring 2020, "Angry at Robert's stubbornness and lack of resilience and his previous life circumstances / Angry at myself")

When I was working on my dissertation proposal, I realized I was also angry in a way I did not expect. After decades of having rose-colored glasses, of knowing God was at work in all things, and that no matter what, God walked this journey we call life with us, I was angry at God. I am sure God did not mind. It was not the first time we had had a fight. But this was a different anger. This was a righteous indignation kind of anger. It was a muscle tensing, jaw-clenching, body-shaking kind of anger. I was angry that God did not help me find the right words or the right form of persuasion to convince Robert that he needed to seek help.

Today is the third anniversary of Robert's death. I've been thinking a lot about our life together, the good, the bad, the wonderful, and the ugly. The following poem was read both at our wedding and at Robert's funeral. In both instances it felt full and rich. Today, the words resonate with a warm hollowness.

In the years since Robert's death, God has fallen off the pedestal that once was so very high. I find that most days I'm quietly fuming that God didn't step in through me, through friends and family, through any number of doctors, or through a miracle, to knock some sense into Robert, to help him see what he was doing to himself, to accept the help he was offered on so many occasions,

and to stop his death. Robert was stubborn and self-sure. God seemed quiet, but present.

I know God loves me, anger and all, and I remain thankful for God's unfaltering presence. Still, I've noticed a change in my theological perspective. My lifelong "Jesus is the friend next to ya, ready to help in time of need" theology, has morphed into Robert's "God is infinitely beyond all knowing and expectations" theology.

(Adapted from *Guerrillas of Grace: Prayers for the Battle* by Ted Loder)

Wondrous Worker of Wonders,
 We praise you not alone for what has been,
 or for what is, but for what is yet to be,
 for you are gracious beyond all telling.
 We praise you that out of the turbulence of our lives
 a kingdom is coming,
 is being shaped even now
 out of our slivers of loving,
 our bits of trusting,
 our springs of hoping,
 our tootles of laughing,
 our drips of crying,
 our smidgens of worshipping;
 that out of our songs and struggles,
 out of our griefs and triumphs,
 we are gathered up and saved,
 for you are gracious beyond all telling.
 We praise you that you turn us loose
 to go with you to the edge of now and maybe,
 to welcome the new,
 to see our possibilities,
 to accept our limits,
 and yet begin living to the limit
 of passion and compassion
 until, released by joy,
 we uncurl to other people
 and to your kingdom coming,
 for you are gracious beyond all telling.

(Albright, Facebook, December 2, 2020, "Mad at God / Morphed theology / Less hope-filled")

Robert was an alcoholic. Our doctor spelled it out clearly for Robert and warned him to take action. Family and close friends pleaded with him to take action. Robert

and I had many heartfelt and intense conversations about the direction his drinking was taking him and my fear for his life. After a while, he would stop the conversation with his silent treatment or an over-confidence and stubbornness. He would say, "I can stop any time I want." And he did. For a while.

In the days after Robert's death, a family member helped me put words around Robert's unwillingness to change. Robert had a brilliant mind and a high IQ. He thought he could think himself out of anything, including the drinking. It was not until a few days before Robert died that I think he realized he had taken it all too far. And I was furious with God for not intervening, through me, through doctors, through miracles, through anything. I had the willpower to try and save Robert's life, but I did not have the waypower to stop his death. I believe God had the power but did not. I can feel my blood pressure rise and the muscles in my jaw tighten just a bit as I type. I am still mad, just not as mad. God and I have more conversations now than we have had in a while. I do not apologize for being angry and God does not ask me to. I know that God does not care that I am mad. God loves me anyway. That is just who God is. . . hanging out with me despite myself. That knowledge also brings a peace that feels like places where there were holes are now beginning to be filled. The anger too, is part of my grief story.

I found twenty-two anger codes in the whole 144 data set. I only found two anger codes in the twenty-two data coded as PsyCap. Table 12 shows all the HERO codes present in the PsyCap data coded as the grief stage anger. Efficacy was the most common code of all the data coded both as PsyCap and as the grief stage of anger.

Table 12

Hope, Efficacy, Resiliency, and Optimism Codes Found in the Data Coded as Anger and PsyCap

Anger HERO Codes in PsyCap Data Set							
Hope	anticipation 0	desire 0	expectation 1	longing 1	waypower 0	willpower 0	wish 2
Efficacy	belief about capabilities 1	confidence 2	conviction 1	faith 0	keep moving forward 0	self- assurance 1	self- reliance 0
Resiliency	adaptation 1	bounce back	durability 1	plasticity 0	rebound 0	toughness 2	
Optimism	appreciative 0	cheerfulness 0	lenient 0	opportunity- seeking 1	positive attitude 2	rational 0	

Bargaining Data and Results.

Bargaining is the “all the what-ifs and regrets” (Kessler, 2019, p. 1). I only coded four of 144 data set as the grief stage of bargaining. Most of the time it was coded with other stages of grief as well. In three of the four it was coded with anger and/or depression. Twice it was also coded with acceptance. Once it was also coded with bargaining and once it was also coded with anticipatory grief. That said, here is the strongest example of my bargaining in the entire 144 data set.

On December 6, just a few days after Robert’s death I posted this to Facebook.

My dear friend taught me a bit of wisdom I find myself using now more than ever. “Never should on yourself.” What is surprising in these days of deep grief, is how many different ways I’ve found that I’m shoulding on myself! “I forgot to” implies “I should have.” “I wish I had” is just another way of saying “I should have.” “I can’t believe I just did. . . suggests “I should have done . . . “ “I’m so unfocused” implies “I should be more focused.” Even, “why am I still awake at 4am” suggests “I should be asleep.” None of this language, internally or verbally is helpful. None of it is grace-filled, loving or gentle. My friend is right. Never “should” on yourself. (Albright, Facebook, December 6, 2017)

I spent most of the first year after Robert's death asking questions like: Could I have forced Robert to see what he was doing to himself? Could I have forced him to get help? Should I have left him and practiced "tough love"? Should I have insisted on not having alcohol in the house and not drinking alcohol when we went out to dinner? Is there anything more I could have done to help him process the heavy baggage he carried from past life experiences?

In the process of healing from the should's of bargaining grief, I have come to the realization that I did all I could. Robert was a grown man. A brilliant man who felt his mental acuity was above most of the people he knew. He was a stubborn man. He had studied psychology and some psychiatry in college and did not want any "help."

On the occasions when I let the alcohol run dry in the house, he would venture out to get it himself and inevitably I would get a phone call from him, or a neighbor, or the police, that he had fallen, and could I please come. I knew I had to make decisions I could live with. I knew that I could not live with turning him out on the street. I knew I could not continue to function in the circles of life in which I journeyed, namely school and work, if I was constantly worried about whether or not he was collapsed in a heap on the street. I knew I could not force him to get or seek help when his heart was so hardened against the idea. I also knew that he was a deeply wounded soul, and that he needed to know he was loved, no matter what. And that is what I chose to do. I chose to love Robert in the way he asked to be loved, unconditionally.

I still should on myself in dark moments of overwhelming grief. But those moments are just random now, not entire days. The darkness and intensity of the grief

has lightened significantly. Bargaining too, has been part, albeit a small part, of my grief story.

Table 13 shows the HERO codes present in the one PsyCap data coded as the grief stage bargaining. Hope and resiliency were tied as the most common HERO codes in this bargaining stage data.

Table 13

Hope, Efficacy, Resiliency, and Optimism Codes Found in the Data Coded as Bargaining and PsyCap

Bargaining HERO Codes in PsyCap Data Set							
Hope	anticipation 0	desire 0	expectation 1	longing 1	waypower 0	willpower 0	wish 0
Efficacy	belief about capabilities 0	confidence 0	conviction 0	faith 0	keep moving forward 0	self- assurance 0	self- reliance 1
Resiliency	adaptation 0	bounce back 0	durability 1	plasticity 0	rebound 0	toughness 1	
Optimism	appreciative 1	cheerfulness 0	lenient 0	opportunity- seeking 0	positive attitude 0	rational 0	

Depression Data.

The grief stage of depression is a withdrawal from life, a deep empty feeling. During depression “you don’t care enough to care” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 21). Did I experience the depression of grief? Most certainly. I found 80 depression codes in the full 144 data set.

I can remember driving on the freeway not long after Robert died and almost being sideswiped by a car driving erratically. Normally, that would have made me angry, more attentive, or perhaps aggressive. In this case, I vividly remember thinking, “So what if I die. At least I’ll get to experience whatever it is Robert is experiencing.” There

were many months when fleeting thoughts of not going on crossed my mind. But there were always things that needed to be done, so I just found myself doing the next thing.

I did, however, withdraw from as much of life as I could. I still went to work, but I often closed my office door and worked quietly without much interaction. I still participated in my classes at the University of New Mexico, but it often felt as if another me was engaged in the conversations and the real me was standing in a corner quietly watching. I still got together with family and treasured friends. When conversations included discussions and memories of Robert, I found myself getting choked up, unable to form utterable words, and tearful. My family and friends were all gracious in letting me be however I needed to be.

I found fourteen depression codes in the data coded as PsyCap. Table 14 shows all the HERO codes present in the PsyCap data coded as the grief stage depression. Interestingly, optimism was the most common code within the fourteen data coded as both depression and PsyCap.

Table 14

Hope, Efficacy, Resiliency, and Optimism Codes Found in the Data Coded as Depression and PsyCap

Depression HERO Codes in PsyCap Data Set							
Hope	anticipation 3	desire 1	expectation 4	longing 8	waypower 6	willpower 5	wish 7
Efficacy	belief about capabilities 2	confidence 3	conviction 1	faith 0	keep moving forward 1	self- assurance 2	self- reliance 2
Resiliency	adaptation 9	bounce back 7	durability 4	plasticity 4	rebound 0	toughness 10	
Optimism	appreciative 8	cheerfulness 3	lenient 1	opportunity- seeking 11	positive attitude 16	rational 1	

Acceptance Data.

Part of acceptance is “accepting the reality that our loved one is physically gone and recognizing that this new reality is the permanent reality. . . It is the new norm with which we must learn to live.” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 25). I accepted Robert’s death immediately. When I saw him in the hospital at 4 a.m. on December 2, 2017, I knew he was dead. His essence was no longer in his body.

Acceptance is also in the process of reorganizing roles. “We must learn to reorganize roles, reassign them to others or take them on ourselves.” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005, p. 25). I had to reassign some of Robert’s roles immediately. Robert always took out the trash, checked the mail, and did the laundry. These were uniquely his roles. He also did most of the cooking, until his last few days. When he died, I found it heart-wrenching to check the mail, take out the trash, and do the wash. I remember walking to the mailbox half a block from our house, quietly sobbing.

I also accepted Robert’s death when I adopted my cat, Theo. Robert was very allergic to cats. When we got married, I willingly found new homes for my two cats, Ginger, a black Burmese, and Houston, a Russian Blue. I gave Ginger to a friend and a family member, who had fallen in love with Houston, kept him. As it became clear that Robert was dying, I began to imagine bringing a cat into my life again after he died. I was thinking maybe it would take a year or so. A ginger cat, who I named Theo, came into my life 15 days after Robert died.

Figure 8

Theo Making Sure I Fell in Love with Him on the First Day We Met



Notes. This adorable cuddler is seeing if he might like to join the Albright clan. His name is Theo (pronounced Tay-o). (Albright, Facebook, December 17, 2017, "Theo")

I found myself, after Robert's death, talking to him the way we always did.

Asking questions. Wondering about things out loud. Making observations.

As we heal, we learn who we are and who our loved one was in life. In a strange way, as we move through grief, healing brings us closer to the person we loved. A new relationship begins. We learn to live with the loved one we lost. We start the process of reintegration, trying to put back the pieces that have been ripped away. (Kübler-Ross and Kessler, 2005, p. 25)

Robert believed when people died, they became energy and joined the energy of the universe. My sense was, and is, that in his new state of being, he could experience more now than he ever could before. I accepted that Robert died. I have not accepted that his death means we can no longer communicate. That too, is part of my grief story.

Acceptance was found in the full 144 data set more than any other stage of grief. It was found 102 times. I found acceptance codes in thirteen of the 22 data coded as PsyCap. Table 15 shows all the HERO codes present in the PsyCap data coded as the grief stage acceptance. Hope and optimism were the most common codes, with efficacy and resiliency closely following.

Table 15

Hope, Efficacy, Resiliency, and Optimism Codes Found in the Data Coded as Acceptance and PsyCap

Acceptance HERO Codes in PsyCap Data Set							
Hope	anticipation 2	desire 3	expectation 5	longing 7	waypower 5	willpower 4	wish 7
Efficacy	belief about capabilities 14	confidence 2	conviction 1	faith 0	keep moving forward 7	self- assurance 0	self- reliance 2
Resiliency	adaptation 7	bounce back 6	durability 3	plasticity 3	rebound 0	toughness 9	
Optimism	appreciative 8	cheerfulness 2	lenient 1	opportunity- seeking 8	positive attitude 13	rational 1	

Finding Meaning Data.

Finding meaning “takes many shapes and can lead each of us along divergent paths” (Kessler, 2019, p. 3). “Ultimately, meaning comes through finding a way to sustain your love for the person after their death while you’re moving forward with your life” (Kessler, 2019, pp. 6-7).

I found finding meaning codes 70 times in the full 144 data set. Six of those finding meaning codes were also in the twenty-two data coded as PsyCap. Table 16 shows all the HERO codes present in the PsyCap data coded as the grief stage finding meaning. Resiliency was the most used code.

Table 16

Hope, Efficacy, Resiliency, and Optimism Codes Found in the Data Coded as Finding Meaning and PsyCap

Finding Meaning HERO Codes in PsyCap Data Set							
Hope	anticipation 0	desire 1	expectation 1	longing 2	waypower 2	willpower 2	wish 3
Efficacy	belief about capabilities 6	confidence 2	conviction 1	faith 0	keep moving forward 1	self- assurance 1	self- reliance 0
Resiliency	adaptation 5	bounce back 2	durability 4	plasticity 2	rebound 0	toughness 5	
Optimism	appreciative 1	cheerfulness 1	lenient 0	opportunity- seeking 5	positive attitude 6	rational 1	

2-Inch View of Research Question 2.

My experience of the stages of grief also taught me about my PsyCap. I've chosen a few to highlight a few examples here. As a reminder, the header of each grief story data is the date of the data and the Holistic Code "headline" I gave each individual data. After each data is outlined in the two-inch view, I share my reflections on my emotion coding and values coding. These codes help show a bigger picture of that moment in my grief journey. I also share reflections on what I've learned about PsyCap from my stages of grief at the end of each data example. A summary of the reflections will conclude this section on research question 2.

2005, 2010, June 1017 A Change of Light in Robert's Eyes.

Tullis (2017) discussed seeing a change in the photographs of her ex-husband and herself when they were married. I wrote in some field notes in the margin, "I saw a change in the photos of Robert and me while I put the slide show together for his

funeral” (Albright, Fieldnote, Spring 2020, “A change of light in Robert’s eyes”). After writing this field note, I went back and looked at all the pictures I had of Robert, from when we were first married, to our final days together. I was astounded. The light of life in his eyes literally faded to almost nothing.

The set of three pictures shows the change that occurred in the light that twinkled from Robert’s eyes (see Figure 9). The pictures were taken by members of our immediate family or, in the case of the third photo, me. The first was taken in 2005. The middle picture was taken in 2010. The last picture was taken in June of 2017.

Figure 9

A Change of Light in Robert’s Eyes



Reflection on 2005, 2010, June 2017 A Change of Life in Robert’s Eyes.

My emotion codes for this data were, startled (by the changes visible), gratitude/thankful (for the good times and for struggling through the bad times), joy (first picture), delight (second picture), sorrow (third picture). The codes show a progression in my life during those same moments. As his light was fading, my sorrow was rising.

The values codes were a belief that photographs tell a story, and that you could see Robert's health change by looking at the photos. I also coded the attitude of being reflective. The values codes helped affirm the values I placed on photography to help tell a story.

What can I learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stage of grief from this data? I coded the 2005 picture as hope. In it I saw expectation and anticipation for the life ahead of us. I coded the 2010 picture as efficacy. I felt self-assured, confident, and had a belief about my capabilities regarding the life we were living. I also coded the first two pictures as optimism. I had a positive attitude, was appreciative of the life Robert and I had and was seeking opportunities for our future. I coded the 2017 picture as resiliency. This was a time when I had to adapt, be durable, and be tough to get through the difficult circumstance of the life we were living.

When I looked at the three pictures, however, I coded this grief data as the grief stage of depression. It was depressing to see the changes I knew had happened so drastically represented in the pictures. I also coded the 2017 picture in this data as anticipatory grief. It's interesting that anticipatory grief and resiliency are both present for me in the 2017 picture. Resiliency was the strongest of my HERO present at that time in our life together. After each time Robert fell, missed the toilet, or couldn't do something we'd hoped and planned for him to do, I could not just give up. I had to bounce back, get back on the road and walk with Robert side-by-side.

