
Mourning and Melancholia

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ABSTRACT

Freud's writings give excellent insight into an unprecedented endeavour to discuss an unvoiced notion with widely disparate ideas in the early twentieth century. The fundamental theme of the paper is Freud's "mourning and melancholia." To some extent, mourning may be a road for a person to unleash a curative and creative quality throughout a downturn. Other connotations arise from the concept of mourning and melancholia that deserve our attention, such as the difference between both concepts and the intricacies they entail. Although there are many critiques of his work, it is worth noting the space for deliberation that he has made for the discourse of melancholia not just in psychoanalysis but also in contemporary literary theory, feminist theory, and cultural criticism. The research investigates numerous possibilities related to Melancholia and mourning.

INTRODUCTION

The central focus of the paper is "mourning and melancholia" by Freud and bringing into deliberation some other works which help in working through the notion of "Melancholia" and "mourning". Nowadays the reason for sadness is more of an external factor rather than internal in a social context. But in ancient times the term "melancholia" has its origins in Hippocratic medicine and hence considered as more of an internal factor. This term derives from humoral theory, which was the dominant medical ideology from antiquity to the nineteenth century. According to generations of humoral practitioners, an abundance of black bile was associated with the melancholic mood and depressive symptoms specifically by the Greek physician Hippocrates around 400 BCE. In the writings of Freud which is changing over time is also evident in the series of his work which can be viewed as evolving concept. In some sense, we view melancholia parallelly with depression due to some of the symptoms similar in both of the phenomena. The writing of Freud provides valuable insight in terms of an audacious move to talk about the concept which is stigmatized and has altogether contrasting conceptions in the early 20th century. He also provides a means to demarcate between grief and depression although they look similar. In this paper, the term object is the object of someone desire/affection or attention and has the same meaning as attributed by Freud.

MOURNING VS MELANCHOLIA

According to Freud, there are two types of reactions to the loss of an object: grief and melancholia. The notion of mourning, according to Freud, is a finite and transforming phase, melancholia is a persistent condition that springs up just outside of a person's conscious

awareness. Freud defines mourning as a period that culminates in a kind of acknowledgement, in which the mourner will finally feel empowered to engage in the external world, even though the loss has occurred.

Melancholia, on the other hand, is more ambiguous. This is the reaction to the loss of the object, an individual experiences their pain more internally. Freud claimed that the agony of loss in melancholia is felt in the unconscious, which means that the sense of the loss is not as clear to the person who is grieving. A solution to this is rather than keeping the agony and distress of loss inside, Freud suggests that truly grieving a loss and making sense of it. And we make sense of our emotions by expressing them verbally to someone and attempting to learn. In contrast, Mourning is seen as a healthy and normal way of processing a loss of the object, whereas melancholia is regarded as unhealthy and pathological. Freud later revisited the notion that melancholia was simply an “unsuccessful” effort to mourn, suggesting instead that melancholic actions were simply a step in overcoming the tasks of mourning. In our daily lives usage of the word “Mourning” is more prevalent as compared to “Melancholia”. The reason perhaps because of pathological nature (attached stigma) and complex phenomena (unable to identify bounds between - Mourning & Melancholia which is also the major argument of Judith Butler). Furthermore, we can look out for the grieving process which has a link to the mourner's cultural background and the conditions of the grief/loss in question to some extent.

The loss of an object does not necessarily mean loss of a person, it may be the loss of an inanimate/animate object (e.g. Loss of ideology). About loss of ideology, we can bring in the case of Lortie where Denis Lortie characterized this initial instinct as an urge to invade the National Assembly and demolish the governing Parti Qubecois, a government that had "harmed the French language." As a result, he would "kill anything that tried to destroy the French language."¹This case emphasizes on the role or systemic position of the father, as well as an authority or, more formally, 'legitimacy'. But the same case can be viewed from another dimension as well. When “Lortie stated that he did not know why he would carry out these acts, he simply knew that he must do them, that they were imperatives.” This provides us with a sense of unconscious sense of loss even if the object is known (Language/loss of ideology or Ideals) which lead to pathological symptoms which are evident in the Lortie case.

RESORTING TO REPEATING, REMEMBERING AND WORKING THROUGH

This piece of Freud bridges the gap which is presented in “Mourning and melancholia” that is transitioning from melancholia to Mourning as one of the solutions.

