

Self-defining memories of mothers of martyrs

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Abstract: The psychological well-being of bereaved women may be impacted by a range of problems, such as memories that define them. Grief lasting a long time can affect mothers who have experienced loss in all areas of their lives. They are subjected to a continuous cycle of intense longing and nostalgia that can lead to a strong preoccupation with the deceased. It is evident that their memories are devoted solely to the deceased, particularly the painful ones. Singer et al. were the ones who adopted the researcher's approach. The (2000-2001) scale was distributed across four areas, with a narrative dimension that can be answered by recalling three memories, and an emotional dimension that can be answered by seven alternatives. It was observed in the results that mothers who have been bereaved have low self-defining memories.

Keywords: *Grief, Healing, Loss, Martyrs, Memories, Self-Defining, Women.*

1. Introduction

Losing a family member is something that almost everyone experiences, and almost every psychiatrist's career involves encountering individuals who have experienced an unusually long and traumatic loss. The deceased's absence has made it hard for these bereaved individuals to re-establish a meaningful life. Healing is not possible due to the constant pain of loss. The bereaved individual experiences a sense of stuckness; time moves on, but the intense grief persists. It's possible that they experience an intense sense of emptiness in their lives. The pain of the loss may be so intense that their death may seem like the only possible way out of the pain [1].

Mothers create a memory that is solely focused on the deceased person, allowing them to recall past events that are meaningful to them personally. Emotional intensity, vividness, and emotional intensity are characteristics of self-defining memories, which is a subset of episodic memories. People have vivid emotional memories, which are records of recent experience with past events, or records that are characterized by detail and a mental 'reliving' of the event, and they are closely connected to their long-term goals and sense of self. Self-defining memories are distinct from other common everyday memories because of their connection to long-term goals [2].

Singer has identified it as a subcategory of active autobiographical memory that is deeply significant, connected to similar memories that are frequently recalled, and relevant to the individual's current anxieties or difficulties [3]. According to Singer, recognizing self-defining memories can lead us to important insights into our identity. The easiest way to uncover self-defining memories is to think about events you might share when someone asks, "Tell me a little about yourself. It's a good idea to start by mentioning your job status, interests, relationships, and favorite activities. You can share specific anecdotes that demonstrate these aspects of your life as the conversation progresses. Your self-defining memories are probably present in the stories that come to mind easily. It's a common practice to steer clear of giving too much information, particularly when meeting someone new. Nonetheless, the deeper memories that support these stories are the ones that are most likely to meet the criteria for self-definition. Singer, et al. [4] conducted an interesting study that examined the self-defining memories of

older adults and university students. They found that older adults tend to form more general memories that connect multiple events together (Singer et al., 2007, p. 887).

Singer [5] conducted a study where participants were asked to recall and describe three self-identifying memories and then rated how positive and negative, they felt during the recall. The results of this study showed that participants did not differ in terms of age or duration of death, and statistical analyses (chi-square) revealed no differences between groups in terms of relationship with the deceased or lack of preparation for death [6].

El Haj and Gallouj [7] conducted a study that examined younger adults and found that this group, compared to older adults, has a lower emotional regulation and response to self-defining memories. Therefore, the benefit of spending more time since the event occurred is that older adults, unlike younger ones, have more freedom to see the overlapping themes and connections between memories in their life story, which leads to greater integration of self-defining memories [7].

Loss victims tend to avoid recalling memories related to the loss and recall non-specific memories when recounting negative emotions. Traumatic memories, such as bereavement, have been found to be resistant to the general retrieval process. The life story and self-identity of a person are closely connected to their trauma memories, which are typically accompanied by intense emotions. Integrating prior knowledge into autobiographical memory is challenging and requires repeated re-consolidation by voluntary or involuntary recall. Preoccupation with images and thoughts of the deceased can cause preference for retrieving lost memories, which is why grief-related preoccupation can lead to preferential retrieval. Two processes that compete with preoccupation with traumatic memories and functional avoidance of negative effects may be responsible for disturbances in the autobiographical memory system, as suggested by Xiu, et al. [8].