Hope, efficacy, and optimism were at play too. I was hoping for a miracle and/or a health-first decision from Robert. During 2016 and 2017 I employed both waypower

and willpower as I searched for avenues of health for Robert and as I helped him connect with people who could support and encourage him. It took willpower to keep hoping in the midst of sometimes dire circumstances.

I was also efficacious. I was confident that I could handle whatever happened, moment by moment. I had a conviction, a belief about my abilities that spurred me on to action. And optimism was there too. A rational, appreciative, opportunity-seeking optimism that pushed me to continue to be resilient, hopeful, and efficacious. In the midst of anticipatory grief and depression, my PsyCap was fully engaged.

12-3-17 Funeral Information/Solo Pianist.

The day after Robert died was the first Sunday of Advent. The church staff gave me permission to be excused from my music duties, but I knew Robert would be furious if I did not fulfill my duties and help take care of the congregation musically. After the service the pastoral staff and I decided on a date for Robert's Memorial Service. Once I got home, I posted the following to Facebook.

I served as the worship pianist by myself this morning. It was really hard, but important to do - for me, for the congregation and to honor Robert. After worship we were able to set the Memorial Service time. It will be Monday, December 11 at 2:00 p.m. at St. Stephen's United Methodist Church. You are welcome to come and celebrate Robert's life with us. Also, since Robert was allergic to flowers and passionate about the needs of humanity, nature and the global warming (global weirding [*sic*], as he called it), the family invites you to make a donation to your favorite charity that supports his passions in lieu of flowers. (Albright, Facebook, December 3, 2017, "Funeral information / Solo pianist")

Reflection on 12-3-17 Funeral Information/Solo Pianist.

I coded the following emotions in this part of my grief story: capable, proud (while I was writing the post), and focused (while I was writing the post). In reality, I was

emotionally numb. Robert had been dead for slightly more than 24 hours, and I had been focused on others and getting things done. Perhaps that is, in part, why I coded the value and attitude of perseverance. This value and attitude code was the most frequent of all the values coded in the PsyCap data set of 22.

I also coded the value of “all creation is worth taking care of.” This code was specifically in relation to the comment in the post about Robert’s passion for the needs of humanity, nature, and global warming. In addition, I coded the belief that it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do. This became one of the most frequent belief codes. I coded the belief that it is important for the surviving friends and family to celebrate the life of someone they loved and cared about after they die.

This data was coded only with the grief stage of acceptance. It was clear I had accepted Robert’s death since I was already planning his funeral and inviting people to attend. As it turned out, since I have a master’s degree in worship, I also designed the entire service of remembrance and created the PowerPoint slide show with pictures and memories of Robert, another act of acceptance. When I coded this grief stage of acceptance data, I found hope in the expectation that people would see the information about Robert’s memorial service and feel welcome to attend. As I write this, I see hope in the form of waypower and willpower to look for a way to honor Robert’s memory by playing the piano in worship and hope in finding the will to follow through. I saw efficacy in the belief about my abilities to hold the solo piano seat in worship, but also in the idea that I kept moving forward by making the memorial service plans. I coded resiliency in the toughness and bounce back it took to be in worship that day, let alone

be in a leadership role musically. I also saw resiliency in the adaptation it took to find a date for the memorial service that worked for everyone. I coded optimism as an overall positive timbre or tone of the post.

What can be learned about PsyCap through this part of my grief story and the stage of acceptance? This data is about two moments in time, although back-to-back. One was playing in worship by myself the morning after Robert died. The second was setting up the memorial details and inviting folks to attend. Did one of my HERO stand out, or were they all equal players? In this case, it took a little bit from all four for me to make it through those grief moments. Efficacy couldn't have been engaged without resiliency, optimism, and hope. Optimism was just one of the team this time, instead of leading the charge. Resiliency and hope were equal and important members of the team. My PsyCap was in equal measure to help me journey through this grief moment.

1-18-18 Literal Physical Grief Pain.

Some days my grieving literally hurts. Some days I feel light and creative. If I'm by myself I often try to find tasks to do or things to watch. When I do sit quietly, I sometimes find myself weighed down with sadness and sometimes find I can be very still in body and soul. There are times when something strikes me as funny and I laugh really hard. Then there are times when the world seems to be crashing in around me and I can hardly see for the tears or breathe for the sobbing.

Sometimes it feels like months or even years since Robert died. But in reality, it's only been weeks. Everyone has moved on to their daily routines and activities. I have too, but it is sometimes hard to continue creating the new routines necessary to function in the circles of life I dance, or sometimes shuffle within.

This is the liminal space I find myself existing in. Right now my harmony is more like a dissonant chord waiting for the moment of resolution. (January 18, 2018, Journal, "Literal physical grief pain")

Reflection on 1-18-18 Literal Physical Grief Pain.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) have suggested that mourners oscillate between loss and restoration, between confronting and avoiding. This data shows an oscillation between being overwhelmed by grief that literally hurt and finding everyday tasks to do or things to watch on TV.

I coded the data for the emotions of discord, teary, overwhelmed, fragile, and reflective. With the text I saw the value of perseverance. I also saw the attitude of waiting for a resolution. I found the belief that it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, that grieving is hard work, and that resolution and harmony are important for healthy living.

I coded this part of my grief story as the grief stage of acceptance. Within this grief stage, I coded the longing and anticipation embedded in waiting for a moment of resolution as hope. I coded the idea of moving on even though it is hard as an efficacious belief about my abilities and the desire to keep on keeping on. I also coded the idea of moving on as resiliency since it showed adaptation and bounce back. This is one of many times during my grief journey when resiliency and efficacy played off each other.

I coded feeling light and creative as an optimistic positive attitude. I also found optimism in the cheerfulness of the experience of laughing really hard. In spite of these strong optimistic perspectives, I coded this as the grief stage of depression. The overall impression of the text is a difficulty in moving on and a discomfort in that.

What can be learned about my PsyCap through this grief stage within my grief story? In this moment in time, my optimism and hope were minimal and almost overwhelmed by the circumstances. I was stuck in a moment of discord. Efficacy and resiliency were paired together for a stronger punch to rebound and move forward.

3-18-18 Mental and Emotional Roadblock.

The semester after Robert died, I kept the routine I had lived during the last few years of his life. It was a routine Robert and I had decided on together. We knew it would be tough, but both felt the engagement in learning was worth the effort. The routine included working a full-time job, teaching an online class through the University of New Mexico, and taking two doctoral classes each Spring and Fall semester. In the summer I worked full time and took a doctoral class. This data is the draft of a letter I wrote to my professor in the semester after Robert died. I journaled this draft in my Notes App.

I am finding myself at a mental and emotional roadblock. I probably should have taken this semester off after Robert's death, but I really wanted to keep learning and I knew he would want me to keep learning! However, I'm finding that my mental acuity and energy level is not what I'm used to. I'm glad to have classes and work to focus on, but I'm not the student I know myself to be this semester.

All of this to say, I will not have my draft of chapter three to you on Monday. I will get the chapter in to you as quickly as I can.

Also, I have asked my supervisor if I can find a substitute to attend the board meeting I am responsible for and, instead, attend our class. Hopefully, you will see me in class at 4:30 p.m. If she does not approve my request, I will get there as soon as possible.

Thank you for your grace and support during this difficult time. (Albright, Journal, March 18, 2018, "Mental and emotional roadblock")

Reflection on 3-18-18 Mental and Emotional Roadblock.

This data was also coded as showing the grief stages of depression and acceptance. I coded this data with the emotions of exhaustion, frustration, and hope. I also coded it with the attitude and value of perseverance and the value of honesty. In addition, I found the mantra of beliefs I found in earlier data: doing that which is hard, but the right thing to do, is important; grieving is hard work; and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one.

In the data I found hope in the statement of longing and wanting to keep learning. I also found hopeful wish and desire in the phrase “hopefully, you will see me. . . .” There was an efficacious conviction and belief about my capabilities in the first sentence. “I am finding myself at a mental and emotional roadblock.” What I needed was time to be resilient. Having classes and work to focus on did show a kind of toughness, and bounce back. But my reservoir of resilience was getting low and that, in part, was the cause of the roadblock I was experiencing. There was also optimism in the data, both in the opportunity-seeking, positive attitude of the phrase “I will get there” and in the appreciation of the last sentence.

This part of my grief story shows a belief in the ability to do what is needed, a hopeful longing to do what is needed, and an optimistic positive attitude about trying to get it done. What I was lacking was enough bounce, plasticity, and durability to get it done. The stretch of my resilient rubber band was not enough to accomplish the tasks before me. It was something that both depressed me and that I was learning to accept.

6-26-18 Missing Robert on My Birthday.

I can feel my heart tighten and tears well up as I think about this part of my grief journey. My 50th birthday was not what I thought it would be in the years that lead up to the day. Robert and I had discussed and large, lively celebration. We had joked about my turning fifty and being eligible for some “senior” discounts, which Robert, who was older, was already eligible for. Without him, a celebration felt like an empty plan. Family and friends went out of their way to help me celebrate, but my heart was heavy the entire day and I felt constantly teary.

I woke up this morning to abundant kitty kisses from Theo, and several birthday greeting from dear friends and beloved family. Yet my soul feels heavy. I wish, with my entire being, that Robert was here to celebrate this day with me.

So, in an effort to lighten the burden of sadness that I carry and to celebrate that this amazing rollercoaster of experiences and emotions called life continues, I’d like to share one of my favorite quotes about growing older: “You’ll never grow old until you’ve lost all your marvels.” Here’s to celebrating future opportunities for marveling. (Albright, Facebook, June 26, 2018, “Missing Robert on my birthday”)

Reflection on 6-26-18 Missing Robert on My Birthday.

I coded this part of my grief story with the emotions of feeling empty, sorrow, being distant, sad, downhearted, and being thankful/grateful. I found the attitude of despondency. I found the value of marveling. I found the belief that continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving.

It was also clear in the data that I was experiencing the grief stages of acceptance and depression. Within this stage of my grief story, I found hopeful expectation in the idea of growing older. The comment “in an effort to lighten the burden of sadness that I carry” was a statement of efficacious self-reliance and a plan to

keep moving forward. I also found efficacy in the statement “here’s to celebrating future opportunities for marveling.” It was a statement of the desire to keep moving forward. It was also a statement of optimism and of having a positive attitude. I found resiliency in the phrase “rollercoaster of experiences and emotions called life.” It showed plasticity and adaption.

What does this data say about my PsyCap, the interplay of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism? Efficacy was the strongest component in this data. Efficacy to keep moving forward fed the resiliency to stay on the rollercoaster of life. Optimism and hope worked synergistically to keep that momentum going in the midst of missing Robert.

6-27-18 Missing Robert on My Birthday / Grief as a Mute / Grief Changing My Life’s Tone and Timbre.

I am blessed by all the incredible remembrances and birthday wishes and have tried to be gracious. I am genuinely thankful for gifts and time shared and have tried to show it. I’ve tried to smile a lot and be as present to each celebration moment as possible. John Wesley is credited with saying, “Preach faith until you have faith.” Over the years, I’ve discovered his idea works for lots of areas in life. I’ve tried for several days to be celebratory, but I never quite got there. Instead, inside, and sometimes visibly, I’ve been gently crying. I miss Robert’s physical presence in the here and now. He hated birthday’s and thought that celebrations were basically frivolous. He came to appreciate my need to celebrate at the drop of a hat and eventually he happily-ish participated in family birthdays. So, it’s not like he would have remembered to say happy birthday or buy me a card. But he would have been here to snuggle with and hold hands with and cheer to another year with. Grief, right now, is acting as a mute. It’s changing both the tone and timbre of my life. I seem more mellow or less vibrant than normal, but in the midst of these muted times I am trying to “act joyous until I am joyous” again. Grieving is hard work. (Albright, Facebook, June 27, 2018, “Missing Robert on my birthday / Grief as a mute / Grief changing my life’s tone and timbre”)

Reflection on 6-27-18 Missing Robert on My Birthday / Grief as a Mute / Grief Changing My Life's Tone and Timbre.

I found the emotions of gratitude, being teary, feeling distant and numb, and being subdued and detached in this data. I found the belief that continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving and the mantra of three beliefs: it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, grieving is hard work, and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one.

I also found a value in thinking that being mellow and less vibrant are not positive attributes. Although at the time I wrote the Facebook post it was clear that I believed that being mellow and less vibrant were not positive attributes, I no longer believe that. It is three years later, and I realize the being more mellow and less vibrant than I was before Robert died is not a negative thing. It is actually a new, more contemplative, 'comfortable in my own skin' me.

I coded the data as the grief stages of depression and acceptance. Within these two stages of grief, I coded the phrase "trying to act joyous until I am joyous again" as hope, specifically waypower and willpower. I coded the phrase "grief is changing the tone and timbre of my life" as efficacy, specifically a belief about my capabilities. I coded the phrase "grieving is hard work" as resiliency, specifically toughness. I coded the phrase "genuinely thankful" as optimism, specifically appreciative. I also coded the phrase "need to celebrate at the drop of a hat" as optimism, specifically showing a positive attitude.

This part of my grief story shows that my PsyCap was active as an interplay of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. They were all equally at work in this moment of time, playing off one another in an interactive dance.

2-5-19 Could Have/Should Have / Too Strong of a Woman?

I can still feel the deep emotion and sorrow embedded in this entry. Some of the could/should have spirals were very deep and filled with thick, hard to breathe through guilt. I still wonder if the strong woman Robert helped me become was more than what he bargained for, and if my thriving somehow resulted in his languishing.

The thing about taking time off is that you have more time to think. That's a wonderful thing! The ability to contemplate nothing and everything with no pressure to move along or get to the next task is a precious gift.

However, it does mean I am alone with random thoughts more. And I am finding my thoughts often stray to 'could have' and 'should have' scenarios. These two phrases have a way of spiraling my thoughts past reality into realms of sorrow. Each time they rear their ugly heads I try my best to think my way out of their incessant negativity.

One of my recent 'could have' spiraling episodes was: Could I have been too strong a woman for Robert? First, let me add that for some, this might be a silly question. However, grief has a way of taking the absurd and suggesting it might be reality. So, my brain went there.

Could I have been too strong a woman? Well, as a strong woman, I don't bow easily to pressure from others to conform. I'm smart, curious, and constantly learning and growing. Was this too much for Robert? Did he need someone who was home more and more of a pampering figure? Perhaps.

But in the conversations we had while dating and throughout our marriage Robert seemed to thoroughly enjoy the way we intellectually tossed ideas back and forth. He seemed genuinely proud that I was pursuing a PhD. When he asked me to marry him, he said he was looking for an intellectual partner. I think I fulfilled that role, but it is possible that Robert got more than he bargained for. If that is true, do I regret being a strong woman? Absolutely not. It is part of the core that makes me me. And when I'm not in the midst of a 'could have' spiral, I'm convinced Robert loved me, strengths, weaknesses and all.

A 'should have' scenario I circle back to a lot is: Should I have forced Robert to seek more help? And would that have made a lasting difference for an

amazing man who was as brilliant as he was stubborn? He didn't just ignore my pleas to seek help or the family's regular pushes to seek health, Robert even completely ignored his doctor's recommendations.

Our conversations about his illness often became philosophical wanderings into past experiences and future preferences. In the end, I chose to listen carefully to his deepest wants and desires and to love him without condition. I will never know if that was the right thing to do, but I'm comforted by the thought that given the same set of circumstances and knowings, I would do it the same way again.

I think 'could have' and 'should have' thinking is only really useful as fodder for self loathing and depression. I see no real benefit in either phrase and wish I could somehow delete them from my language database. But seeing as I don't have that power, I will continue to try and think through the realities of my experience instead of the fake news those phrases try to encourage me to believe. (Albright, Facebook, February 5, 2019, "Could have/should have / Too strong of a woman")

Reflection on 2-5-19 Could Have/Should Have / Too Strong of a Woman.

This moment in my grief journey was filled with emotions. I coded guilt, sorrow, being reflective, fearful, unsettled, curious, strong, capable, proud, exploring, empathy, self-loathing, depression, and frustration. I also coded the attitude of 'shoulding on yourself' and the value of being worthy of positive and uplifting talk. I found the phrases "I am a strong woman" and "I am smart, curious, constantly growing and learning" as attitudes, values, and beliefs. I also found a great many beliefs in this data. The belief mantra was there: it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, grieving is hard work, and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one. Also coded as belief were the phrases "never should on yourself," "grief has a way of taking the absurd and suggesting it might be reality," "the ability to contemplate nothing and everything with no pressure to move along or get to the next task is a precious gift," and "Robert loved me, strengths, weaknesses and all." I also

coded the importance of listening carefully to Robert's deepest wants and desires and loving him without condition as a belief, although it was also a choice I consciously made on a daily and sometimes hourly basis. I coded the phrase "given the same set of circumstances and knowings, I would make the same choices with relationship to Robert" as a belief. I also coded the idea that our brains sometimes feed us 'fake news' as a belief.

