Person-Centered Therapy with a Bereaved Father

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Abstract
This article aims to explore the changing process of a bereaved father who lost his daughter out of the 1999 Taiwan Earthquake. Initially, this father, whom I will call John, greeted me formally and politely, though with implicit distrust. However, in a period of 16 months in which I continually paid visits to the family, some long conversations also took place, and John gradually was willing to trust me. Beyond a recorded in-depth interview with John, I sensed his intense emotions over the loss, and thus invited him for therapy. John finally agreed, and there were seven therapy sessions.

I worked as a person-centered therapist. In counseling, John chose the topic, issue, and speed, and I followed. I kept field notes for the encounter within 24 hours after each session. The descriptions in this paper came out of the field notes. Two themes — a deeper understanding of John and three major changes in John — emerged from the notes. The three changes were autonomy, flexible views, and fear of retirement. They seem unrelated to each other; however, they are all induced from his grief experience. The application of the person-centered therapy appeared to open a new possibility for the field of grief therapy.

Introduction
On September 21, 1999, Taiwan was hit by an earthquake rated 7.3 on the Richter scale that led to casualties and destruction, especially in the mountainous areas of central Taiwan. A nationwide death toll of 2,444 (The 921 Earthquake Post-Disaster Recover Commission, 2000) indicates that thousands of families lost their loved ones without warning. The loss of beloved family members refers to an antecedent

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of a grieving process.

It appears to be the first time ever for the Taiwanese society to awake itself from ignorance of mental health after a disaster (Lee, 2001). Substantial numbers of bereavement studies have been conducted in Taiwan since 2001. Most of them are master's theses and, among them, there are six studies on either child or adolescent bereavement for the 1999 Taiwan Earthquake. In terms of grief experiences, grief reactions are mostly reported from in-depth interview texts. For example, Chang (2002), Li (2001), Lin (1998), Wu (2001), and Yeh-Ho (2003) report the aspects of grief reactions within Worden's (2002) categories (i.e., feelings, physical sensations, cognitions, and behaviors). Some describe various grief reactions from the concept of temporal stages (Li, 2001; Yeh-Ho, 2003). Some explore coping responses after loss (Wu, 2001; Yeh-Ho, 2003), recovering processes (Lin, 1998; Yeh-Ho, 2003), and the meaning of life (Yeh-Ho, 2003), while others report effective interventions to help the bereaved of different ages (Jou, 1997; Tsai, 2001).

Parental bereavement appears to have been barely noticed in Taiwan's academic circles. With respect to parental bereavement, there are apparently only four empirical or qualitative studies in Taiwan. Luo, Chen, and Chen (1981) and Li and Chen (1992) studied parents and mothers, respectively, whose children died of terminal illnesses. Lin (1998) and Yeh-Ho (2003) include child loss from either expected death or sudden death. In the international literature, a broader scope of interests and perspectives, with various sources and developmental stages of bereaved populations, and with broader methodology paradigms implicated, has built up the body of the bereavement literature. The loss of a child could be found in adult bereavement to be the most difficult and unbearable encounter (Parkes, 1986; Yeh-Ho, 2003). Especially in the case of sudden death, the bereaved might receive more self-reprimand or be blamed (Thompson & Range, 1992). Unfortunately, fathers, alone, as human respondents, are rarely seen in Taiwanese or international academia. In the Taiwanese society, mothers are usually the primary caretakers of the family, while fathers are the financial providers. This description suits the profile of the bereaved family I am presenting. However, it is only the father whom I had the opportunity to enter therapy with. Therefore, this study aims
exclusively at one father who lost a child in the 1999 Taiwan Earthquake to explore his grief experience and possibly resolve his grief.

**Related Literature Review**

**Child’s Sudden Death and Father’s Grief**

Children have multiple meanings for their parents: genetically, psychologically, and socially (Rubin, 1993). The death of a child manifests the disruption of a parent’s attachment to and hopes, expectations, and dreams for his or her child (Rando, 1986a). Under the natural law that “the youth outlasts the old,” probably child death, in any form, is always unnatural, untimely, and unexpected to parents. Sudden death, occurring without anticipatory causes and within a short period of time, is especially out of their paradigm. The 1999 Taiwan Earthquake was a natural disaster lasting approximately 40 seconds, and following it was a large scale of sudden death.

