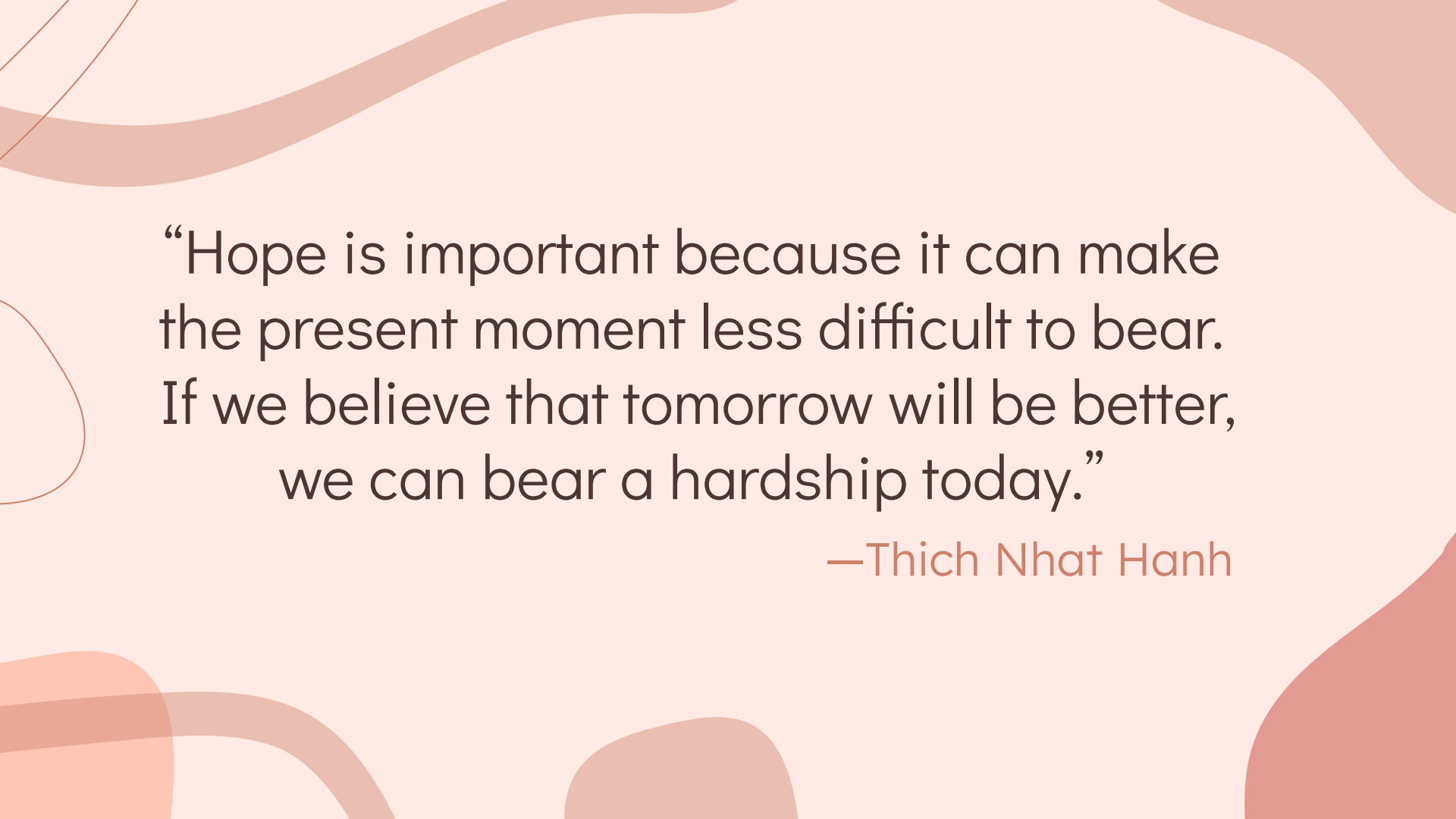


# Gratitude & Hope Among 2nd Year MFT Students Amid the Covid-19 Pandemic

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“Hope is important because it can make the present moment less difficult to bear. If we believe that tomorrow will be better, we can bear a hardship today.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh

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# Introduction



Hello, from Alyssa and Olivia!

2nd Year PsyD Students at Our Lady of the Lake  
University

Qualitative Research Important to us.