PsyCap was also present. There was a hopeful longing in the phrase, "I will never know if it was the right thing to do." The conversation about the core that makes me me was coded as an efficacious belief about my abilities that included self-assurance and conviction. I coded the sentence, "I will continue to try and think through the realities of my experience instead of the fake news those phrases try to encourage me to believe" as resilient durability, toughness, and adaptation. Optimism was also present. I coded the idea of "contemplating nothing and everything with no pressure" as showing positive attitude and opportunity-seeking.

This data was coded with the grief stages of anger, depression, and finding meaning. Like the cycle of regret, I found myself in the eight months prior, experiencing the cycles of should have, could have, and questioning if being a strong woman could have led to Robert's life choice, was heartbreakingly tough. I was angry that the thoughts kept cycling back. I kept thinking, "Hadn't I already dealt with this? Didn't I already work through the could have's and should have's?" Yes, of course I had. But the idea that I could have been too strong a woman was new and started the cycle all over again.

What does this moment in my grief story reveal about my PsyCap? It shows that sometimes resiliency is a choice. When I choose to be resilient, then my efficacy often follows suit. Once my efficacy is engaged, optimism and hope follow. Sometimes hope or optimism run out in front, like geese honking to make a way for the others to follow.

Summary of the 1000-Foot and 2-Inch Results of Research Question 2.

In this research question I looked at my PsyCap from my experience of the stages of grief. I coded for seven stages of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross and Kessler (2005, 2019) by adding the pre-stage of anticipatory grief and the new stage of finding meaning to the traditional five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

The interplay of the component resources of PsyCap was present in the majority of those stages. Sometimes resiliency was strong, but optimism pushed resiliency, hope, and efficacy into action. Sometimes optimism and hope were almost overwhelmed by the circumstances and efficacy and resiliency worked together to help me rebound and move forward. Sometimes hope, optimism, and efficacy tried to engage resiliency, but it wasn't quite enough. Sometimes efficacy was the strongest component. It fed resiliency, hope, and optimism. Sometimes resiliency was a choice. Then once the choice was made, efficacy engaged followed by optimism and hope. And sometimes, all four were equally present and active. There was a lot to learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stages of grief.

Research Question 3: What Do my Grief Stories and the Psychological Capital Questionnaire Reveal About the Malleable Characteristics of PsyCap?

10,000-Foot View of Research Question 3.

As I discussed in the conceptual framework of Chapter 1 and in the literature review of PsyCap in Chapter 2, each component resource of PsyCap, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism, have been shown to be state-like and malleable, meaning they are “open to change and development” (Luthans, et al., 2010, p. 44), that HERO is flexible and pliable. What did my grief stories and the three results from the Psychological Capital Questionnaire reveal about the malleability of PsyCap?

I first took the PCQ in August 2017 to help a friend doing her own dissertation research. I was amused that I seemed to rate high in each aspect of HERO, but it would be another two years before I decided to use these results for my dissertation research. That year, 2017, had already been fraught with some scary experiences regarding Robert and his health decisions, including falling and severely damaging his thumb.

At the time I took the PCQ we had just come back from a long family vacation to Hawaii. In Hawaii, Robert had been healthier than I had seen him in years. But as soon as we got back to Albuquerque all of Robert’s old habits kicked back in and I realized we might be at the beginning of the end. It was at that point I took the test. As it turned out, this was just three months before my beloved died.

The second time I took the test was February 23, 2020. At that point I had decided on using an autoethnographic research method and thought taking the PCQ again might be interesting. I had not yet formulated the question about the malleability of PsyCap.

In early 2020 I was feeling as if I was falling into a routine that reflected what a new normal might look like for me. In fact, I had recently experienced a joy-filled haunting from Robert where I believe he helped me find a pair of lost earrings. I posted the story on Facebook on January 16, 2020.

Robert made me cry twice in the past 24 hours. Before you think I've totally lost it, hear me out. In mid-December I was wearing earrings a dear friend gave me and lost one. I looked everywhere I could think of, but it had been a day of traveling to many schools and appointments. I couldn't find it and gave it up for permanently lost.

Yesterday, I was having a conversation with Robert, one-sided of course, on my way into work. When I parked and got out of the car my earring was just laying there on the pavement a few inches from my back passenger door. It had clearly been "weathered" and trampled by feet and tires, but there it was! I was astounded. My eyes welled up with tears. I couldn't believe it. I actually said out loud, "Was that from you Babe?" I felt all day as if he had gifted me with the lost earring.

I couldn't wait to get home and reunite the earring which had been lost with its (*sic*) partner earring. After a 12 hour day at work, I got home and excitedly went to where I was sure the partner earring was. It wasn't. I looked in every place I could think of. No earring. Sighing at the craziness of life, I gave up.

Then, this morning, I was driving to work. I keep a small framed picture of Robert in my car. I was thanking him for finding the earring and telling him that it was, unfortunately, partnerless. Suddenly, I wondered . . . if Robert found the first earring, maybe he could help me find the second. At the next stop light I had an urge to look near his framed picture. Sure enough, there was the partner earring under his picture frame! This time the tears were from being delighted with joy. Twice, in 24 hours. What a gift! (Albright, Facebook, January 15, 2020, "Robert's help in finding missing earrings")

February 2020 was also before all of the seriousness of COVID had been realized in Albuquerque. I knew there was an epidemic, perhaps even a pandemic, in the world, but it wasn't until March 2020 that Albuquerqueans began to see things close down and close in. As of February 2020, my life, in relation to COVID, had not yet changed.

This time my scores were lower, in some cases up to 1.5 points lower on a 6-point scale. I was surprised. I could feel a fundamental shift had occurred in how I saw and experienced the world following Robert's death, but I had not thought about the malleability of my PsyCap in relation to his death.

The third time I took the test was in the Fall of 2021 as I was in the middle of coding my data. My research question about the malleability of PsyCap had been proposed, although in a slightly different phrasing. COVID was still a part of our lives, but I had thankfully, not lost any loved ones to the disease, nor, remarkably, had the way I lived my life changed beyond wearing a mask, how I shopped, and how often I was in large groups. Interestingly, my scores were again different. My PsyCap had increased from the second test, some of the component resource parts more than others.

As you can see in Table 17 my results were high the first time I took the test. The PCQ uses a Likert rating scale that goes from one to six. Six is high and one is low. The fact that my scores were all five or above in the first test showed strong PsyCap and component resources. When I took the test the second time each of my HERO scores had dropped between .5 and 1.5 points. Hope had dropped the most. In the third test my resiliency score returned to the same level it had been when I took the first test. Optimism and efficacy inched toward their original scores, but my hope score hardly moved. The results of the PCQ show that our PsyCap resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism do not remain steady. They change and are flexible. PsyCap is malleable.

Table 17

The Result from All Three of the Psychological Capital Questionnaires Taken on August 17, 2017, February 23, 2020, and November 1, 2021

	8-17-17	2-23-20	11-1-21	Notes
PsyCap Overall	5.4	4.5	4.8	decreased .9, up .3 overall change from 2017 – 2021 of .6
Hope	5.7	4.2	4.3	decreased 1.5, up .1 overall change from 2017 – 2021 of 1.2
Efficacy	5.5	4.5	4.8	decreased 1, up .3 overall change from 2017 – 2021 of .7
Resiliency	5	4.5	5	decreased .5, up .5 overall change from 2017 – 2021 of 0
Optimism	5.3	4.7	5	decreased .6, up .3 overall change from 2017 – 2021 of .3

Note. These results came from the Psychological (PsyCap) Self Rating Report made available to me after I took the questionnaire each time.

In looking at the coding, hope was found least. This seems to echo my PCQ results. Interestingly, efficacy, not resiliency, as perhaps might be expected from the PCQ results, was the code I found most often. When you look at the timeline of my data (Table 8), it is clear that hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were found in data throughout my research grief journey although in the following 2-inch stories, it is also clear my PsyCap resources were found in differing levels of activity within each data.

2-Inch View of Research Question 3.

I've chosen a few of my grief story data coded as showing PsyCap to highlight here as examples of the malleability of PsyCap. As a reminder, the header of each grief story data is the date of the data and the Holistic Code "headline" I gave each individual data. After each data is outlined in the two-inch view, I share my reflections on my

emotion coding and values coding. These codes help tell a bigger picture of that moment in my grief journey. I also share reflections on what my grief story says about the malleability of PsyCap at the end of each data example. A summary of the reflections will conclude this section on research question 3.

7-3-17 Injured Thumb.

Robert fell down the stairs at our house on July 3, 2017. When I made my regular midday call to check up on him, he said he had fallen, but was fine. As it turned out “fine” meant the house was a mess and you could see his thumb bone through the injury. In times like this, it didn’t help the situation for me to get angry or frustrated. Those kinds of emotions shut Robert down. So, I learned to be compassionate and to focus on the fact that I loved him and was sorry that he was hurt instead of the frustration that he didn’t have the wherewithal to know it was a serious injury.

After gently, but strongly insisting that we seek medical help we went to urgent care. The doctor there was concerned that the situation was severe and the use of Robert’s hand, as a pianist, was in jeopardy, so he sent us to the emergency room. Several times throughout the medical adventure Robert would say, “Let’s just go home, I’ll be fine” and I would have to focus on my love for him and finagle around his stubbornness to get him the help he needed.

Many of the medical professionals we saw that day would give me looks of compassion and understanding. Robert was clearly drunk and was not a good patient. I was trying very hard to be calm inwardly and outwardly so we could get the help he

needed. The medical professionals were angels in my life that day, several went out of their way to help us.

In the end, the treatment required a relocation of the first joint of his thumb and four stitches. Robert honestly did not think he had done anything significant. Because of the severity of the injury, I had to take his place as the musician at a wedding and played several Sunday worship services alone while his thumb healed.

Figure 10

7-3-17 Injured Thumb



Reflection on 7-3-17 Injured Thumb.

I found the emotion codes of panic, frustration, determination to get Robert to a hospital, gratitude and thankfulness for the doctors, and compassion. In my values coding I found belief that Robert had no idea how severe the injury was and belief that a photograph tells a story. I also coded the attitude of being a non-anxious presence. I found a value code in the idea that medical professionals are critically important and are often angels among us.

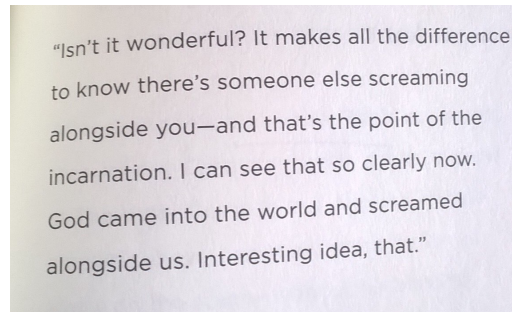
What does this part of my grief story say about my PsyCap? I coded this data as anticipatory grief. Within the data I found two hope codes. There was a longing and

wish to find help and healing for Robert. I also activated waypower and willpower thinking to get Robert to seek medical help. I found efficacy in that I believed I could get Robert to the doctor. I found resiliency, through the durability, adaptation, and toughness I showed in working to get Robert the help he needed. I also found optimism in both appreciation for the help we received and in the fact that I kept a positive attitude the entire time.

What does this part of my grief story say about the malleability of PsyCap? How did PsyCap flex its resources? Efficacy was the strongest resource in this part of my grief story and was shown in my belief that in spite of Robert's stubbornness, I had the ability to get him where he needed to be. Once I saw Robert was going to allow me to help him seek medical help, my resiliency kicked in and my toughness and adaptability helped me move Robert from place to place, even though he just wanted to go home. Hope worked closely with resilience, especially in the form of waypower and willpower thinking. It helped me get creative and find ways to keep Robert on task in getting medical help and treatment. Finally, optimism helped me stay positive and rational in the midst of Robert's irrational belief that he'd be fine on his own and didn't need help.

7-4-17 Screaming on the Inside / God's Help.

This data is a continuation of the injured thumb data, but from a different perspective. It was a journal entry that was also made into a text that I sent to the friend who sent me the picture quote (Figure 11) in a text.

Figure 11***7-4-17 Screaming on the Inside / God's Help***

Note. Quote from Rob Bell's book *Drops like Rain* sent by a friend in a text. It says, "Isn't it wonderful? It makes all the difference to know there's someone else screaming alongside you – and that's the point of the incarnation. I can see that so clearly now. God came into the world and screamed alongside us. Interesting idea, that."

When you sent the quote, I was sitting in ER with Robert. He fell down our stairs yesterday. When we talked midday, as we often do, he said he'd fallen down the stairs but that he was ok and simply bloodied his thumb. I trusted his diagnosis and stayed at work. When I got home he and the house were a mess. It turned out he'd dislocated his thumb and needed four stitches for the laceration that was "bloodied". I had to threaten a call to 911 in order to get him into the car to see a doctor. He was very stubborn about not wanting to go but I was uncommonly firm. I think I was screaming inside. Even in that moment, though, I knew I was not calmly and firmly speaking and acting in my strength alone. God was right there, as promised, walking with us through the emergency adventure. Thank you for feeling the inspiration to share the quote and follow through with sending it. The timing was perfect and gave me a boost of courage to continue in the adventure with love and compassion, knowing God was right there with us. Many hugs dear friend! (Albright, Journal, July 4, 2017, "Screaming on the inside / God's help")

Reflection on 7-4-17 Screaming on the Inside / God's Help.

I coded the emotions in this data as panic, determination, appreciation, confidence, love, and compassion. My values codes included Robert's attitude of stubbornness, and my attitudes of courage, love, and compassion. Are love and compassion an emotion or an attitude? Yes. They are both an emotion you can feel and an attitude you can have by choice about ourselves or another person, thing, or idea.

I coded being uncommonly firm as both an attitude and a value. “Uncommonly firm” is an attitude, in that it is how I felt about myself during that part of my grief story. It is also a value because it is important to be firm and speak strongly when needed. It was a bold move on my part. Usually, Robert shut down completely if I was too firm, but, in this case, I believe he knew my firmness was warranted. I also think greater forces might have been at play, namely God. I coded that feeling of God being right there as a belief.

What can this part of my grief story say about my PsyCap? I found hope in the data, specifically a wish and expectation that Robert would trust the diagnosis and do what he needed to do to heal. I found efficacy in the confidence I showed by being uncommonly firm. I found resiliency in my courage which showed toughness. I found optimism in the overall timbre of the note. It showed a positive attitude in the midst of a difficult circumstance. I coded this data as anger, anticipatory grief, and acceptance – in that order. I was angry that Robert had not understood the severity of his injury. I was angry that he probably had not realized it was serious because he was drunk. I was angry that I had not come home from work when I called him originally. I was anticipating more injuries and more times I’d need to be strong, but I also accepted that this was the way the journey was going, and that I was in it for the long haul.

Within the anger was resiliency. I was angry, but I didn’t stay angry. I couldn’t. Robert needed my help and would shut down if my emotions were over the top. I needed him to stay engaged in order to get the medical help he needed. Within the

anticipatory grief was hope. Again, it was a forestalling hope, but hope, none-the-less.

Within acceptance was efficacy that I had what it took to keep moving forward.

What does this part of my grief story say about the malleable nature of PsyCap? How does it reveal PsyCaps flexibility? Even though this is another perspective of the 7-3-17 Injured Thumb data, efficacy is still the master mover within my HERO for this perspective of the injured thumb story. Efficacy kicked my resiliency into action. Hope worked hand-in-hand with resiliency. And optimism helped me stay positive. Together, the synergistic, malleable nature of PsyCap helped me navigate this moment in my grief journey.

12-10-17 Being a Strong Woman.

I've been astounded by how many people have commented on how "strong" I am in the midst of this sad and difficult season. It started at the hospital, then more "strong" comments were offered when I served as the worship pianist the day after Robert's death. There have been comments about strength, in emails and texts, in visits with friends, and while attending holiday events. I've been perplexed why people are seeing that in me and pondering whether I agree with their assessment. You know what? I do agree. I am a strong woman and I think there are several significant reasons why.

I was brought up by XXXXX who taught me to be a thinker, to be authentic to my beliefs and emotions and who honored my need to be an eternal optimist. My XXXXX, in whom I have delighted since before XXXXX was born, has loved and encouraged me through thick and thin. My whole family XXXXX are my very best friends. In addition, I have a deep and soul nurturing relationship with a God I believe is with me in all of life's circumstances and who is all about love.