The role of narrative that enhances meaning in social engagement has been emphasized by some researchers [9] when it comes to integrating autobiographical memories. Clarification and reinforcement of life lessons that arise from loss are crucial. Individuals communicate their life stories through a detailed narrative, reflecting, interpreting, and evaluating their memories. The narrative involves the search for meaning, which is facilitated either automatically or intentionally through cognitive (re)evaluation. Individuals may encounter failure and engage in unsuccessful attempts, which may lead to an increase in rumination and an exacerbated severity of loss symptoms. In the year 2020, Xiu, et al. [10] cited several publications on this topic. 5)

On this basis, memories are more intense after exposure to loss due to the intense information they contain, they are vivid and effectively charged, secondly, due to their relationship with similar memories, there are more signals that can make bereaved mothers remember them, each time they are retrieved they become more fixed in memory, and the researcher tried to raise several questions, including: To what extent do mothers of martyrs have self-defining memories? Is it possible for mothers to be affected by the repeated retrieval of these memories? Do these memories differ based on age and duration of death? The current research is focused on identifying:

1. Memories of martyred mothers that are self-identifiable.
2. The age and duration of death can cause differences in self-identifying memories.

2. Theories That Explain Self-Defining Memories

2.1. McAdams Life Story Model (2001)

McAdams' life story model of identity is founded on Erikson [11] early developmental theory and argues that narrative identity is the life story. The function of the life story, as proposed by McAdams [12] is comparable to that of Erikson [11] identity theory, which is to address the question of 'Who am I?' The life story is an internal narrative that individuals create to understand themselves and how they have evolved into who they are today. According to McAdams and others, narrative identity is a part of a broader set of traits for an individual's personality [13].

The events and experiences in one's life story have personal significance for them [14]. People who are experiencing psychological distress not only face more negative life events than others, but they also

have a tendency to incorporate these negative events into their life stories. Individuals without distress do not have the concept of a life story. The identity of those who are experiencing psychological distress is likely to have more negative life events than those who are not distressed, according to the assumption that narrative identity is the life story.

Including stressful or highly negative life events in an individual's life story can be a risk factor for psychological disorders, even if they are facing a moderate number of them. This is particularly true when negative events are perceived to be more significant than other more positive experiences.

In the study conducted by MacCallum and Bryant [15] individuals who experienced complicated grief after the loss of a loved one reported self-defining memories related to the deceased more frequently than bereaved individuals who did not experience complicated grief. According to Sutherland and Bryant [16] trauma survivors with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) had a higher likelihood of recalling trauma memories when faced with a self-defining memory task than those without PTSD.

These findings suggest that, for individuals deeply distressed by loss or trauma, such experiences are more likely to be incorporated into their life story and, consequently, their narrative identity—than for individuals who are not distressed [13].

Autobiographical thinking is increasingly being linked to positive psychological functioning when the results of this reflective process are positive for the individual. McAdams' model states that individuals who construct a life story that incorporates positive interpretations of life events and connects them to positive self-characteristics develop a narrative identity that is positive. Positive life stories are associated with a range of indicators of positive psychological functioning [13].

2.2. *The Theory of Singer and His Contemporaries from 1991 To 1992*

Singer and Salovey [14] were fascinated by the structural features of certain vivid and lively memories that appear to be highly influential on personality. Their argument was that individuals have their own set of autobiographical memories that define them. The term used for these memories was 'self-defining memories' (SDMs).

Their investigation focused on self-defining memories that relate to goals, emotions, and personality. Memories that reflect self-definition are more vivid and emotionally intense, frequently remembered, and connected to similar experiences. Singer and Salovey [14] asserted that they are organized around an ongoing concern or unresolved conflict within the individual's personality.

An individual's life story can be enhanced by the narrative capture of recurring critical themes and emotional scripts through self-defining memories [17]. This enables individuals to convey their greatest values to others [18].

Studies Singer [19] and Sutin and Robins [20] show that self-defining memories are connected to various personality dimensions, goals, and motivations. Singer and Blagov [21] investigated how personality traits are reflected in self-defining memories. Self-defining memories had four dimensions proposed by them: specificity, meaning, content, and affect. Self-control, distress, and repressive defense were identified as three dimensions of personality. Self-control is defined as the ability to control one's impulses, suppress aggression, and take responsibility. Trait anxiety, depression, low well-being, and low self-esteem were used to measure distress. To avoid negative effects and present oneself positively is what repressive defense is all about. Their argument was that there would be a correlation between differences in the four dimensions of self-defining memories and differences in self-control, distress, and defense [3].