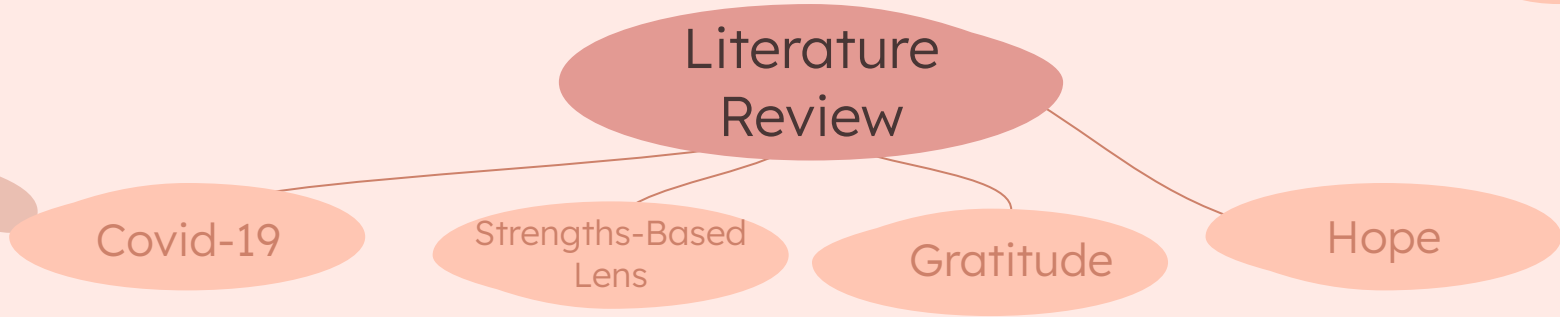


Lived Experience

Interested in Gratitude and Hope among MFT  
graduate students.

Unique experience

# Literature Review



103 million Americans who have reported experiencing illnesses associated with Covid-19, and over one million have lost their lives to the virus since the pandemic's beginning

Postmodern,  
Strengths-Based  
Researchers

Themes of resilience  
emerging through  
pandemic

“Gratitude enhances mental health (or prevents its deterioration) because it helps people to positively reframe difficult situations in positive ways and so experience positive emotions.”

“Hope led to greater well-being because it helped people to direct their attention to positive information, make positive self-evaluations, and elicit greater support within their communities.”

(Carr, 2022, and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023)

# Methods

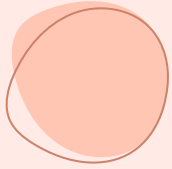
- Phenomenological Approach
- Dyad Interviewing
- Acknowledge Hardship
- Shared Experiences
- Participants & Recruitment
- Data Collection & Management
- Trustworthiness & Rigor



# Interview Questions

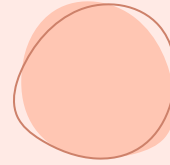
1. Visualize the experience of attending a counseling graduate program during the Covid-19 pandemic. What are some of the details from this experience?
2. What occurred academically (or personally) during this time?
3. How has this experience been for you?
4. What personal strengths did this experience help you discover or grow?
5. How has this experience made you better able to face future challenges in your life?
6. How did this experience help you put your life in perspective & recognize what you value most?
7. How will this experience influence who you are as a future MFT?

# Findings Main Themes & Subthemes



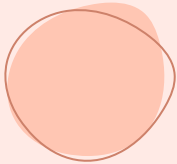
## Reliance on Support Systems

- Commonality in Peers
- Relying on Family Connections



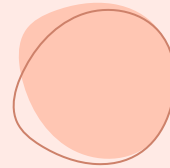
## Growth and Resilience

- No subthemes



## Multiple Perspectives

- Peers Lives Outside of School
- Life is Fragile



## Gratefulness

- No subthemes



# Reliance on Support Systems

“It's kind of like finding that shared commonality with peers about the struggle that you all have, but also, like, finding the support with those peers as well.” - Monica

## Commonality in Peers

“I also feel like it really created a network of support because I met a lot of people through the program where everybody had their own challenges. All the challenges were very different. But it was nice to have that cushion of support and kind of developing these friendships during the program that people you probably wouldn't have met before and just knowing that they were kind of in the same struggles, right?”  
- James

“Family was a very big source, like, a big strength for me, a very big source of support.” - Monica

## Relying on Family Connections

I also think too just during the pandemic, having that time with my family too, especially my grandfather also helped build me up a lot.” - James

# Growth and Resilience

## **Monica:**

“I also feel like ... resilience it's just making up my mind that I was going to get it done. I was going to keep looking forward regardless of whatever struggle I was facing in that moment. There were times that I was kind of battling myself, like, do I really want to do this? It's right now, the right time. Should I just wait? I feel like there was every excuse in the book to put it off a little bit. I guess I feel like being stubborn with myself and just, like, no, why wait? Regardless of what's going on in the world through the pandemic or I feel like those were some of the things that kind of got me through just my stubbornness and being, like, resilient and just to keep pushing forward, like trying to persevere, regardless of whatever I was facing in that moment.”