However, before I met Robert I was probably strong-ish. I think I've become the strong woman you are seeing today because of Robert. He didn't have to love me, yet he adored me, flaws and all. He was an off the charts feminist and his daily words and actions reflected his belief in the power and importance of strong women. He gave me courage to live life boldly. He enjoyed being with me, in spite of, or perhaps because of my wackiness, emotional ups and downs and need for regular thoughtful intellectual conversations. Robert's love added to an already substantial foundation. I think he would be proud of

the strong woman I've become. (Albright, Facebook, December 10, 2017, "Being a Strong Woman")

Reflection on 12-10-17 Being a Strong Woman.

This post was written eight days after Robert died. Already, I was trying to find meaning in our life together and in my life without him. I coded that text for the grief stage of finding meaning.

I also coded the text with the following emotions: surprised, capable, and thankful/gratitude. In this part of my grief story, I found the value of 'strength of character'. I also found the belief that it is important to do the right thing, even if it is hard to do. The belief that 'having a family that allows you to be your best self which is important for healthy growth' was also found in the data. As was the belief that Robert's love was formative. Interestingly, I coded "I am a strong woman" as an attitude, a value, and a belief. It is an attitude, but it is also a belief. It is my interpretive perception of myself. And it is a value, in that I believe being a strong woman is an important attribute.

PsyCap was present in this text. There was wishing hope that Robert would be proud. There was efficacy in believing in my abilities to play the worship service alone. There was also efficacy in the confidence I show when I live life boldly and when I said I agreed I was a strong woman. There was resiliency through being tough and durable by continuing to live life in the days immediately following Robert's death. And there was the mention of my eternal optimism, a sort of permanent positive attitude I carry with me wherever I go.

This data is about my development into a strong woman, a process that took place over decades. So, let's look at the malleability of PsyCap in this grief moment. In writing the Facebook post, I was trying to make meaning of my life without Robert. What could I learn from his love that I could take with me into the future? Being a strong woman was part of that learning. There was hope in that grief moment, the aha that I am a strong woman. There was a longing hope, with wanting Robert to still be present to share this insight. There was a desire hope, wanting to live up to Robert's expectations of me. That led to a resiliency to pick myself up out of sorrow-filled times and figure out whether I was a strong woman and if so, where that toughness, durability, and adaptability came from. This resiliency led to efficacy and a belief about my capabilities. Finally, the appreciative optimism shown through and a positive attitude of being a strong woman was evident. In this experience of PsyCap flexed its resource muscles as a chain reaction of hope, resiliency, efficacy, and then optimism.

12-31-17 Solo Pianist / Tears Throughout the Last Service.

This morning was my last Sunday as the worship pianist at XXXXX Church. Robert served as their primary musician, organist and choir pianist for 9 years. I joined him 4 years ago. It was a deep joy and a weekly delight to make music with my Love. Since his resignation in early November and his death in early December, I've been serving as the solo worship and choir pianist. Each worship service, even the day after Robert's death, I was gifted with a strength of faith and focus I'd not known before. As I prepared for this last service I thought I was ready. I thought it was going to be just as the others had been. I'd practiced the prelude, offertory, postlude and hymns. I'd thought through the details of the service. I'd lifted the morning's experiences to God. Then I sat down at the sanctuary piano to help lead the congregation in worship for the last time and started to cry. The tears flowed through the whole service. Tears of sadness. Tears of thanksgiving. Tears of change. Tears of hope. Although it was difficult to read music through tears, the worship moments were filled with grace as the congregation, the music director XXXXX, my friend XXXXX and my XXXXX supported me through the service. Grief's timing is sometimes surprising. I'm

thankful for the supportive circles of friends and family that allow the tears to flow freely and wash unexpectedly over my soul. (Albright, Facebook, December 31, 2017, "Solo pianist – tears throughout the last service")

Reflection on 12-31-17 Solo Pianist / Tears Throughout the Last Service.

What I neglected to say in this Facebook post was that when I sat down at the piano, I looked over at the organ to catch Robert's eye, smile, and show I was ready to make music with him. I had done this Sunday after Sunday for years. When I looked over at the organ that morning, I didn't expect to see Robert. I knew he wasn't there. But seeing the empty organ bench was overwhelming. The remembrance and permanence of his death was almost unbearable, and I began to cry. As the worship service moved on my tears morphed from sadness to thanksgiving, to a realization of the changes in my life, and then to hope. All throughout the worship the people closest to the piano keep handing me Kleenexes. Amid the tears and ever-growing pile of Kleenexes, somehow, I kept playing the piano and leading the congregation musically.

I coded this post with the emotions and feelings of loneliness, confidence, capable, brave, joy, delight, teary, and sad. Within the post I found the value that practice and preparation are essential, as well as the value of perseverance. I found the attitudes of being perseverant, confident, and capable. Also coded were the following values: it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, grieving is hard work, prayer is a helpful life tool, and sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

Within this grief story I found anticipatory hope in preparing for the worship service as well as waypower and will power hope in my tears. I coded a belief in my

abilities to be a solo worship and choir pianist as efficacy. I coded toughness and adaptation in making music through the tears as resiliency. I found optimism in the cheerfulness and positive attitude of the joy and weekly delight of making music with Robert. I coded the sentence that starts with “I’m thankful” as appreciative. It is a reminder that optimism is not always through positive lenses. Sometimes, like in this case, optimism is from a realist perspective. I coded this part of my story as both the grief stage of depression and of acceptance.

What does this part of my grief story say about the malleability of my PsyCap? In this data, resiliency and efficacy were both strongly at play. I believed I could be the worship pianist and showed a toughness and durability in doing so. I also had micro-moments of bouncing back in that every time the tears would overwhelm me, I would rebound, and keep playing the piano. The dual work of resiliency and efficacy inspired hope and optimism to be present in the moment as well.

3-4-18 Physical Sickness Without Robert / Grief is Hard.

Sometimes daily life in the midst of deep grieving actually seems normal-ish. No major meltdowns, no overwhelming feelings of loss, no debilitating sadness or frustration, just an almost regular pattern of tackling the next task, prepping for the next appointment, or caring for the next need. Then some days are not normal at all.

My heart has been heavy the past few weeks, in a constant state of missing Robert. Two weeks ago I had the stomach flu and was at home almost all week. I think being sick without Robert around made his absence even more tangible.

Usually I’m pretty good at knowing I might need to prep myself for times and experiences that could trigger deep sorrow. Being sick caught me off guard. But I am doing my best to mentally and emotionally prepare for several “firsts” (first time without Robert) coming up. Robert and I had lots of silly but significant anniversaries in March and April: the day our Lovebird, Cadeau found us by knocking on our porch sliding glass door, our first date, our first kiss, and the day he asked me to marry him. As each of those days creep closer, I am trying to find

ways to honor them, remember Robert, his love and compassion, and hold myself gently. Grief is hard. (Albright, Facebook, March 4, 2018, “Physical sickness without Robert / Grief is hard”)

Reflection on 3-4-18 Physical Sickness Without Robert / Grief is hard.

I coded this text with the emotions of anguish, feeling fragile, vulnerable, lonely, and reflective. I also found the value of perseverance and the attitude of being perseverant. I coded several beliefs. All three became almost mantras throughout my coding. They appeared dozens of times. The beliefs were: doing that which is hard, but the right thing to do, is important; grieving is hard work; and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one.

In this data, I coded the idea of finding ways to honor the upcoming firsts as waypower and willpower thinking (hope) and as opportunity-seeking optimism. I coded the phrase “doing my best” as an efficacious belief about my capabilities. I coded resiliency three times. “Sometimes daily life in the midst of deep grieving actually seems normal-ish” was coded as bounce back, “almost regular pattern of tackling the next task . . .” was coded as adaptation, toughness, and “grief is hard” was coded as toughness. I also coded the data with the grief stages of depression, acceptance, and finding meaning.

In this part of my grief story, PsyCap flexed its malleable muscles through hope and optimism which partnered together to help me think positively and find a way to find meaning by honoring the upcoming “firsts.” They also helped to engage my resilience to bounce back from the depression and into a more efficacious way of thinking about how to celebrate the upcoming anniversaries.

6-14-18 Regrets / Grief is Hard Work

I have, in general, been extraordinarily blessed to live a life with no regrets. But the last few days have been filled with regret in regard to Robert. Regret is packed with emotions that are difficult to work through. I am usually able to logic my way out of regret-filled thoughts. However, like the emotions it brings, regret seems to be cyclical. And recently the cycles have been coming fast and furious. Grief is hard work. (Albright, Facebook, June 14, 2018, "Regrets / Grief is hard work")

Reflection on 6-14-18 Regrets / Grief is Hard Work.

I coded this part of my grief story with the emotions of being regretful, sorrow, anger, feeling overwhelmed, guilt, feeling unsettled, and being frustrated. I found several beliefs including the belief that regret is not helpful. I also found the mantra of beliefs: it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, grieving is hard work, and grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one.

I found hope in the text. The phrase "able to logic my way out of regret-filled thought" showed an attempt at waypower and willpower thinking. There was efficacy and a belief about my capabilities in the phrase "difficult to work through", not impossible, but difficult. There was a resilient toughness in the phrase, "grief is hard work." The phrase also showed an acceptance of Robert's death in that I was experiencing grief.

This was an extraordinarily tough moment in my grief journey. I could not stop the thoughts spinning through my mind. This was a grief stage of depression. Even so, there was optimism. "I have been extraordinarily blessed" showed an appreciation and positive attitude.

What does this part of my grief story say about the malleability of my PsyCap?

Experiencing this level of regret in the midst of grief was tough. Even so, my hope and optimism told me this was a part of the work of grief and my resiliency and efficacy jumped in to say you are tough and durable (resiliency) and can do this (efficacy).

3-16-19 The World is Lucky About How Put Together I Am.

I've noticed something about the clothes that I wear each day. For about a year after Robert died, when I left the house I thought to myself, "The world is lucky I have pants, a shirt, and shoes on, and that I remembered to put on make up, and to brush my hair." I honestly didn't care how I looked, I just knew I had to be at work and school and so I had to follow expected norms, like clothes. I was despondent and the thought of putting any energy into getting ready for the day was exhausting.

Several months ago I realized I was thinking as I got in the car, "Ok, I remembered to put on all my clothes, and do my make up, and my hair looks pretty good. Whew. It's going to be a good day." Of course I'd get to work and realize I'd forgotten something like jewelry, or that my socks were blue instead of black, or that I'd left my phone at home, or a book for class. But, I was basically 'put together' and was pleased about it.

Just in the last few weeks I've started to occasionally think, "I want to look cute today. What should I wear?" Those thoughts were a daily occurrence when Robert was alive. I think, in large part, I wanted to look cute for him. After his death I just didn't care.

I was struck, when thinking about my recent journey of daily getting ready, that my thoughts about clothes and preparing for the day closely parallel my energy and enthusiasm levels for life. They are a sort of touch stone for me about how I'm doing in the midst of this grief journey and a sign that I'm beginning to find reasons to energetically get ready for the day.

Don't get me wrong. I still have "the world is lucky" days. But those days have become almost a statement of quiet rebellion instead of sign of despondency and exhaustion. I'm hopeful that's a good thing. (Albright, Facebook, March 16, 2019, "The world is lucky about how put together I am")

Reflection on 3-16-19 The World is Lucky About How Put Together I Am.

I coded this part of my grief story with the emotions of indifference, despondency, exhaustion, reflection, interested, enthusiastic, and rebellious. I found

the value of reflecting on and about life in this data. I also found the attitude of being reflective. Two aspects of the belief mantra were also present: grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one, and grieving is hard work.

Hope was coded due to the phrase, “I’m hopeful.” This showed a longing and desire. I coded the phrases, “they are a touch stone . . .and a sign that I’m beginning to find reasons to energetically get ready for the day” as an efficacious belief about my capabilities. The sentences, “I still have “the world is lucky” days. But those days have become almost a statement of quiet rebellion instead of a sign of despondency and exhaustion” were coded as resiliency showing bounce back, plasticity, and durability. Positive, opportunity-seeking, cheerful optimism was present in the idea of a good day and being pleased about being put together. I coded this moment with the grief stages of depression, acceptance, and finding meaning.

How was the malleable flexibility of PsyCap revealed in this part of my grief story? This moment shows optimism as the guiding force. I was optimistic about the changes I was seeing and that in turn inspired continued resiliency to bounce back and efficacy to keep moving forward. Because of my optimism, I believed in my capabilities. That belief engaged waypower and willpower thinking. It engaged my hope.

Almost three years later – I still have occasional, “the world is lucky” days. Now, however, it is more a statement of freedom than of absentmindedness. I am free to be me, warts, and mistakes and all.

12-31-20 No Vision for the Future, No Purpose.

This journal entry was titled “End of Year Thoughts” and was written in the last hours of the last day of 2020.

For years I've been moving from task to task, event to event, trying to do my very best. I rest, but I remain tired. I set short term goals, which I usually successfully meet, but I feel uninspired. I reach out to connect in relationships and while connecting I feel energized, but afterward, I'm exhausted. I think it might have something to do with lacking motivation, lacking a sense of making a difference, and having no vision for the future.

When I was younger and working in the church, I took for granted that I made a difference. I knew I did. I knew what I was doing helped others live a deeper, fuller life. I knew what I was doing was important and reached into the future. Teaching and helping people grow in their faith was my primary purpose. When I was “let go due to budgetary constraints” (a total lie from church leadership), I felt like my purpose had been surgically cut away. As I worked to find another job, my goal was financial stability and was not finding another life fulfilling purpose.

During my life with Robert I knew that I was making a difference in his life, as he was in mine. I had a vision for our future. I worked hard to provide for us, to care for him. I knew he loved me and I knew he was severely broken and discovered, in some ways, he was also abused. When he started to show signs of alcoholism, I worked harder to show him love and to help him feel like he was making a difference through his gift of music. After I lost my job at the church Robert's happiness was my primary purpose. When he died I was exhausted and felt like a failure.

Even during Robert's long illness, I continued to work hard at my job and to succeed in my classes at UNM. Purpose is not a word I've associated with either place. In my mind, I just want to do my best for the school district and at school. I want to please my superiors and make them proud to be associated with me. But purpose, a sense of making a difference, or seeing a future . . . Not so much.

In moving in with my folks, I have held several goals/purposes in tandem. . . To heal my heart and soul, to care for them, and to do my best at work and school. These are all worthy. Healing myself and doing my best lack a sense of making a difference. I do feel I make a difference in caring for my folks. But I no longer see a future beyond the present. I don't have goals beyond the next event or deadline. I'm still tired all the time. Perhaps the healing of heart and soul takes longer than I imagined. Perhaps with that healing comes a renewed sense of future and purpose. (Albright, Journal, December 31, 2020, “No vision for the future, no purpose”)

Reflection on 12-31-20 No Vision for the Future, No Purpose.

I coded this part of my grief story with many emotions including: uninspired, tired, expectant, discouraged, love, care, broken, abused, exhausted, empty, proud, compassion, determination, unsettled, melancholy, and ungrounded. I coded reflective as both an emotion and an attitude. I coded the grief stages in this grief moment as both depression and finding meaning.

I found many beliefs in this data, including the mantra beliefs that it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do, that grieving is hard work, and that grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one. I coded the idea of being tired, uninspired, and exhausted might be tied to a lack of vision and feeling like I'm making a difference also as a belief. I coded the belief that Robert's death was somehow a failure on my part. The ideas of working hard can lead to success and that doing my best is important were also coded as beliefs. I coded the phrase "with healing comes a renewed sense of future and purpose" as a belief. Today I wonder if the opposite might also be true. Perhaps it is in finding a renewed sense of future and purpose that we find healing?

My PsyCap was active in this part of my grief story too. I coded the setting of short-term goals which were usually successfully met as hopeful waypower and willpower thinking. I coded the ideas of trying to do my best and knowing that I was helping others as a belief about and confidence in my capabilities. I coded working to find another job as resilient toughness and adaptation. I coded the belief that healing, a

sense of the future, and finding purpose might be connected as opportunity-seeking, positive attitude optimism.

What did this section of my grief story say about the malleability of my PsyCap? As has been the case throughout all the stories, it shows my PsyCap to be present and active. In this moment, which is actually a description of several years, all four component resource parts of PsyCap played equal and important roles in moving me forward (efficacy), keeping me as positive as possible (optimism) as I sought out opportunities through both hopeful waypower/willpower thinking (hope) and a belief that I was tough and could adapt (resiliency.)

As a sort of Paul Harvey moment, here is a little bit about the rest of this particular moment in my grief story. I had a health wake-up call about five months ago. My health has inspired me to think about this post and my feelings in it differently. I would not yet say I'm future-focused, but I do realize that the things I do right now will greatly affect the rest of the day. For instance, when I exercise in the morning, I feel more energized all day. When I choose to eat foods that are healthy and energy-sustaining, I feel better. When I choose to let a negative thought roll on by without grabbing hold of it and turning it over and over again, I feel free to be hopeful, efficacious, resilient, and optimistic. I'm learning that my choices now affect how the rest of the day, week, month play out. There is a hint of future thinking there and perhaps a sense of purpose in striving to be physically, emotionally, and mentally healthier.