In the only two identified empirical studies on parental bereavement including sudden death of a child in Taiwan, Lin (1998) and Yeh-Ho (2003) interviewed 13 parents and six parents, respectively, who each lost children to terminal diseases or car accidents with several years elapsed since the loss. Besides the multiple and categorical grief reactions described, both Lin and Yeh-Ho consistently found differences of grief response between genders. That is, fathers were less likely to express their grief, especially through emotions or feelings. Beyond this, thought-changing was found to be the most consistent and transparent cognitive process throughout the grieving course (Lin, 1998). According to Lin, thought-changing refers to the comprehension that it takes time to resolve one’s grief and that it is the bereaved who has to take responsibility for the resolution. A comprehension of living right here in this moment is also evidence for thought-changing.

What is commonly believed (i.e., parental bereavement usually causes complicated grief) was not found in these two studies. Actually, Lin and Yeh-Ho found that parents grieve in a process of reactions that are recurrent and ever-changing, and that then gradually taper off. Parkes (1997, p. 215) uses “the pangs of grief,” Rosenblatt (1993, p. 107) uses “in surge” and Stroebe and Schut (1999) use “oscillation” to

describe the vicissitude of the grieving process. In fact, several factors make impacts on people’s grief (Lin, 1998; Parkes, 1986; Rando, 1986b; Sanders, 1993; Worden, 2002); one single factor, such as the deceased’s age or the relationship of the bereaved and the deceased, cannot adequately explain the grief. Therefore, even if we might think parental bereavement to be the most unbearable form of adult bereavement, we ought to be more conservative in proclaiming complicated grief to be inevitably arising out of parental bereavement.

Turning to the international literature of parental bereavement, only one study was found on paternal bereavement over the death of a child with developmental disabilities (Wood & Milo, 2001). The authors found, from the result of the Grief Experience Inventory (GEI), that a father’s grief demonstrated no difference from grief experiences of the mother and the GEI norm population. However, fathers, in interview data, described a “double loss.” That is, their children died young after the children were born developmentally disabled. The coping strategies that fathers utilized were to keep themselves busy and to take action with tasks. But when they were alone, senses of isolation and aloneness became full-blown.

The Willingness of the Bereaved to Partake in Therapy

The bereaved are usually unwilling to seek help (Talbot, 1997; Thompson & Range, 1992), especially for those who grieve over unanticipated death (Thompson & Range, 1992), those who prohibit grief due to religious beliefs (Wang, 2006) or those who do not want to pass sadness onto others (Lin, 1998; Wang, 2003). From another perspective, Thompson and Range (1992) found that the bereaved grieving over natural unanticipated death, accidental death, or suicidal death report the recollection of higher rates of unhelpful support responses. There existed both inner difficulties and external obstacles of the bereaved to release their grief. However, Raphael, Middleton, Martinek, and Misso (1993) suggest that, although torn between grief experience and a wish to avoid grief or deny the death, “the need to share feelings with a caring person usually predominates” (p. 431). Therefore, a caring person could invite the bereaved to actualize the need to grieve, which may be accomplished in therapy.
The father in this article, "John," turned out to be accepting therapy 16 months after I first visited his family. The period of 16 months presents evidence of Raphael et al.'s (1993) position, described above, in many aspects: John had been struggling between his grief experiences and distrusting me. However, as the passage of time grew and he became more trusting of me, his need to grieve eventually predominated.

**Grief Therapy and Person-Centered Therapy**

Sigmund Freud's (1917) "Mourning and Melancholia" is near the very origin of the field of grief counseling. Freud initiated the concept of "grief work" by asserting a process of detaching the libido from the love-object. This concept has dominated the empirical and especially clinical direction of the field for decades (e.g., Lindemann, 1944; Bowlby, 1980; Parkes, 1986; Worden, 2002). According to Stroebe (1992), grief work refers to "a cognitive process involving confrontation with and restructuring of thoughts about the deceased, the loss experience, and the changed world within which the bereaved must now live" (p. 33). Grief therapy goes along with this concept and insists that the bereaved need to experience and gradually resolve their grief.

