

Preface

The only real wisdom is knowing you know nothing.
Socrates

Why is this book necessary? I found myself contemplating the main problem of loss of relevancy and how resilience might be further developed. These thoughts occurred to me while I was moving on with my own life and observing others, whether in my own family, my work unit, or out on the streets. Eventually, I opened up my introspective analytical thoughts to weave in the thoughts and inspirational comments from trusted friends. As a trained researcher and survivor of the process of completing a doctoral dissertation, I began to conduct a multifaceted process of absorption of what others had to say on the topic and to consider what else needed to be said.

Loss is a phenomenon experienced at some point in life by every being. It is also experienced by nonhumans, such as a deer can certainly experience sudden annihilation, but, absent a cerebral cortex, the concepts involved lose their interpretive value, but no offense to the deer is intended. It may involve the death of a loved one, friend, or pet. As well, the concept of “complex loss” involves a person who experiences the loss of a loved one and does not work through the traditional steps of grieving, staying stuck in the state of grief. It can also occur as a result of a casualty, such as theft, accident, or absentmindedness. Loss can involve a person’s employment status or social status. A professional golfer may lose a major tournament by a single putt, which could equate to the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars in prize money not to mention the elusive gleaming trophy and the lost opportunity to bask in the limelight. At the Masters Golf Tournament held annually in Augusta, Georgia, the winner receives a much-coveted green jacket. This jacket is a symbol of success. But for the golfer coming in second or further down in the pecking order, there is no green jacket. So, then, the jacket becomes the symbol of success and the non-attainment thereof becomes the bane of the golfers who fail to achieve such important attire. We create many types of “green jackets” in our lives, leading to psychological vulnerability.

Resilience is a characteristic pointing to the ability of a person to recover from loss. It is the ability of someone to move past disappointment or failure or upset (Diane Allerdycce, Ph.D., April 28, 2012, personal communication). Some of us bounce back quickly; others languish and remain suffering, even becoming partially psychologically disabled. Returning to the example of professional golf, we can consider the case of Tiger Woods. He is, perhaps, among the greatest golfers in history. Because of personal issues, his prowess on the tournament circuit has waned. He is attempting to make a remarkable comeback. As such, his efforts testify to his resiliency. Relevance is the degree of a person feeling connected to their primary and important components of their life. People carry complex internalizations of their internal sense of relevancy. Situations occur during the span of life to alter this particular sense.

Humans are complex and, as such, require evolving theories to explain behavior and to understand the many psychological mechanisms that either build resilience or lead to the loss of important relationships or connections. Such loss can lead to an erosion of a person's self-perception of their relevance. Irrelevance is damaging to the sanctity of a person's self-esteem and self-confidence and can serve to derail the momentum of a person's life. This book attempts to explore this subject through an illustrative case study (Rex) and appendices, which include a stage play based on my work with female prisoners. All writings are representative of creative constructs to forge a sustaining foundation of relevance and resilience.

I discovered much written on resiliency and connectedness. Likewise, plenty of content has been published on loss, including complex loss, as well as grief, the process of grieving, and the momentum of moving forward. I talked with many people about resilience. "We all have resiliency built into our nature" (Robert Fechter, June 20, 2012, personal communication). Mr. Fechter is, in my opinion, a very resilient person. He and I have discussed the thesis of this book and he agrees not everyone can survive the constant psychological onslaught brought on by life's dilemmas, disappointments, and upsets. In a way, can we all field every curve-ball thrown at us? Therefore, I maintain that most people can be helped, at least to some meaningful degree, to alter their self-perception and to develop new tools necessary to evoke greater happiness in their lives.

The material presented, including the expressive writing found in Appendix A and B, has been integrated with an important case study of an individual ("Rex" for the purpose of anonymity). Rex's life history and the exploration of resiliency and relevancy, determined through regular dialogue between us, weave nicely into the theoretical text, providing the reader with a lasting example of how the presented material can play out with a willing human subject. It is one of my primary objectives with this book to provide therapists with additional tools to incorporate into their therapeutic practices in order to help people who have difficulty with low resilience or who communicate feelings of irrelevance.

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