Summary of the 1000-Foot and 2-Inch Results from Research Question 3.

What did my grief stories and PCQ results reveal about the malleable characteristic of PsyCap? My PCQ results show my PsyCap levels changed, as did my levels of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism. My raw coding data showed PsyCap was a constant presence throughout my researched grief journey although the resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were not present in equal proportion throughout the data. Sometimes efficacy was strong and pushed resiliency into action. Resiliency worked with hope and together they worked to engage optimism. Sometimes hope led to resiliency. Resiliency led to efficacy. Efficacy led to optimism. Sometimes resiliency and optimism worked together as a duo that inspired hope and optimism to be present. Sometimes hope and optimism worked together to engage resilience and efficacy. Sometimes hope and optimism laid the foundation for resiliency and efficacy to jump in. Sometimes optimism was strong and inspired resiliency and efficacy and then hope. On occasion, all four component resources were equally present and active. My grief stories revealed a significant amount about the malleable, flexible, changing nature of PsyCap.

Summary of Chapter 4

In this research, I looked at what could be learned about my PsyCap through my grief stories and my experiences of the stages of grief. I also looked at the malleable characteristic of PsyCap through the lens of my grief stories. This chapter showed the results found from the data analyzed.

PsyCap was engaged in my moments of grief, albeit at different levels, with different component resource parts taking a leading role. The interplay of HERO in my grief stories and my experiences of the stages of grief, showed PsyCap to be malleable, flexible, and changeable. PsyCap is not static. It flexed its resource muscles in different ways depending on the situation.

Doing the research and writing this chapter was an effort to report the details explicitly and methodically, to show resonance, to accurately reflect my life experiences, and to show reflexivity in order to reveal a sense of trustworthiness and rigor. I tried to honor the emotions, subjectivity, and researcher influence that are unique to autoethnography while presenting my data in a rich and thick way. I have tried to share a compelling story that reveals a cultural portrait and personal reflections on my experience of grief and the role of PsyCap.

The journey of wearing the hats of both researcher and the one being researched has been more than difficult. In trying to be distant and reflexive, it was at times as if I was coding and reflecting on someone else's life experiences. It has been exhausting mentally, emotionally, and physically. I knew I'd been to that funny liminal place of reflexivity when I was surprised by some of the things the codes and reflections revealed about me. Perseverance? Being strong? A belief in my capabilities? So much time spent in the grief stage of depression? The results are intriguing, and we will take a deeper look at them in chapter five.

Chapter 5: Discussions, Implications, Recommendations – So What, Now What?

This popped up on my feed. It made me laugh. Robert was a brilliant goofball. He loved to play with words and ideas. I really miss his unique perspective on life. Sigh.

From March 19, 2017

Best quote of the day . . . From Robert, "What does 'in whack' look like?"

(Albright, Facebook, March 19, 2019, "Missing Robert")

Introduction

Autoethnography

asks that we not only examine our lives but also consider how and why we think, act, and feel as we do. Autoethnography requires that we observe ourselves observing, that we interrogate what we think and believe, and that we challenge our own assumptions, asking over and over if we have penetrated as many layers of our own defenses, fears, and insecurities as our project requires. It asks that we rethink and revise our lives, making conscious decisions about who and how we want to be. And in the process, it seeks a story that is hopeful, where authors ultimately write themselves as survivors of the story they are living. (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, p. 10)

Writing this autoethnography has been both an experience of being out-of-whack and in-whack. I have been in-whack in those times when I've been focused as a researcher, challenging my assumptions, interrogating what I think and believe. I've been out-of-whack while penetrating my defenses, fears, and insecurities. All the while, continuing to grieve, to live, and to survive.

This autoethnographic research looked at three primary research questions: 1. What do the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our psychological capital?

2. What can I learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stages of grief?

3. What do my grief stories and the psychological capital questionnaire reveal about the malleable characteristics of PsyCap? I used Facebook posts, journaling, field notes from

remembered observations I scrawled in the margins of books and articles, photographs, and the psychological capital questionnaire as my data.

To the best of my knowledge, psychological capital and grief have not been studied together in a longitudinal, qualitative, autoethnographic study. In fact, I don't think grief and PsyCap, as a composite construct, have been studied together at all. This represents a significant gap in the literature about both PsyCap and grief. My research helps to fill that gap. It provides insights into PsyCap and grief and what we can learn from the interaction. It also provides insights into how an autoethnography can be used in a formal dissertation.

Why is this a gap that needs to be filled? And why can this study fill it? Amid the world-wide pandemic of COVID-19, stress and grief seem to be on the rise (Dyrdek Broad & Luthans, 2020). PsyCap, is a tool that can be used to shape how we deal with stress and think about our life circumstances (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan (2017); Kalman & Summak, 2017; Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009; Bajwa et al., 2018; Gautam & Pradhan, 2018; Sytine et al., 2019; and Wiedenfield et al., 1990). In addition to the research already in the literature about PsyCap and stress and PsyCap and mental health (Worden, 2001; Dyrdek Broad & Luthans, 2020) the information contained in this research has the power to influence human resources departments as they look at possible ways to help those experiencing the stress and mental fatigue of grief by using PsyCap. It also opens doors to help individuals work on their PsyCap outside the workplace setting. A unique PsyCap training can now be

developed to help those experiencing grief tell stories that bring healing and use positive psychology to navigate the difficult journey. But I'm getting ahead of myself.

Discussion of Results

Let's delve into the interpretation of the results outlined in chapter 4. We will take this section one research question at a time.

RQ1: What do the stories we tell ourselves during grief say about our psychological capital (our hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism)?

PsyCap is a "higher-order, multidimensional construct" and "is the underlying core construct shared among its four component resources" (Petersen et al., 2011, p. 430). In this question, I was looking for what my grief stories can tell us about my composite construct of PsyCap and its component resources.

Petersen et al. (2011), Youssef-Morgan and Luthans (2015), Lin et al. (2016), and Avey et al., (2010) have suggested that PsyCap "represents a reservoir or bank account of resources a person can draw from" and that it increases and decreases throughout time based on what is put in and what is taken out (Petersen et al., 2011, p 433). One of the things my data tells is that I had a deep reservoir of PsyCap resources prior to Robert's death and used those resources through the grief journey captured in this research.

As is clear from the stories shared, my PsyCap reservoir of resources included hope.

Individuals who are high in hope tend to be good at setting goals, identifying multiple pathways or 'steps' along their goal pathway, as well as possessing the ability to reset goals when obstacles and adversity are encountered. High hope individuals are also resourceful; they reach out to

others for support and ideas to generate additional pathways towards their goal pursuit, while optimizing resources by leveraging strengths along the way. (Dyrdek Broad and Luthans, 2020, p. 546)

Snyder (2002) suggests hope is both about having positive goals and forestalling negative outcomes. My hope codes of desire, longing, and wish all seem to generally fall in the forestalling negative outcomes category. My hope codes of expectation, anticipation, waypower, and willpower seem to generally fall into the having positive goals category. In the data coded as PsyCap, hope was coded 25 times. Hope was coded 46 times in the full data set of 144.

My PsyCap reservoir of hope has not yet fully refilled, and I'm not sure it ever will be. That too, has been part of my grief story and effects my PsyCap and how the component resources interact with one another.

My stories also show I had efficacy in my PsyCap reservoir of resources.

Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) define confidence, or self-efficacy, as an individual's conviction about his or her abilities to mobilise the motivation, cognitive resources, and courses of action needed to successfully execute a specific task within a given context. Their meta-analysis demonstrated a strong relationship between efficacy and performance, and also provided clear guidelines of how it can be developed. Individuals who are high in self-efficacy possess a generalised belief in their ability to achieve their goals and draw upon domain specific mastery experiences when faced with unique, complex challenges such as is found in today's and tomorrow's . . . environment. (Dyrdek Broad & Luthans, 2020, p. 546)

Efficacy was the most prominent resource found in my data. I coded it 99 times in the full data set. In the 22 data coded as PsyCap I coded efficacy 29 times. Belief about my capabilities, an efficacy subcode, was the most used code in the PsyCap data set. Keep moving forward, confidence, self-assurance, self-reliance, conviction, and faith all totaled were coded less times than the belief in my abilities code. I had no idea

I felt or acted that way. I had not metacognitively analyzed that aspect of how I functioned in the world. Clearly, efficacy was a big part of how my PsyCap was reflected in my grief journey.

My grief stories also show there was resiliency in my PsyCap reservoir of resources. Resiliency is

a staunch acceptance of reality; a deep belief, often buttressed by strongly held values, that life is meaningful, and an uncanny ability to improvise and adapt to significant change. . . . concept of buffering effects can be developed through mindful attention on one's assets, weaknesses, and influencers." (Dyrdek Broad & Luthans, 2020, p. 546)

I coded resiliency 54 times in the full data set of 144 data. Twenty-five of those were in the data coded as PsyCap. Of all the subcodes I used, toughness and adaptation were at the top of the list. Together, they were coded more than the other codes of durability, bounce back, rebound and plasticity combined. This also surprised me. I haven't normally thought of myself as tough, or particularly adaptable. In fact, I have said that I hate change and others might add that I hate it so much that I partially shut down. Apparently, that is an old tape I play about myself. The new tape, the tape that is clearly a part of this data, is one that says I am tough and adaptable.

My grief stories revealed my PsyCap reservoir of resources included optimism.

Optimism impacts how individuals perceive stress and perhaps, more importantly for psychiatry, how they cope with stress. Optimism also determines how people problem solve when faced with complexity, adversity and obstacles are encountered. Optimists tend to employ an approach to coping that in many life circumstances is most adaptive, and least dysfunctional. (Dyrdek Broad & Luthans, 2020, p. 547)

Luthans, Avey, Avolio, and Petersen in their 2011 article on the development and impact of PsyCap talk about the two theoretical streams of optimism in positive psychology.

Seligman (1998) uses an attribution framework (i.e., explanatory style) whereby optimists make internal, stable, and global causal attributions of positive events and external, unstable, and specific attributions of negative events. Carver and Scheier (2002), on the other hand, take an expectancy perspective for their theoretical framework. A primary mechanism constituting this optimistic process is the expectation that a desirable outcome will result from increased effort. Carver and Scheier (2002) note that when people have this positive expectancy, they will continue to put forth effort even in the face of increasing adversity. (p. 45)

My subcodes of positive attitude, appreciative, and cheerfulness lean toward Seligman's attribution framework of optimism. Opportunity-seeking, rational, and lenient, lean toward Carver and Scheier's expectancy perspective. Optimism codes were the second highest in the full 144 data set with 63 stories coded with optimism. Thirty of those codes were in the PsyCap data set. This speaks to the optimistic lens through which I tend to look at life.

Together my reservoir of the resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism spoke of the presence of PsyCap in my grief stories. The data showed that PsyCap helped me to navigate my grief experiences. Just how it did that will be discussed in the section on my third research question.

RQ2: What can I learn about my PsyCap from my experiences of the stages of grief?

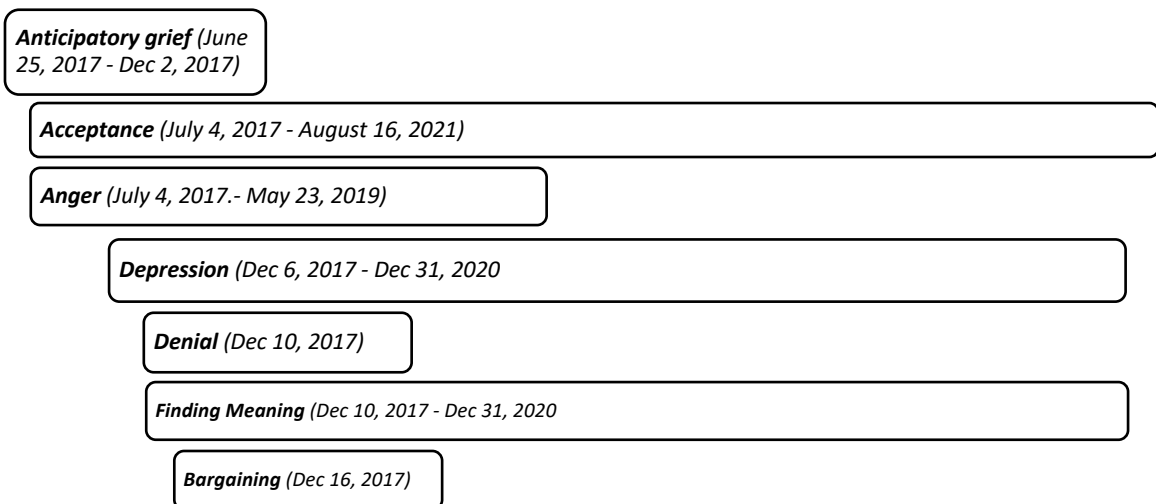
In this research study I looked at seven stages of grief proposed by Kübler-Ross and Kessler: anticipatory grief, denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance, and finding meaning (2005). Specifically, I looked at what I could learn about PsyCap through my experience of the stages.

Non-linear experience of the stages of grief.

First, it is important to note that I did not experience the stages in a linear fashion. The stages often occurred together and in seemingly random order, except for anticipatory grief which did occur entirely prior to Robert's death. Acceptance and anger were present during anticipatory grief. Finding meaning was present almost immediately after Robert's death. Denial and bargaining were very brief and within a few weeks of Robert's death. My stages are visually portrayed in Figure 12. The order was anticipatory grief, acceptance and anger, depression, denial and finding meaning, and bargaining. Then there was just anger, depression, finding meaning, and acceptance. Next, I moved to experience just depression, finding meaning and acceptance. Finally, only the grief stage of acceptance remains. In addition to experiencing stages of grief in a different order, I often experienced them concurrently (see Figure 12.)

Figure 12

Timeline of the Experiences of the Stages of Grief



Why did I experience the stages in such a mixed up and concurrent way?

Perhaps oscillation (Stroebe & Schut, 1999) helped facilitate my movement between the stages of grief? There were moments of oscillation in my grief journey, such as in story presented 1-18-18 “Literal Physical Grief Pain.” During that part of my grief journey, I shared how on days when my grieving literally hurt and I was by myself, I would find tasks to do or things to watch to move my focus to something else. This oscillation has become a tool I use to navigate uncomfortable or overwhelming moments in life. But did it impact the way I experienced the stages of grief? Possibly.

My constructivist mindset leans strongly toward the idea that assimilation and accommodation (Piaget, 1952) had more to do with the way I experienced the stages of grief. A quick reminder . . . when we assimilate knowledge, we incorporate it into already existing containers in our mind (Rothwell, 2008; Heick, 2014). When we accommodate knowledge, we create a new container in our mind.

Did my knowledge of the grief stages before Robert’s death, especially Westberg’s stages (2019) and Kübler-Ross and Kessler’s five stages (2005), effect how I experienced the stages of grief? Did this knowledge provide more places of assimilation for new learnings and less work at having to accommodate the new learnings?

Did my prior knowledge of death and experiences of grief encourage me to accept the reality of Robert’s death quickly, and basically bypass the stages of denial and bargaining? That is quite possible. I don’t think I saw denial or bargaining as worth the effort to participate in, assimilate, or accommodate. I just accepted Robert’s death, basically no denial or bargaining needed. I accepted his death right away although,

every time some new grief learning occurs, I accept his death again to some extent. Acceptance was immediately assimilated, but the box in my mind remains open and actively accepts new data.

My anger took longer to assimilate. As I said in my results section, I was surprised by my fury at God. I had been angry at God before, so there was already a box in my brain to assimilate the anger into, but I have never been angry at God for so long. It took from July of 2017 until May of 2019 to finally get my anger assimilated so that I could move on from that stage.

Anticipatory grief was new. I didn't even realize it was a stage, or really, a pre-stage, until I was reading about it in Kübler-Ross and Kessler's work (2005). I knew I had experienced grief prior to Robert's death, but I didn't know what to do with it or what to call it. When I read about anticipatory grief my brain accommodated the knowledge by creating an "anticipatory grief" box and in went all my grief experiences prior to Robert's actual death.

Finding meaning was also new. I didn't know it was a stage until I happened on a reference to Kessler's book in another text I was reading. I immediately got a copy of the book and devoured it. Once I had accommodated the idea and created a new box in my brain, I discovered finding meaning was present throughout my grief journey. In fact, I wondered, for a bit, whether finding meaning was actually the catalyst for movement between stages of grief. Are we angry and then we find meaning in the anger and can move on to another stage? Are we in denial and then find some meaning in our loved one's death and are therefore able to move on to another stage? It's

probably worth researching, but this research was not designed to look for that possibility.

Learnings about PsyCap from my stages of grief.

What did I learn about my PsyCap and the stages of grief I experienced? Table 18 shows that hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism were active in the stages of grief I experienced.