The assumption of grief work underlies the major part of the current grief-counseling field. Raphael et al. (1993) thoroughly reviewed studies that utilized either dynamic psychotherapy or behavioral therapy, and there were various findings for these studies. Many skills and interventions were also reported (see pp. 438-445). No person-centered approach to grief counseling or therapy was reported. However, based on my clinical experiences of working with the bereaved, I argue that the loss of a loved one is one of the most profound, essential, and eternal human experiences. It touches the utmost of one's inner world. The grief experience seems, to me, to be able to be uncovered and encountered through Rogers' (1975/1980, p. 142) empathy with the inner world of the bereaved when the therapist is genuine.

The person-centered therapist is then to meet the bereaved with empathy from the utmost genuine spot, often referred to as

“presence”:
I find that when I am closest to my inner, intuitive self, when I am somehow in touch with the unknown in me, when perhaps I am in a slightly altered state of consciousness, then whatever I do seems to be full of healing. Then, simply my presence is releasing and helpful to the other. (Rogers, 1978, 1979/1980, p. 129)

PCA believes that each organism has an inherent actualizing tendency that directs one to maintain, enhance, and reproduce oneself as the fundamental motivation (Rogers, 1959, 1963). It is operative all the time under any circumstances; however, it can be thwarted as well (Rogers, 1977; 1978, 1979/1980). In a study of parental bereavement, the recovery tendency found in the bereaved (Lin, 1998) appears to be a similar concept to the actualizing tendency. For the growth climate to be promoted, in which the actualizing tendency could uncover, the therapist expresses himself or herself to be genuine, demonstrates unconditional positive regard, and communicates empathy to the client. Nothing else needs to be achieved to perform therapeutic change (Rogers, 1959).

Raskin and Rogers (2005) indicate that the PCA can be applied in every possible context. Although there is not much discussion in the field of grief counseling or therapy of the application of the person-centered principles, some clinical reports were made in the field of PCA (e.g., Rogers & Bickham, 1995). The application of the person-centered principles to the grief issue appears to be an interrelated field worth exploring.

In sum, the purposes of this study were twofold. First, from the clinical perspective, the purpose was to therapeutically help a bereaved father, who suddenly lost his child, in a certain period of the grieving process. Second, from the empirical perspective, the PCA was practiced to expand and enhance the understanding of paternal bereavement for the bereavement field and of bereavement as an application for the PCA.

**Antecedents of Therapy**

**Client**

This father, John, in his late 40s, was a high-school teacher with a college degree in Taiwan. The 1999 Taiwan Earthquake caused the death of his younger daughter. During the process of therapy, John...
and his wife lived together in a new house, instead of rebuilding the collapsed one, in the same town. His older daughter studied away from the town.

As is customary in the Chinese culture, John, as the eldest son, carried a great deal of responsibility, expectation, and love for the entire family. John had been enjoying the love and tried hard to fulfill the responsibility and expectation.

**Therapist**

I worked with John as a person-centered therapist. I have no difficulty believing the actualizing tendency that PCA proposes, as well as the six necessary and sufficient conditions that Rogers (1957, 1959) posited as necessary for personality change. I believe that person-centered principles can be applied in various contexts. In fact, I professionally and personally use these principles in counseling, teaching, and living my life. My attitude has been extended and further affirmed through a long process of exploration. Beyond being trained as a counselor, I am currently a licensed professional counselor in Taiwan. I continuously explore myself in the field of the PCA by attending conferences in the United States, as well as publishing. Thus far, I am confident that I have long since left the self-doubt of whether what I practice is person-centered or not.

I initiated the invitation for therapy for reasons described in the “procedure” section as follows. Therapy sessions started out with John leading the way. This is one of the unique things that make the PCA stand out from other theories (Bohart, 1995). From my perspective, I think it is because I trust my client. I trust that the actualizing tendency in John remains active although he has encountered a profound loss. The client knows best where inside his heart he feels hurt and how much time he needs for resolution, although nothing might be clear at hand. As long as I provide a growth climate in which he is free to explore himself, the actualizing tendency in the client can be activated. The client can get closer to his inner world and deeply experience his grief.
Procedure

I started to knock on John’s door, initially, for the interview of his wife for the fulfillment of a research project in January 2002. The couple and I sometimes had dialogues after the interviews. The time when John was willing to accept my interview invitation was after 16 months, in June 2003. During the 16 months, almost all information we encountered was from interviews with his wife. Occasionally, we had long conversations in which their grief experiences were present. With my persistent intention to interview John, as well as John’s growing trust in me, I got the opportunity to interview him and to understand paternal bereavement after the sudden death of a child.