The notion of Repeating is discernible specifically in melancholia where the subjugation of ego is more evident which often leads to a repeated pattern of behaviour. This repeated behaviour repeatedly goes unnoticed by the individual due to the unconscious element in melancholia. The notion of melancholia brings forth a withdrawn of libido and subject into

¹ Peter Goodrich, 'The Unconscious Is a Jurist: Psychoanalysis and Law in the Work of Pierre Legendre' [1996].

the self which is not available to reinvest elsewhere. This can lead to varying reactions and sometimes a repeated behaviour is visible. This is generally termed as destiny when the individual is not aware of melancholia.

The succeeding phase of remembering entails making the unconscious into conscious which leads the way to acceptance of loss. This can open on to the path of Mourning which is considered a healthy process, unlike Melancholia. However, Freud himself changed this position later, in *The Ego and the Id*, which Judith Butler deals with exhaustively.

When working through the issue need reconfirmation to the accuracy of judgment of the individual. This reproduction of pattern causes clarity in the thought process. Hence resolution from melancholia. This whole process of repeating, remembering and working through can be one of the mileposts in resolving a complex phenomenon called melancholia.

MELANCHOLIA & MANIA

One of the characteristics of melancholia as stated by Freud is its tendency to change into mania. The divergence among both of the concepts is in mania ego get over the loss of the object, unlike melancholia. The symptoms of melancholia are altogether opposite but its inclination towards mania is a significant aspect.

NEXUS BETWEEN MOURNING AND MATERNAL/PATERNAL FIGURE

Kristeva's study of melancholic depression clarifies the violence done to the lost other, particularly the maternal other which is often termed as healthy mourning. Kristeva views Matricide as significant which leads to separation from mother and replaces this feeling of the lost object to Father (similar to Oedipus complex except paternal figure is replaced with "maternal figure"). As this definition of healing implies, her account of grief describes attachment revocation as a natural state of relativism and meaning. They propose mourning ideas based on a historically male paradigm of subjectivity in which rigid expressions of individuality have become the standard. According to Kristeva, women are not just culturally susceptible but also biologically predisposed to struggle as mourners, succumbing to despair and "sinking into the blackness of asymbolia." Although Kristeva acknowledges that men may have a failed grappling with the predominant loss of the mother, she strongly correlates women with failed mourning. In some sense, it makes the matter more complex and leaves us with various questions. These questions provide us with the link between Mourning with the Paternal/Maternal figure.

MELANCHOLIA AS DIVINE

Melancholia is also approached from other dimensions of contemplating it as divine. Zizek presents the idea of optimism of melancholia with the help of an example of Lars von Trier's "melancholia" as an optimist film. Some poets also treat melancholia as spiritual craving. Also, cliché statement that artist is prone to melancholia is due to the nature of their work

which brings us to acknowledge the other side of melancholia. On a similar line of thought in the context of mourning /melancholia sometimes there is an unknown lost object which means an individual misses something but does not know what is missing (often termed as an existential crisis). To answer this question from Lacan's perspective is we always have a lack irrespective of anything.

COLLECTIVE MOURNING

From “mourning and melancholia”, we can also elicit a conception of collective mourning which is often evident nowadays specifically through the pandemics. This pandemic causes collective grief/ mourning which binds people from various nations. We can also contemplate collective mourning in terms of the recent case of Sabarimala where the majority of people are happy with judgment but the other part of the population grieves for the loss of ideology and as a result, causes havoc. There is no definite answer to deal with collective mourning as it requires a lot of effort from multiple sources.

CONCLUSION

This piece by Freud introduces different types of understanding about the mind's system, our interactions with others, and how we deal with loss/grief. It also leaves us with a lot of question which lead to the further inquiry of the meticulous interpretations concerning conscious and unconscious mechanisms during a time of real loss of the object. It can be a path for an individual to unleash a cure and constructive powers during a downturn to some extent. Although there are various critics of his work but the indispensable place which is created for the dialogue of melancholia not only in psychoanalysis but also in recent literary theory, feminist theory, and cultural criticism is noteworthy. There is various connotation which crops up from the notion of mourning and melancholia that require our consideration in order to explore numerous possibilities.