Table 18

HERO in the PsyCap Data Also Coded as a Stage of Grief

Stage of Grief	Hope	Efficacy	Resiliency	Optimism
Anticipatory Grief	7	6	11	8
Denial	0	0	0	0
Anger	3	5	4	3
Bargaining	2	1	2	1
Depression	34	11	34	40
Acceptance	33	26	25	33
Finding Meaning	11	11	18	14

The resource of resiliency was abundant in the grief stage of anticipatory grief. Within resiliency toughness was coded the most. Perhaps this speaks to the need to be resilient despite knowing what was coming.

Efficacy was the most frequent resource found in the grief stage of anger. Within efficacy confidence was coded the most. This hints to the experience I describe of righteous indignation. I was angry and yet still confidently advocating for what I thought was the best for Robert.

Hope and resiliency were the most used code in the grief stage of bargaining. Within hope, expectation and longing were coded the most. Within resiliency durability

and toughness were coded the most. It makes sense that expectant and longing hope paired with durable toughness would be part of bargaining. Why bargain if you don't expect that you will get what you are asking for.

Optimism was the most frequent code found in the grief stage of depression. Within optimism, a positive attitude was coded the most. This one is a strange combination. Optimism and depression almost seem like oxymorons. However, as you read my stories of grief, there is a positive attitude that is reflected even in times of depression. It is a combination that is unique to my experiences and grief stories.

Hope and optimism were the most frequent codes in the grief stage of acceptance. Within hope, longing and wish were coded the most. Within optimism having a positive attitude was coded the most. Again, this is a unique pairing that fits my context of grief. A longing, wish-filled hope paired with the positive attitude was present in my grief stages of acceptance. It speaks to an acceptance that was still filled with longing, but also a positive attitude to keep the hope alive.

Resiliency was coded the most in the grief stage of finding meaning. Within resiliency, adaptation and toughness were coded the most. In looking at my grief stories, a resilient and adaptive toughness have been part of my grief experiences and the struggle to find meaning.

The results from looking at the stages of grief data reveal my PsyCap is especially resilient and specifically tough. A tough resiliency led the pack with a positive attitude of optimism and a hopeful longing closely following. Confident efficacy brought up the rear. If you had asked me which PsyCap characteristics best described me before

researching, coding, and analyzing, I don't think it would have been toughness, longing, and confidence. Positive attitude, however, would have been on the list. This research has changed how I think of myself. It has helped me to find meaning in the midst of my grief journey.

RQ3: What do my grief stories and the psychological capital questionnaire reveal about the malleable characteristics of PsyCap?

PsyCap is state-like which means it has a baseline from which to measure and evaluate growth or shrinkage and it can be developed and shaped (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017). "It's state-like nature . . . makes it open to development" (Dello Russo & Stoykova, 2015, p. 330), flexible, changeable.

PsyCap can change (Luthans, Avey, Avolio, Norman, 2007; Luthans et al., 2010; Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Newman, Ucbasaran, Zhu, & Hirst, 2014). One of the ways to see the change in PsyCap is to look at the interplay of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism at any given time. This is basically what the Psychological Capital Questionnaire, or PCQ, does (Luthans, et al., 2007). It looks at HERO at a specific moment in time and rates the levels of hope, efficacy, resiliency, optimism, and PsyCap. I took the PCQ three times. Let's look at hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism in relation to my PCQ results.

Hope and PCQ.

"Hope is a positive motivational state directing perseverance towards desired goals and pathways for success" (Gautam & Pradhan, 2018, p. 26). Hope is strengthened each time you reach a goal, large or small. A specific way to develop hope is through stretch

goals. Stretch goals are specific goals that can be measured and are challenging but reachable (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007).

When I took the PCQ in 2017 my hope score was 5.7. Robert was still alive, but his health was seriously declining. When I took it again in 2020 my hope score had dropped to 4.2. Just a few months before writing this chapter, my hope score was 4.3. Why would my hope plummet 1.5 points? Was the lessening of my hope responsible for a lack of energy and my desire to be less active early in my grief experiences? Why would it only rise .1 points two years later? Were my rose-colored, naïve, happy-go-lucky glasses no longer protecting my eyes from the realities of life? Was Robert's illness and death for me a bit like Buddha's realization that there is deep pain in the world? Had I stopped being stretched and stimulated by the goals I was setting? Yes. Any of this is possible and even likely. It is clear from my PCQ results that my hope changed drastically during grief.

Efficacy and PCQ.

"Self-efficacy is trusting oneself that one can perform the challenging tasks"

(Gautam and Pradhan, 2018, p. 26). It is the belief that you can do it, or in the modern vernacular, "You've got this!"

Bandura (1997) has identified . . . widely recognized sources of efficacy development. First, when individuals successfully accomplish a challenging task, they are generally more confident in their abilities to accomplish the task again. This task mastery enables personal efficacy over that specific task. Second, personal efficacy is influenced when individuals vicariously learn by observing (i.e., modeling) relevant others accomplish a given task. If a relevant other is successful at a given task, personal efficacy to follow suit is increased. The impact of such modeling is dependent on how similar the individual sees him- or herself with regard to the role model who successfully accomplished the task. The more similar/relevant the role

model, the more effective the efficacy development process becomes. (Luthans et al., 2010, p. 46).

My results from the PCQ showed that my efficacy scores went from 5.5 in 2017, to 4.5 in 2020 and then up slightly to 4.8 in 2021. It is interesting that efficacy took the second greatest hit with a one point drop between 2017 and 2020. Could that drop in points be related to feelings that I failed Robert and so no longer trust myself in the same way I did the first time I took the test? My grief stories between 2017 and 2020 certainly point to this as a possibility. I did not feel that I had accomplished the task of keeping Robert healthy and alive. In addition, the modeling I observed in others with alcoholic husbands was not modeling I thought would work for our situation.

Why the rise then in 2021? Forgiveness and time had helped me move forward and trust that I had, in fact, done all I could for Robert given his worldview and my own. I reaffirmed that I had mastered the situation the best I could and my observation of others in similar circumstances affirmed that as well. How did my efficacy change during grief? It changed with time, affirmation of mastery, and observation of others.

Resiliency and PCQ.

“Resilience is being strong against challenges and being able to pull oneself together” (Gautam & Pradhan, 2018, p. 26). Luthans, Avolio, and Avey share a powerful metaphor for resiliency in the opening pages you receive when you get the results of your Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ).

One way of thinking about developing resilience is similar to taking a raft trip down a river. On a river, you may encounter rocks, rapids, slow moving water and shallows. Life has challenges and changing terrain. In traveling the river it will help if you know what the river is like and even have traveled down it before. Having knowledge will help you assemble the equipment you will need

both personally and physically. Taking a white water river requires different equipment than a lazy river. Similarly, in life you need to think through what is ahead and what skills and resource you will need to safely move down your river. Your journey should be guided by a plan, and a workable strategy includes assembling the tools for success. As you move down the river you need to trust that you are able to navigate around boulders and through rapids. As you move down the river you gain courage and skill as you successfully navigate your way through. Trusted companions traveling with you help you navigate through the rough spots. Stopping to enjoy the river and resting is also key to success. (Luthans, Avolio, & Avey, 2007, p 19)

How did my resiliency change during grief? My resiliency scores went from 5 in 2017 to 4.5 in 2020 and back up to 5 again in 2021. It's interesting the score for resiliency bounced back. Another way to think about resiliency is as the ability to pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Although it was clear from my grief stories that my fingers were tired of pulling, I kept pulling because that's what I do. I know it's worth the effort.

Optimism and PCQ.

"Optimism is having positive thoughts that one can be successful now and in the future" (Gautam and Pradhan, 2018, p 26). Luthans, et al. (2010) suggest that the "key to developing realistic optimism is: 1) Leniency for the past; 2) Appreciation for the present; and 3) Opportunity seeking for the future" (p. 20). My optimism scores went from 5.3 in 2017 to 4.7 in 2020 and back up to 5 in 2021. When I first saw the optimism scores drop, I was not surprised. I knew that where before I had seen the glass as half full, at that point in time I just felt like the glass had stuff in it. When it went back up a bit in 2021, again, I was not surprised. I knew the glass was half full again, or at least I thought the stuff in the glass was interesting and worth tasting. My grief stories attest

to that too. I had become more lenient with the past, more appreciative of the present, and had begun seeking future opportunities.

My 2-Inch Reflections and PsyCap's Malleability.

My 2-inch reflections were the most informative in looking at PsyCap and how it is flexible, how it morphs, and how it changes. Table 19 is a quick look at PsyCap's malleable, interplay, dance in the 22 data coded as PsyCap.

Table 19

The Malleability of PsyCap in the 22 Data Coded as PsyCap

22 Data Coded as PsyCap	The Malleability of PsyCap Within the Grief Stories
2005, 2010, June 2017 A Change of light in Robert's eyes	Resiliency was strong, but optimism pushed resiliency, hope, and efficacy into action
6-25-17 Baseball game smiles	Optimism was strong and pushed resiliency, hope, and efficacy into action
7-3-17 Injured thumb	Efficacy was strong and pushed resiliency into action. Resiliency worked with hope and together they worked to engage optimism
7-4-17 Screaming on the inside	Efficacy was strong and pushed resiliency into action. Resiliency worked with hope, and together they worked to engage optimism
11-27-17 Robert in the hospital	Hope was strong and encouraged resiliency and activated efficacy. These then pushed me to be optimistic
12-3-17 Funeral information / Solo pianist	All four were equally present and active
12-10-17 Being a strong woman	Hope led to resiliency. Resiliency led to efficacy. Efficacy led to optimism
12-16-17 Going on and finding a life balance	Resiliency was strong and led to hope. Hope sparked efficacy and optimism, but they were both very low.
12-31-17 Solo pianist – tears through the last service	Resiliency and optimism worked together as a duo that inspired hope and optimism to be present
1-18-18 Literal physical grief pain	Optimism and hope were almost overwhelmed by the circumstances and efficacy and resiliency worked together to help me rebound and move forward
1-19-18 Joy go to's are connected to Robert	All four were equally present and active
3-4-18 Physical sickness without Robert / Grief is hard	Hope and optimism worked together to engage resilience and efficacy

Table 19 (cont.)

3-18-18 Mental and emotional roadblock	Hope, optimism and efficacy tried to engage resiliency, but it wasn't quite enough
6-3-18 New routines / I miss him	Efficacy led to resiliency. Resiliency was supported by hope and optimism
6-14-18 Regrets / Grief is hard work	Hope and optimism laid the foundation for resiliency and efficacy to jump in
6-26-18 Missing Robert on my birthday	Efficacy was the strongest component. It fed resiliency, hope and optimism
6-27-18 Missing Robert on my birthday / Grief as a mute / Grief changing my life's tone and timbre	All four were equally present and active
12-9-18 Laughter, joy, peace and wonder in the midst of grief / Every moment is different / Emotional vertigo / 3 seconds off / Person I'm becoming because of the person I loved – unexpected gift	Optimism inspired hope, which in turn inspired resiliency and then efficacy
2-5-19 Could have/should have / Too strong of a woman?	Sometimes resiliency is a choice. Then efficacy engages followed by optimism and hope
2-21-19 Wishing for the old me and who I used to be / Learning to embrace the me I'm becoming	Efficacy inspired resiliency while optimism and hope quietly continued working
3-16-19 The world is lucky about how put together I am	Optimism was strong and inspired resiliency and efficacy and then hope
12-31-20 No vision for the future / No purpose	All four were equally present and active

Note. These results are from the reflections in Chapter 4.

Table 19 shows an interplay between the component resource parts of PsyCap. This interplay creates a synergism unique to PsyCap (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017; Luthans et al., 2015; Dawkins et al., 2013, Luthans et al., 2010, Lin et al., 2016, and Nolzen, 2018).

When you combine this data (Table 19) with the stages of grief, as I experienced them (Figure 12), you begin to understand the malleability of PsyCap (Table 20) throughout my grief journey. Table 20 show the malleability of PsyCap through the interplay of the component resources during my experience of the stages of grief. The

rows delineate each of the 22 times PsyCap was fully present in the data and the interplay of component resources. The columns are the timeframe I experienced each stage of grief. The synergistic dance of the component resources was present during most of my stages of grief. The exceptions were denial and bargaining, which are the stages I did not experience for any significant length of time. Although there is some interesting overlap of the PsyCap resource interplay in my grief stages of acceptance and anger, in general, the stage of grief I was in did not make a perceptible difference to which HERO resource took the lead in the dance.

Table 20*Malleability of My PsyCap and My Stages of Grief Chronologically Paired*

	Stages of Grief Experienced						
	Anticipa- tory Grief June 25, 2017 – Dec. 2, 2017	Accept- ance July 4, 2017 – August 16, 2021	Anger July 4, 2017 – May 23, 2019	Depres- sion Dec 6, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020	Denial Dec 10, 2017	Finding Meaning Dec 10, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020	Bar- gaining Dec 16, 2017
22 Data That Showed a Full PsyCap Interaction and the Malleability of PsyCap Through Interplay							
2005, 2010, June 2017 A Change of light in Robert's eyes <i>Interplay:</i> Resiliency was strong, but optimism pushed resiliency, hope, and efficacy into action	x	x	x				
6-25-17 Baseball game smiles <i>Interplay:</i> Optimism was strong and pushed resiliency, hope, and efficacy into action	x	x	x				
7-3-17 Injured thumb <i>Interplay:</i> Efficacy was strong and push resiliency into action. Resiliency worked with hope and together they worked to engage optimism	x	x	x				
7-4-17 Screaming on the inside <i>Interplay:</i> Efficacy was strong and push resiliency into action. Resiliency worked with hope and together they worked to engage optimism	x	x	x				
11-27-17 Robert in the hospital <i>Interplay:</i> Hope was strong and encouraged resiliency and activated efficacy. These then pushed me to be optimistic	x	x	x				

Table 20 (cont.)

	Anticipa- tory Grief June 25, 2017 – Dec. 2, 2017	Accept- ance July 4, 2017 – August 16, 2021	Anger July 4, 2017 – May 23, 2019	Depres- sion Dec 6, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020	Denial Dec 10, 2017	Finding Meaning Dec 10, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020	Bar- gaining Dec 16, 2017
12-3-17 Funeral information / Solo pianist <i>Interplay:</i> All four were equally present and active		x	x	x			
12-10-17 Being a strong woman <i>Interplay:</i> Hope led to resiliency. Resiliency led to efficacy. Efficacy led to optimism		x	x	x		x	
12-16-17 Going on and finding a life balance <i>Interplay:</i> Resiliency was strong and led to hope. Hope sparked efficacy and optimism, but they were both very low		x	x	x		x	
12-31-17 Solo pianist – tears through the last service <i>Interplay:</i> Resiliency and optimism worked together as a duo that inspired hope and optimism to be present		x	x	x		x	
1-18-18 Literal physical grief pain <i>Interplay:</i> Optimism and hope were almost overwhelmed by the circumstances and efficacy and resiliency worked together to help me rebound and move forward		x	x	x		x	
1-19-18 Joy go to's are connected to Robert <i>Interplay:</i> All four were equally present and active		x	x	x		x	
3-4-18 Physical sickness without Robert / Grief is hard <i>Interplay:</i> Hope and optimism worked together to engage resilience and efficacy		x	x	x		x	
3-18-18 Mental and emotional roadblock <i>Interplay:</i> Hope, optimism and efficacy tried to engage resiliency, but it wasn't quite enough		x	x	x		x	
6-3-18 New routines / I miss him <i>Interplay:</i> Efficacy led to resiliency. Resiliency was supported by hope and optimism		x	x	x		x	
6-14-18 Regrets / Grief is hard work <i>Interplay:</i> Hope and optimism laid the foundation for resiliency and efficacy to jump in		x	x	x		x	
6-26-18 Missing Robert on my birthday <i>Interplay:</i> Efficacy was the strongest component. It fed resiliency, hope and optimism		x	x	x		x	

Table 20 (cont.)