Right after the interview with him, I invited John for therapy. Reasons for my invitation were twofold. First, John looked like steam in a pot to me. It was evident from my experiencing John’s psychological distress in dozens of contacts, and especially in the interview that took six hours straight. The steam seemed ready to blow from his chest at any time. Secondly, from my own personal experience at the time, I had just deeply grieved the sudden death of one of my students, whom I taught on a one-to-one basis. Additionally, one day before my interview with John, I saw a piece of news on the sudden death of a professor. The impermanency of life in the secular world seemed repeatedly noticed. All these antecedent encounters led to me inviting John for therapy.

Showing his hesitation, John said, “Am I so ill?” This response indicated the understanding of Taiwanese about seeking psychological assistance. Also, John said, in the invitation, If we were long-time friends, then it would probably be better. ... However, in this case, it’s like you are the doctor and I am the patient. It seems to me that “being seen through” is something happening only on TV. (cited from field notes)

John hesitated and then gave his consent. It turned out that there were seven therapy sessions in two months. Each session started out at 10 o’clock in the morning at John’s home. The duration for each session ranged from two to four hours, with a totality of over 21 hours of therapy. We ended the therapy, with mutual understanding, mainly because I moved out of town for a new job. I continue to visit John
twice a year upon returning to the town. We have maintained a long-lasting relationship.

I did not look back the therapy process until 10 months later. At that point, it was the first time that I had not lived in the same town as the bereaved families. The geographical distance offered me a great opportunity to retrospectively look at myself and my experiences with the bereaved families. Beginning in late June 2004, I involved myself with the field notes. The field notes were scrutinized three times with one-month intervals between each review. Two themes of changes that emerged from the field notes are reported in the next section. The establishment of both internal and external reliability and external validity in ethnography holds by following LeCompte and Goetz’s (2001) position. The dialogue in therapy was intertwined with either Chinese or Taiwanese, and the field notes were written in either Chinese or English. In the following section where citations from the field note are necessary, all will be translated to English.

As far as the compilation of the field notes that represents each therapy session, “field notes for session I” through “field notes for session VII” are short names for the field notes recorded after the first through the seventh counseling sessions, respectively.

**Process of Therapy, Process of Changing**

By scrutinizing the field notes collected within 24 hours after each session, I summarized two major themes out of the field notes. One is a deeper understanding of John and the other is major changes found in him. For the latter theme, three major changes were found, and they are autonomy, flexible views, and fear of retirement. It may be safe to say that the success of the former theme produced the finding of the latter one. The second theme was directly or indirectly related with John’s grief.

A trust relationship was successfully established before therapy. According to John, my continual visits to this family and several spontaneous long conversations with John and his wife in the period of 16 months were important for him to trust me. In addition to his personal experience with me, John had read a volume I edited (Wang, 2002) and believed in the genuineness of my continuing endeavors on post-disaster psychological resolution. John, in the trust-informed
relationship, reported these to be the factors that led him to sharing his loss with me honestly.

In the following sections, I will be using the field notes as the basis of descriptive narratives.

**Theme I: A Deeper Understanding of This Bereaved Father**

If there could be only one characteristic to describe John, I would say, with no hesitation, that he is extremely fond of instructing. In a sense, it is the way he is, because he has been teaching for over 20 years. This characteristic of John emerged in my field notes,

> John has been so used to saying things like, “You are not gonna believe this if I say so…” Then I realized that it was his platitude. (cited from “field note for session I”)

Usually, after this platitude, John would continue with topics or issues that he was good at. Sometimes he would check on me to see if I believed him or not. In the field notes, for five out of seven sessions I wrote about John’s characteristic of being extremely fond of instructing. In the recorded verbatim text of interviews, there are 27 instances of a statement like “it’s simple.” It seems that John tries to present himself as knowledgeable, and it is quite easy for him to instruct people. In the field notes for session III, I wrote,

> This time, I found that John intended to initiate an issue by teaching me something. It’s possible that (a) John has been a teacher for so long, or (b) that’s the way he made the meeting less like a counseling session. (cited from “field note for session III”)

Besides, I also found that John was a scientific, rational, and competitive person. He reported that he was an atheist. He ridiculed his wife for her beliefs in folk religion. Meanwhile, John acknowledged himself to be a perfectionist, and he valued saving face very much. He also played a traditional male role by being an economic provider and expecting his girls to be successful.