Singers claim that each time self-defining memories are retrieved they become more stable in memory, and a salient feature of this is that individuals perceive the relationship between these memories and their goals, making them more central and more important to current issues and conflicts. This suggests that there are some self-narratives that individuals consider to be part of their life story narratives, and that individuals' life stories do not include all of their self-memories; people select, interpret, and integrate some memories that they find relevant to their current issues and that

they consider important in terms of their sense of self, and that they prefer some memories while ignoring others.

Singer and Salovey [14] found that self-defining memories can also have other characteristics such as emotional intensity, high levels of activation, and a connection to persistent anxiety. The distinction between self-defining and other vivid memories can be made. Brown and Kulik [22] defined flashbulb memories as a particularly vivid and emotional memory form for personal events, which are often associated with significant public events. Conway [23] discovered that these memories are created by four interrelated variables (surprise, consequentiality, significance, and emotion). The presence of these characteristics does not imply that memory is crucial for achieving goals or resolving intrapersonal conflicts [21].

Because self-defining memories are vivid, poignantly intense, and well-rehearsed, individuals build on life story memories by connecting to other significant memories across the lifespan that share themes and narrative sequences, reflecting individuals' most enduring interests (achievement, intimacy) and unresolved conflicts (sibling rivalry, addictive tendencies) [24].

3. Methodology

The current study surveyed 400 mother-of-martyrs from Baghdad Governorate who experienced loss, and their ages ranged from 40-70 years and above.

The specified sample was subjected to the current study scale. Singer et al. developed a scale that the researcher adopted. In 2000-2001, there were four areas that were separated. Three memories were recalled assessing the narrative dimension, while seven-point alternatives were used to assess the emotional dimension. After retrieving, processing, and analyzing their feedback forms, the experts gave their approval to the scale after it was presented to them. The discrimination formula was employed to calculate the discriminatory power of the items, as per Eble's criteria, which states that an item is considered discriminatory if it has a discriminatory power exceeding 0.30 [25]. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used by the researcher to determine construct validity for the two dimensions (narrative and emotional). The alignment between the theoretical model adopted by the researcher and the study sample was determined by obtaining several important fit indices.

The goodness of fit index (GFI) was 0.90 while the Hoelter index for the narrative dimension was 205. The Hoelter index for the emotional dimension was 223, while the GFI was 0.90. The Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR-20) was used to calculate the reliability of the scale based on the responses of the entire sample of 400 mothers. The narrative dimension had a reliability coefficient of 0.63, while the emotional dimension had an alpha coefficient of 0.77. Furthermore, the researcher evaluated reliability through the use of the test-retest method. The narrative dimension had a reliability coefficient of 0.85, while the emotional dimension had a reliability coefficient of 0.70.

The researcher analyzed statistical indicators using the t-test for 1 sample, the t-test for 2 independent samples, the discrimination equation, the point-binary correlation coefficient, and the Pearson correlation coefficient. The Kuder-Richardson equation (20) was also utilized by her. To determine psychometric properties, confirmatory factor analysis was employed along with skewness, kurtosis, mean, median, and mode, among other statistical methods.

4. Results

Since the sample consisted of mothers who had been bereaved, a special scale was applied that met certain conditions (a period of time of one year or more since the bereavement/deficiency in functional and family areas) before applying the scale of self-defining memories to the research sample of (400). There were 145 mothers who were betrayed, with a rate of 36%. Table (1) demonstrates that self-defining memories were found at a low rate in the sample, as shown by the results.

The self-identifying memories scale has two dimensions, narrative and emotional impact, and a T-test has been conducted to determine the difference between the sample mean and the hypothetical mean.

Table 1.

Test for the difference between the sample mean and the hypothetical mean for the self-identifying memories scale in its two dimensions (narrative and emotional impact).