	Anticipa- tory Grief June 25, 2017 – Dec. 2, 2017	Accept- ance July 4, 2017 – August 16, 2021	Anger July 4, 2017 – May 23, 2019	Depres- sion Dec 6, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020	Denial Dec 10, 2017	Finding Meanin- g Dec 10, 2017 – Dec 31, 2020	Bar- gaining Dec 16, 2017
6-27-18 Missing Robert on my birthday / Grief as a mute / Grief changing my life's tone and timbre <i>Interplay:</i> All four were equally present and active		x	x	x		x	
12-9-18 Laughter, joy, peace and wonder in the midst of grief / Every moment is different / Emotional vertigo / 3 seconds off / Person I'm becoming because of the person I loved – unexpected gift <i>Interplay:</i> Optimism inspired hope, which in turn inspired resiliency and then efficacy		x	x	x		x	
2-5-19 Could have/should have / Too strong of a woman? <i>Interplay:</i> Sometimes resiliency is a choice. Then efficacy engages followed by optimism and hope		x	x	x		x	
2-21-19 Wishing for the old me and who I used to be / Learning to embrace the me I'm becoming <i>Interplay:</i> Efficacy inspired resiliency while optimism and hope quietly continued working		x	x	x		x	
3-16-19 The world is lucky about how put together I am <i>Interplay:</i> Optimism was strong and inspired resiliency and efficacy and then hope		x	x	x		x	
12-31-20 No vision for the future / No purpose <i>Interplay:</i> All four were equally present and active		x		x		x	

When I was preparing for my comprehensive exams, I came across a documentary on Joseph Haydn, “Now Hear This Haydn: King of Strings.” Haydn was the first composer to write for four stringed instruments, specifically two violins, a viola, and a cello. In most string trios and quartets, the violins steal the show, shining with melody and power. But in his Opus 20 collection Haydn surprised his audience and his musicians by giving the cello primary voicing and viola secondary voicing. Throughout

the quartet the primary voicing switches between all four instruments. After Opus 20, quartets were never the same. Geoff Nuttall suggests in the video that the instruments were a “democracy of four voices speaking amongst themselves” (Lynch, 2020, 5:06). Scott Yoo, the host for the series, said a string quartet is “four equal people without a hierarchy. The first violin is the first among equals, but the string quartet is four equal voices. Everybody counts. Everybody matters.” (Lynch, 2020, 36:58)

Since I had been preparing for my comps prior to watching the documentary, it should probably come as no surprise that my mind immediately made the jump from string quartets to PsyCap. “Perhaps,” I thought, “the aspects of PsyCap, hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism, are a bit like a string quartet?” I jotted this note down and set it aside. The more I thought about it, the more plausible the idea seemed.

Hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism can certainly work independently and be their own strong and powerful voice. What I realized in this research, and specifically the reflections in Chapter 4, is that the four members of HERO are a democracy of voices speaking amongst themselves, creating something more significant than any of them can do alone. Any one of the four can have the primary voicing and sometimes two or more have an equal voice. But when they all work together as PsyCap something synergistic happens. Together, they compelled me to move positively forward with waypower and willpower thinking, a positive attitude, and a willingness to resiliently pick myself up each time I failed and to be as hopeful, optimistic, or efficacious as the situation required.

Summary of Research Questions: The Synergistic Interplay of the Component Resources of PsyCap

Why did my PsyCap appear twenty-two times in my data, but not in all 144 pieces of data? As I discussed earlier, some of the 144 were just about Robert, and although they were still part of my grief story, those data did not discuss me specifically. Perhaps some of the data simply didn't have enough detail to show all four component resource parts of PsyCap in an active interwoven dance? Maybe only the twenty-two PsyCap data were filled with enough details to show hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism at work together?

All the twenty-two data coded as PsyCap were describing moments of stress. Remember, stress occurs when you think the situation might be beyond your coping capabilities (Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009). Some data showed more extreme stress than others, but stress was present in all twenty-two data.

One of the unique aspects of PsyCap, as discussed previously, is the coping mechanisms common to the four component resource parts (Dawkins, et al., 2013). PsyCap, as a construct, benefits from these coping characteristics and helps reduce stress (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan (2017); Kalman & Summak, 2017; Avey, Wernsing, & Luthans, 2008; Avey, Luthans, & Jensen, 2009; Riolli, Savicki, & Richards, 2012; Bajwa et al., 2018; Gautam & Pradhan, 2018; Sytine et al., 2019; and Wiedenfeld et al., 1990).

When you look back at the twenty-two data coded as PsyCap, the journal entries, pictures, or Facebook posts often occurred during stressful time frames. Within the twenty-two there are blocks of data around my birthday in 2017 and 2018, in the few weeks immediately following Robert's death, at the beginning of 2018, during the

semester I took off from taking classes and teaching, and the new year in 2017 and 2020 (see Table 7.) These were all times of heightened stress in my life. Is it possible that stress is key to why my full PsyCap was visibly engaged in those twenty-two data? Yes, I think that is likely.

Does that mean, though, that my PsyCap wasn't engaged in the other moments of my grief journey? Yes, I suppose that is possible. It is also possible that there simply wasn't enough evidence in the data to reveal PsyCap at work in the midst of that particular moment of my grief story. Or perhaps, like in a string quartet, one component resource of PsyCap was present, but had no notes to play in the music of that moment. In music, an instrument that doesn't play is not suddenly considered absent from the quartet. It is performing a vital part in the arrangement by keeping silent. If all the instruments played all the time, the music would be chaotic. Perhaps that is also true of the component resources of PsyCap?

Earlier I likened the interaction of the component resources of PsyCap to an apple raisin pie. I said that PsyCap is the piece of pie, all of the goo, the apples, the raisins, and crust together and that you could not have that piece of pie without the goo, or without the apples, or without the raisins, or without the crust. But now I'm rethinking that analogy. Do they all have to be there? If you have a piece of apple raisin pie that is missing the raisins, is it really no longer apple raisin pie? Perhaps the piece of pie is visibly missing raisins, but a remanent flavor of the raisins is still present. Perhaps that is what was going on with my data. There were times when a component resource

was not clearly present in the data, but perhaps it was still there, mixing invisibly with the other component resources.

Or perhaps the interplay of PsyCap can be imagined as the phases of the moon. Just because you cannot see the full moon, does not mean that portion of the moon is missing. Your perspective of the moon has changed. My perspective when coding my data saw hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism as playing together in a synergistic way 22 times. Does that mean PsyCap was missing in the other data? No, it means that I did not see the full interplay of HERO in motion. Is it possible that someone else would code my data differently? Of course. I brought both my researcher hat and the one who was being researched hat to the coding experience. No one else will have quite that perspective. They might see the full HERO at play in more of my data, or they might see less.

In the end, I believe the number of times is not as relevant as the fact that my research is an affirmation of previous research (Dawkins, et al., 2013; Bajwa, 2018; Luthans, Youssef-Morgan, and Avolio, 2015; Luthans, et al., 2010; Lin, et al., 2016; Dyrdek Broad, and Luthans, 2020). My research shows the synergistic interplay of the four component resources of PsyCap, hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism from a unique autoethnographic perspective.

How Can My Learnings About Grief and PsyCap Incite Action and Serve as a Catalyst for Change?

Autoethnographies extend social understanding and give voice to that experience (Sparkes, 2000; Wall, 2008). This dissertation gave voice to the role of PsyCap in grief. It extended the social understanding of grief by looking at what can be learned about

PsyCap. Perhaps this autoethnography helped you to see the culture of grief differently or to understand your culture of grief differently. Maybe it helped you discover PsyCap and its potential role in your life?

Autoethnographies break the silence about facets of cultural and social experiences by giving those experiences a voice that can extend beyond the page and affect both insiders and outsiders (Holman Jones, et al., 2016; Ellis et al., 2011; Tullis, 2016). My research looked at the culture of grief and used my social experience of grief. It broke the silence around grief and showed how PsyCap, a reservoir of resources, can be engaged even in the midst of difficult and unsettled moments of grief (Luthans and Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Perhaps this autoethnography inspired you to have a conversation about grief, PsyCap, or both? Perhaps it led you to rethink how you use social media? Perhaps you saw the possibility of using social media as a relational tool, to share your grief experiences and/or the role of PsyCap in your life.

Autoethnographies compel all those who experience the work to “make room for difference, complexity, and change” (Holman Jones, et al., 2016, p. 25). Stories are a kind of flight simulator (Gottschall, 2013). The stories of an autoethnography have the power to train us for the challenges in life, including grief. Perhaps you were inspired to engage in a critical reflection of your grief experiences because of reading about my experience of grief and PsyCap (Bochner & Ellis, 1996)? Maybe you are a grief counselor, and you were inspired to look at PsyCap as a tool for your clients? Maybe you are a Human Resource trainer, and after reading this autoethnography, you want to see how PsyCap can be used to strengthen your Positive Organizational Behavior?

Maybe you see that grief is a part of your employees lives inside and outside the workplace and you are inspired to create a PsyCap training that focuses on using PsyCap during grief?

In being reflexive and transparent, I have created a flight simulator based on my grief experiences. Perhaps this autoethnography helped you to make room for difference, change and complexity as you played and replayed the simulations of your grief experiences over in your mind? Perhaps it inspired you to rethink your own grief experiences? Maybe you discovered your PsyCap was more engaged than you realized? Or if you've not yet experienced grief, maybe this autoethnography will prepare you for the grief, big and small, yet to come? Perhaps you were inspired to learn more about PsyCap and to see how it is and can be a part of your life?

My learnings incited action and served as a catalyst for change in me. The following is an excerpt from the I Poem. The entire I Poem is in Appendix A.

I believe . . .

that Robert was a multifaceted human whose uniqueness will be missed
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one
grief is hard work and more overwhelming than I imagined

I don't want to continue participating in life without Robert, but I will believe . . .

that we are a conglomeration of how our experiences, relationships, and DNA have
molded and shaped us

I'm unsure of who am I now, without Robert

I was unsettled, sad, anxious, and lonely

I felt love

I was at peace

finding ways to remember a loved one is part of the grieving process

Robert was a gifted musician whose music had the ability to stir the core of a person

I believe . . .

every day I miss him

I believe . . .

I am a lifelong learner

that keeping mementos and items from a loved one who has died is part of the healing process

“widow brain” is a real thing

talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is a sign of the continuing bond of love

regret is not helpful

I believe . . .

continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving

that grief is not one-size fits all

I am strong, vulnerable, deep, contemplative, observant and willing to take care of myself

waiting to let our soul catch up is an essential part of healing and of growing
grief has a way of taking the absurd and suggesting it might be reality

I believe . . .

Robert loved me, strengths, weaknesses, and all

that your soul can be exhausted

our brains sometimes feed us fake news

given the same set of circumstances and knowings, I would make the same choices

I’m learning to embrace the me I’m becoming

I believe . . .

it is possible for us to feel we’ve tried over and over again and never blossomed,
even if those around us are amazed at the bloom we’ve become

that falling in love can cause a seismic shift in your universe

the passage of time is a great healer

I believe . . .

you can be haunted by smells, songs, sights, physical sensations, and even possible actions of dead loved ones

there is joy and delight amidst grief

that Robert’s death was somehow a failure on my part

truth is relative

I did the best I could knowing I had to make decisions I could live with

I believe . . .

that anger is not the opposite of love . . . both can exist simultaneously

I knew Robert better and more completely than anyone else in our lives. Robert

knew me more completely than anyone else in our lives. It was a unique bond and perspective of one another that only we shared. It can never be replicated

grief can be all consuming

brilliant and stubborn are not oxymorons

I believe . . .

who I missed was Robert when he was his best self, curious, conversational, and loving

I don’t miss the unhealthy choices and the constant worry they caused

I believe . . .

that our grieving experiences change over time

grief is exhausting

our identities and understanding of who we are can change in grief

our life choices have long term ramifications

I believe . . .

I still have something to offer

letting go is part of the process of healing after the death of a loved one

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

Robert's love was formative

I believe . . .

I have a stronger sense of my own PsyCap and the role it plays in my life. Depth and breadth have been added to my PsyCap reservoir of resources. I see my PsyCap and its reservoir of resources as especially resilient and tough, packed with a positive attitude of optimism and hopeful longing, and a confident efficacy that believes in my own capabilities. I didn't know, until this autoethnographic research, that I personally have a deep and replenishable reservoir of PsyCap resources. I'm more excited about the possible use of PsyCap to help individuals navigate the ups and downs of life. I'm not sure quite yet what that excitement means in terms of next steps. I'm playing with the idea of a children's book or an article. Understanding my PsyCap in the midst of grief is a blessing that will continue to bear fruit for years to come.

Summary of the Results Analysis

In chapter 1, I discussed my theoretical framework and conceptual framework for this research. The theoretical framework included the ideas that there were theories of grief and that PsyCap was a construct composed of component resource parts. My conceptual framework included the ideas that PsyCap is a state-like construct and therefore malleable, that grief can be experienced in stages, and that stories are the primary way we learn and make meaning. These formed the foundation for my research questions about what the stories we tell during grief and our experience of the stages of grief can tell us about our PsyCap and its malleability. With this framework in

mind, I believe I have provided some evidence for answers to these questions. There is always room for more research and more evidence.

Limitations

“Concluding comments interpret the meaning of the findings in terms of past studies and personal experience, interpret the limitations in the qualitative procedures, and suggest implications for audiences that clearly follow from the findings” (Plano Clark and Creswell, 2015, p. 72). This autoethnographic research looked at one person’s experience of grief and what could be learned about PsyCap from the grief stories and stages of grief. It also looked at the malleability of PsyCap from a first-person perspective. Were there possibly other characteristics or environmental impacts that could be considered when looking at PsyCap and grief? Of course. Family, finances, culture, work, age, or any number of things could be considered limitations to this research. In addition, the PCQ and journaling are both forms of self-assessment and that might be considered a limitation although, I should add, they are appropriate data sources for an autoethnography. I ask that instead of seeing the limitations, you put on your PsyCap lenses for a moment and look at how this research tells the story of hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism during grief. Perhaps you will find yourself in the story?

Implications of the Study

This research has implications for human resource development, specifically stress management and mental health support during times of grief. It shows how

PsyCap might be used as a tool, both in the workplace and for individuals outside the workplace, to shape how we can thrive in the midst of stressful life circumstances.

Unique Insights from This Study

The majority of PsyCap studies are quantitative or mixed methods. Many involve a pre-test/post-test pattern with some sort of intervention. From a PsyCap perspective, the uniqueness of this study is not solely the research into the relationship between PsyCap and grief, but that it is a longitudinal and qualitative nature of the study as well.

This research also provided some insights never before published. I provided a comparison of stages/tasks/phases of grief from multiple sources (Table 3). I shared a unique definition of story in chapter 1 (Table 1) and a unique definition of the culture of grief in chapter 2. In addition, I presented several distinctive ways of thinking about the synergistic interaction of the component resources of PsyCap (chapters 4 and 5).

Recommendations for Further Research

I have been gathering future research questions since I started this research. Robert and I both believed that a good question leads to another, and that is no less true of research questions. What follows is the beginning of a list of possible future research questions.

- How do the stories we tell ourselves impact our PsyCap?
- How do our experiences of grief in the workplace influence our PsyCap?
- Why is it that some people are stopped in their tracks by grief and others manage to continue thriving? Could it be related to their PsyCap?
- Since PsyCap is state-like, the formation of a person's hope, efficacy, resiliency, and optimism is likely a bit of nature and a bit of nurture. How can that be measured? And would having a measurement be helpful foundational

knowledge in developing PsyCap resources for individuals to use during specific stressful times of life, like when they are grieving?

- This study looked at grief experiences and PsyCap. Perhaps PsyCap could be strengthened in a way to help those experiencing grief tell stories that bring healing as well as help those grieving use positive psychology to navigate the difficult journey?
- Is it possible that if we don't like the story we've created, we can create one we can live with more easily? Some would say it is possible and that we do it all the time (Eagleman, 2015). If that is the case, can we reassemble the facts, in a sense re-tell the story, in a way that strengthens and develops our PsyCap? For instance, is it possible that we've misremembered things about ourselves and our life experiences, and in re-membering them we might find out new things about ourselves that we missed the first time around?
- Do people with strong storytelling mindsets also have strong PsyCap? If so, why?
- Does the ability to make meaning through story affect/strengthen PsyCap? If so, how?
- If grief is a process of change (Blevins, 2008) and PsyCap can play a part in the grieving process, can PsyCap play a part in other change? For instance, what role does PsyCap play in organizational change?
- Does finding meaning aid in the transition between stages as opposed to being its own unique stage of grief?
- In taking a broad perspective, is PsyCap reflected in all of life's experiences? Is it changed by those experiences? Is PsyCap an influencing factor for those experiences?
- Could simply practicing PsyCap within everyday life experiences be a way to develop PsyCap? For instance, Da, He and Zhang used "a daily online self-learning approach" (2020, p. 2) and found the intervention "significantly enhanced PsyCap" (2020, p. 14). This "online-based, self-learning intervention approach enjoys the benefits of speed, convenience, cost, and effectiveness" (Da, He, and Zhang, 2020, p. 4). Could an online intervention be developed to playfully practice PsyCap strengthening it for life's everyday ups and downs?
- Avey (2014) suggests there may be various types of PsyCap, such as a work PsyCap, a family PsyCap. Is there a grief PsyCap – or at least a way of looking at PsyCap that focuses on using PsyCap to navigate grief?
- Could a specific intervention be created to help develop and strengthen PsyCap in the midst of grief . . . a sort of PsyCap for griever?
- Could tools and techniques be created to help increase and stabilize PsyCap at any given moment of life?








This research has been the story of one person. What would it look like to research how PsyCap is reflected in the grief stories of a specific group, workplace, or culture? What about looking at how a specific group, workplace, or culture's PsyCap changes during grief? Or looking at the ways PsyCap might impact the experience of the stages of grief for a group, workplace, or culture.