Regarding the characteristic of being extremely fond of instructing, John denied it at first, and said that his behavior was for me, whose professional training was especially for listening instead of talking. I replied, “If this is the case, you wouldn’t be saying that the
counselors at your school are not professional enough (by instructing too much).” John, then, was willing to encounter this aspect of him. He said that he would be damned by his own characteristic of being fond of instructing. Who, after he retired, can he teach anyway? (cited from “field notes for session IV”)

This statement seems to verify my understanding of John’s characteristic. Then he followed, “It’s because you (the therapist) are younger than me, and also because I am not used to being seen through, ... after all, I’ve lived my life this way for years.” (cited from “field notes for session IV”)

This also seems to explicate the content of my field notes: “I found that John intended to initiate an issue by teaching me something,” probably because “that’s the way he made the meeting less like a counseling session.” Through teaching me, John got to “save his face,” one of his important values, and restrained me from seeing him through quickly.

Through each of the sessions, all the impressions of rationality, atheism, and competition gradually changed into another picture in approximately two hours. John became very sensitive to experiences and full of emotions. The actualizing tendency in John seemed to activate, and the profoundness and the subtlety of John’s inner world became present. In there, John was courageous to confront the real self and became very spiritual. For example, John had abandoned his interest in the stereo system, one of his hobbies, for decades, due to family expectations. However, after the loss, he started to improve on the stereo system, and to him that meant that he brought back his deceased child. To study the stereo system, John stood by the piano, “experiencing how the sound of the piano should be.” It was a subjective and sentimental experience to him.

Although John sneered at his wife’s superstition in our prior long conversations, he also said, after our relationship of trust was established, “I believe that there is a certain strength in an unknown world that decides everything.” Several times John expressed that he seemed to be able to predict things, including his destiny. It seems that, deep inside John’s heart, he was not as rational and scientific as he seemed.

The more real and profound aspect of John, who was extremely
fond of instructing, was like this:
John said that he did not like himself to be thinking too much, as well as thinking from different angles. ... I reflected that he did not like himself a bit. He did not like himself to be able to think, to feel. He blamed himself not to be able to deal with living beings (e.g., stereo and electricity as his hobbies). He had never raised any animals or plants. He simply started to sense the need of plants recently. (cited from "field notes for session IV")

Regarding his perfectionism, being knowledgeable about everything, and valuing saving his face, John responded that it might have had to do with the fact that he is the eldest son and grandson in his family of origin. He said that he was the object of all the love from the family. He did not want to lose all the love, so therefore he would perform perfectly (cited from "field notes for session VII"). Because of his role in the original family, John's life had been arranged always, until the impact of the 1999 Taiwan Earthquake that took his daughter away. Perhaps due to the perfectionism, John acted as if he was intelligent in everything. With the 1999 Taiwan Earthquake, and the death of his child taking him away from his need to be perfect, John was made to turn his life book to page two (the lifelong arrangement of his life by others was "page one").

I have attended to John's path and process of allowing himself to explore deeper in sessions since the fourth session. I wrote in the "field notes for session IV":
I reflected that John has broken the record of my counseling experience. He had to "warm up" for two hours, talk profoundly in the third hour. I found it was really not easy for him to talk from inside. John said that it might be because he was older than my regular clients...

John replied by using "mask" as a metaphor, meaning that older people use it for refining their look. Meanwhile, John said in the same session, "It's because you (the therapist) are younger than me, and also because I am not used to being seen through, ... after all, I've lived my life this way for years" (cited from "field notes for session IV"). It seems that the demographic variables as well as the personal qualities of the therapist and the client play roles in terms of the speed of client's openness in counseling.
Summary for theme I

Due to a trusting relationship successfully being established, John was willing to uncover himself and allow me to a deeper understanding of him and his grief. In each session, after about two hours elapsed, the actualizing tendency in John seemed to activate. He was able to get close to his inner world. He became sensitive to experiences and became spiritual instead of rational. He got closer to his real self and expressed his grief toward his deceased child.

Theme II: John’s Major Changes

With his grief experience in mind, I let John lead the way in counseling. Three major changes, seemingly induced from his grief, emerged as follows.