Scale	Mean	Standard Deviation	Hypothetical Mean	Calculated t-value	Tabulated t-value	Degrees of Freedom	Significance Level
Narrative	4.06	1.47	4.5	3.58	1.96	144	Significant
Emotional Impact	36	11.56	48	12.5	1.96	144	Significant

As per Table 1 mothers of martyrs have self-defining memories that have a low level of narrative and emotional impact.

This finding may be explained by Singer's suggestion that older individuals are likely to use protective strategies that slow down detailed recall and allow for emotional modification of more specific and powerful memories, a practice that may prevent them from experiencing particularly traumatic memories [26].

Singer and Salovey [14] recommended that individuals suppress or block information to keep themselves from being aware. They reported preliminary data linking the repressive personality style to specific memory inhibition, suggesting that images of certain narratives evoke intense and disconnected emotional responses that repressive individuals may seek to avoid.

Individuals who had high repression scores were found by Davis and Schwartz [27] to recall fewer emotional memories and to recall memories from more recent periods of their lives. The association between general memories and defensive avoidance of emotional arousal from more specific and detailed memories [21].

The study by Xiu, et al. [8] shows that people who are bereaved tend to steer clear of memories related to their loss and instead focus on nonspecific memories when recounting negative emotions. A preference to retrieve certain memories while maintaining specificity in loss-related memories can be induced by the preoccupation with grief, which includes images and thoughts of the deceased.

A significant body of experimental research has revealed the hypothesis of "failure to integrate loss-related memories," conceptually explained through two cognitive processes: functional avoidance of negative affect and maladaptive cognitive appraisal [8].

4.1. The Results also Showed That

A. There is no statistically significant difference in self-defining memories according to age and duration of death, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Results of a two-way analysis of variance to detect the significance of differences in the self-defining memories (narrative) dimension of mothers of martyrs according to age and duration of death.

Source of Variance (S.O.V)	Sum of Squares (S.O.S)	Degrees of Freedom (D.F)	Mean Squares (M.S)	F-Value	Significance (sigh)
Age	0.08	1	0.08	0.038	Not Significant
Duration of Loss	6.314	2	3.157	1.509	Not Significant
Age × Duration of Loss	12.296	2	6.148	2.938	Not Significant
Error	290.819	139	2.092	---	---
Total	2705	145	---	---	---

B. According to their age and duration of death, mothers of martyrs have different self-identifying emotional impact memories, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3 presents the results of a two-way analysis of variance to determine the significance of differences in self-defining memories after emotional impact among mothers of martyrs, based on their age and duration of death.

Table 3.

Results of the two-way analysis of variance to detect the Significance of differences in self-defining memories after (emotional impact) among mothers of martyrs according to age and duration of death.

Source of Variance (S.O.V)	Sum of Squares (S.O.S)	Degrees of Freedom (D.F)	Mean Squares (M.S)	F-Value	Significance (sig)
Age	123.867	1	123.867	0.907	Not Significant
Duration of Loss	21.378	2	10.689	0.078	Not Significant
Age × Duration of Loss	122.413	2	61.206	0.448	Not Significant
Error	18988.79	139	136.61	---	---
Total	207166	145	---	---	---

Singer [5] study is a good example of how this finding can be explained. Participants were tasked with recalling and describing three self-identifying memories and afterwards rated how positive and negative they felt when recalling them. The results of this study showed that participants did not differ in age or duration of death, and a chi-square analysis revealed no differences between groups in terms of relationship to the deceased or prepare for death [15].

Regardless of their age, advanced age, or even the years that have passed since their death, mothers of martyrs suffer directly and indirectly because of their loved ones' passing. The loss is the same, the tragedy is the same, and the circumstances surrounding the death of their sons are the same.

5. Conclusions

- The concept of self-defining memories encompasses both positive and negative memories. The research focused on negative memories that were centered around grief and loss among mothers who lost their sons. Mothers who have lost their sons often struggle to describe their memories of them in a way that is private and meaningful. To overcome the negative impact, some of them opted to suppress those memories. The memories were focused on the event of death and the moments that were most painful for them.
- Feelings can range from sadness, guilt, fear, and pride when mothers experience loss and later remember the event. Mothers may experience emotional swings when reminded of their deceased child and express both negative and positive emotions. More research is necessary to define self through memories that emphasize achievement, whether with family, at work, or academically.

Transparency:

The author confirms that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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