The research possibilities are abundant. "The autoethnographic resistance to finality and closure reflects a conception of the self (and society) as relational and processual, mutably written in a moment that opens onto a panoramic, albeit not unlimited, future of possibilities." (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, pp 78-79).

Evaluating and Autoethnography

How do we now perform the critical task of evaluating this research? Throughout this dissertation, I have reflected on the various ways to evaluate autoethnographic research. Did it make a contribution? Did the data, my story, and your experience as a reader triangulate? Did my story resonate with your story? Was it compelling? Did it seem to be accurate, grounded, and credible? Did my reflexivity show my work both as a researcher and the one researched? Did it elicit a response? Table 21 is a summary of those evaluation tools discussed throughout the dissertation.

Table 21*Evaluating an Autoethnography*

	Contribution: Does this research make a substantive contribution by researching sociological understandings?
	Triangulation: Did the data, my story, and your experience as a reader intermingle? Does it flesh out and embody a sense of lived experience?
	Resonation: Did this research and my stories resonate with you as a reader? Does it affect you emotionally and/or intellectually?
	Story: Does it tell a compelling story? Did it hold out hope?
	Accuracy of Life Reflection: Did it seem to be an accurate reflection of life? Is it a deeply grounded, credible account of a cultural, social, or individual reality?
	Reflexivity: Has the author's reflexivity shown both self-awareness and self-exposure? Is there a clear sense of both the researched as producer and product of the text? Does it show more than it tells?
	Response: Do the creative, analytical practices open up the text and invite interpretive responses?

Note. Designed using evaluation information primarily from Richardson 2000, 2008; Ellis et al. 2011; Yin, 2016; Holman Jones et al., 2016; and Gingrich-Philbrook, 2016.

Gingrich-Philbrook (2016) suggests that autoethnographic research, when at its best, encourages the reader to open themselves to being changed by it. Only you, as the reader, will be able to evaluate the trustworthiness and rigor of this autoethnographic research fully.

Conclusion

There is no determinate, or definitive autoethnographic representation of any event, experience, or phenomenon – despite the “auto” implication that this might be a single person’s account of a lived experience. Rather, there is a project, an ongoing investigation, always subject to revision and retelling from another angle, via a different lens, within another set of relations, along a different line of sight with the concomitant impossibility of an ending or a resolution (or of a “finished performance”). (Holman Jones, Adams, & Ellis, 2016, p. 231)

Autoethnography is never really finished. There are always other stories to add, other insights to include, and other research to incorporate. After a five-year process of envisioning, researching, and writing this dissertation, I have, though, come to a comfortable stopping space, at least for now.

As a qualitative researcher, I have provided a lived experience, over the course of several years, as a description of a cultural phenomenon, grief. Through research, writing, and remembering, I have been able to begin to make meaning of my own grief journey by looking at my psychological capital. I have been both the researcher and the one being researched. My dissertation has been descriptive but not necessarily prescriptive. The results contribute to knowledge about grief and PsyCap.

Could I have been both the researcher and the one researched earlier in my grief journey? Perhaps. Could I wait and finish it in a few years. No. Besides the health issues, emotional fragility, and crazy dreams, during this dissertation journey, I've realized that the more I move toward the end of my research, analysis, and findings, the more I am letting go of some of the memories I've been holding on to so very tightly. I've been holding them close to my heart, keeping them fresh, just in case the information was needed for this research. As I let them go, I'm finding that, in some ways, I'm letting Robert go as well.

We all grieve. If we're lucky and have loved much and loved deeply, we will grieve much and grieve deeply. Most of us will experience the resources of hope, efficacy, resiliency, or optimism. Some of us will be blessed to experience the full composite construct of PsyCap. This autoethnographic research has described my

journey in grief through the lens of PsyCap. Through the writing and research, I have begun to find meaning, including healing and a renewed sense of who I am and can be in the world. I hope in the reading you have begun to find meaning as well. To the journeys ahead . . .

A Journal entry from December 14, 2017:

Said by the family at Robert's graveside ceremony

Into the freedom of wind and sunshine

We let you go

Into the dance of the stars and the planets

We let you go

Into the wind's breath and the hands of the star maker

We let you go

We love you, we miss you, we want you to be happy

Go safely, go dancing, go running home

(Burgess, 2013, p. 136)

APPENDIX A

“I believe”: An ‘I Poem’ from My Holistic, Emotional and Values Coding

I believe . . .

I was uncommonly firm

God was right there

Robert was a multifaceted human whose uniqueness would be missed

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

it is important for the surviving friends and family to celebrate the life of someone they loved and cared about after they die

you should never “should” on yourself

I am a strong woman

having a family that allows you to be your best self is important for healthy growth

Robert’s love was formative

I don’t want to continue participating in life without Robert, but I will

I still have something to offer

letting go is part of the process of healing after the death of a loved one is important for the surviving friends and family to celebrate the life of someone they loved and cared about after they die

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

God has the power to intervene in life’s circumstances

I am worthy of being loved

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

grief is hard work and more overwhelming than I imagined

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

prayer is a helpful tool

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is hard work

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

liminal is a constructive concept

harmony is a constructive concept

Resolution and harmony are important for healthy living

you should never “should” on yourself

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

that grief is exhausting

choosing joy is important for healthy living

liminal is a constructive concept

harmony is a constructive concept

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

healthy relationships push you to see beyond your perspectives

Robert’s love was formative

I believe . . .

I am a strong woman and a deep thinker

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

every day I miss him

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

I am a lifelong learner

keeping mementos and items from a loved one who has died is part of the healing process

a kiss can be the beginning of a wonderful relationship

owning a house is hard work

visiting places that are part of foundational memories is important

I am a better, smarter, stronger woman because of Robert's love

"widow brain" is a real thing

I miss him

I am a lifelong learner

talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

regret is not helpful

continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving

thanking inanimate objects and places can be an important aspect of saying goodbye

asking questions is an important part of being a lifelong learner

I miss him

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

life continues with and without us

talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love

grief is not one-size-fits-all

the person I am becoming because of the person I loved is an unexpected gift

I am strong, vulnerable, deep, contemplative, observant, and willing to take care of myself

the person I am becoming is a gift from Robert's love

it is a blessing when others remember a loved one

"that" sometimes happens

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

grieving is hard work

talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love

waiting to let our soul catch up is an essential part of healing and of growing

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

the ability to contemplate nothing and everything with no pressure to move along or get to the next task is a precious gift

you should never "should" on yourself

I am a strong woman

I am smart, curious, constantly growing and learning

grief has a way of taking the absurd and suggesting it might be reality

I believe . . .

Robert loved me, strengths, weaknesses and all
 it was important to listen carefully to his deepest wants and desires and to love him
 without condition
 our brains sometimes feed us fake news
 given the same set of circumstances and knowings, I would make the same choices with
 relation to Robert
 wishing for the old me and who I used to be
 learning to embrace the me I'm becoming
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
grieving is hard work
grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one
 too many mistakes, faux pas' or misunderstandings can make for an unhealthy work
 environment
 people have some intriguing thoughts about what people who are grieving need and
 don't need
 your soul can be exhausted
 your beliefs about God can change
talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love
 the world is lucky about how to put together I am
grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one
grieving is hard work
 Robert brought a unique perspective to life
 living on the edge of crying is a yucky feeling
 the body and soul know stuff even when the mind hasn't a clue
 it is possible for us to feel we've tried over and over again and never blossomed, even if
 those around us are amazed at the bloom we've become
 asking questions is an important part of being a lifelong learner
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
grieving is hard work
grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one
 falling in love can cause a seismic shift in your universe
 Robert and I would still be married
asking questions is an important part of being a lifelong learner
 after death, somehow, people are able to see and participate in the web of connected
 relationships in history
 Robert had a unique take on things
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
grieving is hard work
grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one
 our DNA can age exponentially when we experience significant stress and/or trauma
 it might be possible for DNA to grieve
 the passage of time is a great healer
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
 continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love
 you can be haunted by smells, songs, sights, physical sensations, and even possible
 actions of dead loved ones

I believe . . .

there is joy and delight amidst grief
 you often learn more about yourself when you are people watching than about the
 people you are watching
 pictures of loved ones can bring insight and healing
 time is a great healer
 life continues during grief
it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do
grieving is hard work
grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one
continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving
 connecting different times of our lives is sometimes fascinating
 God is not fazed by our anger and our changing theological perspectives
 being tired, uninspired, and exhausted might be tied to a lack of vision and feeling like
 I'm making a difference
 Robert's death was somehow a failure on my part
 working hard can lead to success
 doing my best is important
 healing can bring a renewed sense of future and purpose
 continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving
 after death, somehow, people are able to participate in the life experiences of the living
 my high PsyCap helped me to see the positive aspects of the situations I was
 experiencing and focusing my energy there instead of dwelling on the negative
 it is important to be as clear as possible about the biases and power you bring to the
 research table
 it's ok if your theological understandings and religious needs change
 God is not fazed by our changing theological perspectives
 music and education/teaching are important passions in my life
 the grief characteristic, avoidance, has been most pronounced since Robert's death
 keeping mementos and items from a loved one who has died is part of the healing
 process
 the writing of my dissertation might help me make sense of my grief and might help
 others do the same
 perhaps I am a resilient griever
 widowhood is NOT a temporary transition, and it is not a permanent condition in the
 sense that I will never be anything but a widow. No matter what I do, I will always also
 be a widow, just like I will always be able to say I've been married
 I am a widow
 Robert was going to die before I died
 I failed Robert by not being there in the moments he took his last breath
 that once a person dies, their spirit no longer inhabits their body
 being another person's version of us can help us find our way back to ourselves if we are
 lost, but it can also be a gag on possible growth, learning, and change
 truth is relative
 sometimes telling the truth can be detrimental
 Robert's participation in the things he loved to do and that fed his soul was worth my
 silence
 I did the best I could, knowing I had to make decisions I could live with

I believe . . .

sometimes the toughest love is watching the person you love destroy themselves
because that is the choice they have made, and nothing you can do will change that
it's ok to be angry

anger is not the opposite of love . . . both can exist simultaneously

I wanted to spend more years living with Robert

all animals, human and otherwise, are worthy of a long and healthy life

medicines can help us be our best selves

I knew Robert better and more completely than anyone else in our lives. Robert knew

me more completely than anyone else in our lives. It was a unique bond and

perspective of one another that only we shared. It can never be replicated

it's ok to feel relief after the death of a loved one

it's not ok for me to feel relief after the death of Robert

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

you can be haunted by smells, songs, sights, physical sensations, and even possible actions of dead loved ones

grief can be all-consuming

when a loved one dies, we don't just lose the loved one, we lose all the things we did
with the loved one and/or were connected to the loved one living in this world

I wanted to spend more years living with Robert

during grief, we can feel disconnected even when we are with people we care about

naming your realities after the death of a loved one is difficult

a compassionate and empathetic community is vital for healthy grieving

discovered secrets can be hurtful

everyone has secrets

secrets can be intentionally told, intentionally kept quiet, unintentionally told and

unintentionally kept quiet. In reality, no one can reveal everything about themselves,

even if they wanted to

I did the best I could, knowing I had to make decisions I could live with

*sometimes the toughest love is watching the person you love destroy themselves because that is the choice
they have made, and nothing you can do will change that*

knowing control is an illusion does not stop me from trying to exert some semblance of
control

trying to exert control, by making choices you can live with, can help you feel like things
are not as chaotic as they seem

brilliant and stubborn are not oxymorons

who I missed was Robert when he was his best self, curious, conversational, and loving.

I didn't miss the unhealthy choices and the constant worry they caused

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

I am a strong woman

what we think happens after a person dies affects our grief experience

we become energy after we die

talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love

what we think happens after a person dies affects our grief experience

we become energy after we die

Robert's energy is in my nephew's musicianship and in my cat

continuing to celebrate life is an important part of grieving

you can be 'haunted' by smells, songs, sights, physical sensations, and even possible actions of loved ones

I believe . . .

our grieving experiences change over time

doing that which is hard, but the right thing to do, is important, but sometimes not possible

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

It is not always a negative self-centered act to put your needs ahead of the needs of others

if you are not using it and it is usable, give it away. Others might find it useful.

it's important to keep things that belonged to your loved one that have meaning

it is important to give yourself the time and space you need to in order to sort through your deceased loved one's things

I did the best I could, knowing I had to make decisions I could live with

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

sometimes the toughest love is watching the person you love destroy themselves because that is the choice they have made, and nothing you can do will change that

suicidal thoughts are not uncommon for those grieving the death of a loved one.

the passage of time is a great healer

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

regret is not helpful

I did the best I could, knowing I had to make decisions I could live with

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

unresolved grief can be compounded to the point of disfunction and death if not resolved

when we are in relationship with one another we have the capacity to imprint on one another

the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator was a fairly accurate assessment of both Robert's and my personalities

it's important to keep things that belonged to your loved one that have meaning

It is important to give yourself the time and space you need to in order to sort through your deceased loved one's things

our identities and understanding of who we are can change in grief

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

regret is not helpful

sometimes following your heart is more important than following the advice of authority figures and sometimes following the advice of authority figure is more important than following your heart

Robert, primarily due to his upbringing, the death of his mother and grandfather, and two divorces, was a low-hope thinker

being a low-hope thinker, paired with being an introvert, almost made decisions impossible for Robert

some women marry men in the armed forces to get to the United States. (It might also be true of men marrying women in the armed forces.)

the death of a parent can "undermine hopeful thought" in children (Snyder, 2002, p. 263)

our life choices have long term ramifications

I believe . . .

Robert lost hope

the final straw for Robert seemed to be losing the job he loved at the church we both worked for. He could never find the energy or will to remake himself and bounce back Robert was never given or able to internalize tools that would help him process and move on from the multiple tragedies of his life

Robert never acknowledged his illness nor the things that might be causing it truth is relative

we are a conglomeration of all our experiences, relationships, and DNA. They each have a role in molding and shaping us

it's ok to be angry

some people are both unable to accept the reality of their situation and unable to accept help

you can be 'haunted' by smells, songs, sights, physical sensations, and even possible actions of loved ones

there is joy and delight amidst grief

I did the best I could, knowing I had to make decisions I could live with

I'm unsure of who am I now, without Robert?

remorse (that I was unable to make things better for Robert)

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

grieving is hard work and more overwhelming than I imagined

sometimes the best you can do is to keep putting one foot in front of the other

there is joy and delight amidst grief

talking to a deceased loved one is not a sign of insanity but is instead a sign of the continuing bond of love

if Robert acknowledged the ways his behavior was contributing to his health, he might have made changes, but he did not want to change, with every fiber of his body, he did not want to change

writing Robert's obit was cathartic to me. Also, his death allowed me to grieve openly – everywhere and with everyone. It was a sort of release

I experienced anticipatory grief, which is grief that begins prior to the loss of the loved one. My anticipatory grief was silent because he wouldn't acknowledge the severity of his health issues. His death allowed me to grieve openly

I saw a change in the photos of Robert and me while I put the slide show together for his funeral

Robert's perception of life as a threat exceeded his coping abilities

Robert did not have the mental or emotional tools to activate his metacognitive activity extreme empaths need tools to help them not be overwhelmed by the empathetic stimulus that surrounds them daily

high PsyCap has a "lasting impact on well-being" (Youssef-Morgan and Luthans, 2015, p. 185-186)

shared life experiences mean having more memories together and feeling more deeply connected to one another

my PsyCap is high

Robert had no idea how severe the injury was

I was unsettled

I was sad

I believe . . .

I was lonely

finding ways to remember a loved one is part of the grieving process

photographs tell a story

I was exasperated

compassionate because I knew his just being there was a big deal

people deal with changes to plans differently, and the way they deal with change can morph over the course of their lives

although Robert was a “P” in the Myers-Briggs, which allowed him to go with the flow,

but his introverted self was totally done being with people

photographs tell a story

I felt love

taking moments to contemplate the nature around you can be a way to settle and ground yourself

I felt love

I felt longing

I was intrigued and at peace

doing something you love and/or are deeply interested in, can help you find balance and peace

photographs tell a story

I was at peace (I was always astounded at how at peace Robert seemed when he was asleep)

I was anxious (I often checked to make sure he was still breathing)

everyone deserves a cozy space they can call their own

Robert was a gifted musician whose music had the ability to stir the core of a person

finding ways to remember a loved one is part of the grieving process

Robert had no idea how dire his situation was, and neither did I

it's ok to take pictures of loved ones after they have died

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

I felt empty (even though I was surrounded by people who loved me and loved Robert.

Some of whom I hadn't seen in years)

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

photographs tell a story

you could see Robert's health change by looking at photos

it is important to do the right thing even if it is hard to do

grieving is hard work

grieving is an essential part of learning to live with the loss of a loved one

I believe . . .

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