Autonomy

John used “cage” and “kite” to analogize the process of changing he had been through. In the first session, he mentioned that: he was like a bird in a cage. He simply could not free himself out of the cage. He was certain of his destiny (of a particular one). I reflected, “There seemed a lot of cages in your life journey, ... It’s you who would not want to let go...” (cited from “field notes for session I”)

Then John kept on saying that, he was so afraid of the whole family being in a car. In case that both his wife and daughter were gone, he then would be forced to the destination that he refused going toward. (cited from “field notes for session I”)

John had been getting all the love, as well as the obligation and expectation, in his original family. Both the fear of losing his family and the obligation from the family are what I meant above with “the cages in your life journey.” My deep understanding of John was that he was willing to be caged; more aptly put, John was unwilling to let go of these cages.

As I mentioned earlier, John believed there was a higher power that decided everything, and he seemed to be able to predict what had been decided. However, he chose to fight against his lot instead of
going along. He was afraid of the realization of his destiny prediction. Therefore, he was willing to be caged.

After suddenly losing his daughter, John, for a long time, felt that he had nothing left. His life was no longer perfect. “John acted with the disposition of inadmissibility, restiveness and unwillingness for submission…” (cited from “interview notes”). Perhaps deep inside his inadmissibility was a sense of helplessness that John came up with when encountering this loss. Restiveness and unwillingness for submission were his resistance to his destiny.

The process of the modification of the stereo system created a world for two, John and his deceased daughter. The product to him was a rebirth of her. All that had mattered for him, i.e., his wife, his surviving daughter, and his family of origin, were no longer of importance. Neither of his current family members can get into the world of him and the deceased daughter. “When, at this moment, he is free of the cage, but he just does not know how to fly” (cited from “field notes for session II”) suggests, it seems, that John, after losing his loved one, was not struggling about freeing himself, but struggling about not knowing how to fly freely.

In the sixth session, John said that,

He wished that he could restart his life all over again. If that could be the case, he wished that he could be out of the cage (freedom) and have a space to express himself, so he would be satisfied. (cited from “field notes for session VI”)

It seems that, from the above field note citations, there was a progressive process for John to use “cage” as an analogy. John did not know how to fly although he wanted to be out of the cage; however, there appear to be some tiny clues that John initiated getting his feathers: John decided to be the author of “page two,” and he devoted himself to innovation of the stereo system that represented the rebirth of his deceased daughter. The interest in studying the stereo system, which returned and blossomed after the loss, shows the persistence and the volition of John. He was willing to have his life arranged no more. He wanted to be himself. John seemed to gain a closer contact with his inner voice.

John also used “kite” as another analogy. In the sixth session, he said that he wished himself to be a kite with a broken string. He had
utilized this analogy to describe his deceased daughter in one of our prior conversations: “She was like a kite without a string, never coming back.” In the counseling session, John analogized this kite to himself, and he also said that “…and this kite without a string has its own will…” which connotes that he was going to be the author of “page two” in his life. In the session, when the kite was having a string, John asked,

“...then the string that connects the kite...” I replied, “it may be resistance...” John appeared in shock, jotting down something like “string – resistance” in a sheet of paper. He seemed in deep rue. He said, “I didn’t expect you to say so...” He assumed me to analogize the string to “connection.” (cited from “field notes for session VI”)

The “resistance” I noted was analogous to the cage that he was unwilling to get out of: John had been persistent in his fight against his destiny and looked for excuses to be “secular.” He could not let go of what he had gotten, and this resistance was his way of deciding not to change. Then,

John appeared confronted by strong emotions, with a painful look. He asked, “then who is there pulling the string?” “God, probably?” (cited from “field notes for session VI”)

In sum, it does not matter that either the cage or the kite are an analogy of his life; John seemed to have been willing to be bound. However, after loss, a gradual thinking of “being oneself” came up from the bottom of his heart. Even so, he did not know how to fly when the cage opened, but he intended to learn. He also learned to be a kite with free will, “probably there will be a brighter sky ahead...” (cited from “field notes for session VI”).

**Flexible Views**

John seriously brought up an issue, in session VI, regarding the career development of his surviving daughter. Both John and his wife hoped that she could study in an institution with the best reputation. I reflected that he was concerned with the skin-deep ranking issue. Then, according to the field notes for session VI,

The look in John’s face became “productive,” mainly painful.

I could see there was a lot he tried to express. A cluster of thinking and words was squeezing and ready to pop up. I think the only thing I need to do now is to keep quiet, waiting for his expression when he is ready. John stood up and said, “Now I... Now I suddenly feel that the sky gets brighter.... I wish I had met you sooner, then I would not have been in this much pain for so long.”... Then he said, “what I knew about her (his daughter) is actually what I thought I knew about her, and that is not the real her.” I nodded affirmatively. He continued, “I should have taken the position from her perspective,” then he burst out, “It is the ‘for your own good’ concept that makes me...... I have been treated this way since I was a child. And I did not see anything wrong with it, so I treated my children accordingly.”

John then mentioned, “perhaps it’s good to be a kite with a broken string, there might exist a prettier sky ahead...” After this, John returned to the topic of his deceased daughter,

He said that maybe he himself controlled her (i.e., the deceased). He thought the kite made of his own should have flied the highest in the sky. Out of this, she might have complained as well. ... John repeated, “perhaps it’s good to be a kite with a broken string, there might exist a prettier sky ahead...” Then he decided to be a kite with a broken string, meaning stop being a controller. I replied, “how come I hear a sense of sadness?” John responded by saying that sometimes we cannot do much about life, but he is for sure not back to the life of being planned, expected, and arranged. “No way!” He said. (cited from “field notes for session VI”)

Twice in the same session, John spoke about being a kite with a broken string. Probably this analogy took over his mind and lots of his insights came out of this analogy. Actually, this analogy needed several substitutions, and each released productive information. First was when this kite was his deceased daughter, and John was the controller. Since she had been disconnected, she would have been out of John’s control. She would have had a brighter sky after she passed away. Second, this kite could be John himself, and God was on the other side of the string. As long as he gave up fighting against God regarding his
destiny, John would have been a real and free self. Being oneself, to John, referred to his striving for improvement of the stereo system, and accepting his own predictive destiny.

In the seventh session, John shared with me his insight regarding my response about the string being resistance. He said, regarding his modified product that he was about to accomplish, that he was no longer looking for the biggest kite for it; instead, he was looking for the most proper wind leading the kite flying high. Again, this is another analogy. When this kite was his innovation, meaning the rebirth of his deceased daughter, John knew it was the wind that suits the kite that mattered the most, although he still wanted his kite to be sky high.

Therefore, John became more flexible in terms of seeing things. Several factors indicate this change. One is the loss of his child leading to his grief and contemplation over his loss. The other is the modification of the stereo system. John allowed it to represent the return of his child. This change, realized in his daily life, made John listen more to his students instead of giving lectures (from one of our prior conversations). He offered more space and freedom to his surviving daughter. He wanted her to be happy and learned to demand less of her in terms of performance.

**Fear of Retirement**

In an earlier correspondence, I reflected John's then-current situation as retirement because he had a job with few demands. Some time after that, John replied to me that this reflection was like a stimulating pin to him. Several times in the sessions, John raised his concerns about retirement.

He said that he would be damned by his own character of being fond of instructing. Who, after he retired, can he teach anyway? (cited from “field notes for session IV”)

He is afraid to approach retirement, seemingly no one needs him any more, especially he has not found out what he really wanted to do. (cited from “field notes for session VI”)

The issue that John has encountered seems to deviate from no one of the same developmental stage. This clarifies an understanding
of parental bereavement. Parental bereavement may well lead to various kinds of feelings or concerns besides the grief experience. After this understanding, I jotted down in my field notes,

Now I understand as follows. John’s issue at this moment is not the trauma due to losing his daughter, although I intended to help because he used to lament. The issue that John is having now is about retirement approaching (His fear of emptiness that retirement brings about). (cited from “field notes for session VI”)

Summary for theme II

I found three major changes in John through seven lengthy therapy sessions. They appear unrelated to each other; however, the connection of these changes can be traced to his grief experience. Because of the loss, John decided to be himself. He is not going to let himself be controlled to fulfill the expectations from his family of origin (“autonomy”). Regretting not showing his love for the child, John experienced the importance of others’ needs and perspectives. He learns to see things from another perspective (“flexible views”). Even losing his child, John was able to live in this moment by being concerned with his life after retirement (“fear of retirement”).

Discussion

Paternal bereavement rarely gets attention in academia, both in Taiwan and probably in the entire world. Only one study (Wood & Milo, 2001) was found regarding the understanding of fathers’ grief after their developmentally disabled children died. The PCA was also seldom, if ever, opted for as a method of grief counseling. This article has aimed to represent the application of person-centered principles with a bereaved father who lost his daughter in the 1999 Taiwan Earthquake.

The establishment of a trusting relationship took 16 months, through continual visits to this family, some spontaneous long conversations with John and his wife, and a volume of my continuing endeavors on post-disaster psychological resolution. John, in the
trust-based relationship, reported these to be the factors that led him to sharing his loss with me genuinely. This coincides with Lin (1998), Talbot (1997), Thompson and Range (1992), and Wang's (2003) understanding of the reluctance for the bereaved, especially when male (Lin, 1998, Yeh-Ho, 2003), to express their grief. However, as Raphael et al. (1993) suggested, a person who does care for the bereaved would usually win the expression of their grief experiences out of the dilemma. In addition to someone who does care for the bereaved, Rogers (1958/1961) maintained that a helper has to be perceived as trustworthy and dependable. As far as the relationship between John and I is concerned, it may have been established, in John’s perception, through my persistence prior to therapy.

Regarding the establishment of a trusting relationship, Rogers (1958/1961) raised 10 questions that characterized a helping relationship in various contexts. The reader is reminded in some of those questions that a helper be expressive enough in a consistent way, strong enough as a person distinct from others, and secure enough within himself or herself. A helper, as a person, understands that the other person is in a process of becoming. He or she lets himself or herself step into the inner world of the other fully and accept who the other is in all aspects. During our therapy sessions, I found when I was aware of my inner self and in touch with the unknown in me, as noted by Rogers (1978, 1979/1980, p. 129), the readiness of the state-of-mind in me let me follow John’s track, in his inner world, as fully as I could. I could feel his pain of losing his daughter forever, the contradictory feelings of being afraid of breaking down because he missed her so badly and the sense of aloneness that no one seemed to be able to transcend. It demonstrates the revolutionary aspect of the PCA to return power to the client by the client leading the therapist (Bohart, 1995). Through following the client, I found three major changes emerged out of the therapy. They were autonomy, flexible views, and fear of retirement. They appear irrelevant to his loss; however, all are virtually contingent on it. The sudden death of his child forced John to turn to page two of his life, a metaphor contrast with his prearranged life (“page one”) before the loss. John decided to be the author of page two. That raised a sense of autonomy.

The regret of his taking his daughter for granted while she was
alive, with a wish that he should have provided more love and gotten closer to her, helped John learn to pay attention to the needs and aspects of others. During the process of modifying the stereo system, which meant the rebirth of his deceased child, John learned to expand his thinking to look for more possibilities for the system. These experiences led to John's flexibility in seeing things.

In terms of fear of retirement, John was as concerned with it as others of the same age. He did not seem to be stuck by his grief experience in this matter. Lin (1998) found that "thought-changing" is the most consistent process throughout the grieving course. One aspect of this concept is that of a comprehension of living right here at this moment. John's concern with retirement was a very then-current issue. It may be fair to say that he was moving toward loosening his uptight emotions in the grieving process.

In the bereavement literature, these major changes are evidence that the therapeutic issues brought up by the bereaved are diverse (Klass, 1988); they are also connected with each other. That the modification of the stereo system represented the rebirth of John's deceased child was unique in a way; however, the implication of John's deeds can be echoed by the accumulation of evidence, both empirical and clinical, over the decades (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Pine & Brauer, 1986; Rando, 1986a, 1986b; Rubin, 1993; Sanders, 1986; Schatz, 1986). They support the continuing bonds between the bereaved and the deceased. The process of stereo modification seems to be the process of John relating himself to his beloved daughter.

Klass (1996) and Parkes (1997) believe that it is not necessary to make suggestions to the bereaved to help them recover or resolve their grief. It does not matter whether it is psychiatrists or volunteers who want to help the bereaved, the result can be the same (Parkes, 1997, see pp. 212-213 for discussion). Person-centered therapy reflects much of the above attitude. After working with John, it can be seen that the PCA seems to open new possibilities to the field of grief therapy.

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