“I feel like this experience has really highlighted strengths I didn't even know I had. Just like being able to juggle so much and know that I can do well regardless of the pressure I'm under. Just knowing that I can do well and it's going to be okay at the end.”

## **James:**

“Yeah. I also agree a lot with Monica, too, about the idea of kind of, like, getting to know your own body kind of like your own limitations, like what you can do, what kind of like pushing it to and also kind of just like being okay, being okay with the uncomfortability.”

# Multiple Perspectives

“I feel like being sensitive & flexible, right? Like everybody is kind of on a different boat. I feel like this even more so made me just think my mentality is just more flexible working around people & just being open to the fact that everybody is in a different position. Everybody, like my daughter being in class & my daughter would just kind of pop in in the background or my daughter would knock on the door. I think just understanding that even when it looks like somebody has it together on screen or in person, there's a lot going on that we have no idea about. And just being sensitive to that. I feel like even though for us, it was virtual, it just opened my eyes to the real world. Somebody can walk into my office one day & just seem like everything's fine & we don't really know what's going on. I feel like just being more flexible & more sensitive to different situations or different positions that people are in different circumstances.” - Monica

“There's a whole each person has their own world, own reality, own rules that they kind of, like go by, & so you're kind of joining that person & becoming a part of that world with them. I guess what I'm taking away from this & going out to the world is the idea of how you're kind of, like I guess you're very connected & you can also respect that connection too. And, like, appreciate that connection that you have with the other person & helping. It's not like you help them, but it's more of, like, a team, I guess. Like, you're working with a team anytime you're interacting with someone that's kind of how I see it.” - James

Peers Lives  
Outside of  
School

# Multiple Perspectives cont.

## Life is Fragile

“Just being grateful & kind of like it put into perspective that life is like super fragile & can really change overnight. I feel like it made me more grateful for continuing to wake up when I was hearing of people passing or family members who got really ill or lingering symptoms of Covid & it just made me more grateful. Just really put into perspective how things can change overnight.” - Monica

“What I really thought of during my time at this program was, & especially during the pandemic, was this idea that you kind of only get to live one life. You have this limited time on Earth & so you can spend that time how you want & get out the most meaning now with it, but live every moment, moment by moment. Kind of like how we say in single session, it's like the last session. Treat it like as it's the last. You can treat every moment like as if it's the last moment. That doesn't mean like live 'yolo,' live, like there's no tomorrow. But it's kind of like that idea of respecting & appreciating all that time that you're having.” - James

# Gratefulness

“It just made me just more grateful ... It made me more grateful that my chronic illness was not in a place where it was like, my body was still strong enough to get me through. It makes me even more grateful for that. Even though I struggle with chronic illness, that I was in a place where my body was still taking care of me, knowing that it could have been worse. So I just feel like it made me value a lot of the things that I took for granted before.” - Monica

“In terms of gratitude, I think I learned how to do gratitude. I remember when I was young, I always did gratitude in kind of like a forced way. The idea of like, I need to think of 10 things I'm grateful for today every single day. Sometimes it rubbed off on me the wrong way, where it felt forced. For me, gratitude is something that should be done naturally. It should be like a very natural thing to do rather than a forced thing to do. And that helps not just with your gratitude, but also like kind of like your own authenticity as a person, so you can kind of like mix those two together. For me, wanting to be grateful in a natural way, I think was what really helped me throughout the time and the pandemic as well.” - James

# Reflections

After completing the intervention, we asked our participants how the conversation was for them. Monica shared with us: “this conversation has made me speak out loud things I am grateful for and strengths that I might have known but don’t speak out ... this is not an everyday conversation you have with people, and it makes me aware of all the good things.” James followed up by saying, “ these kinds of conversations have me stop and reevaluate life ... and allow you to learn about yourself.”

# Post Interview

We offered Monica and James some resources at the end of the interview, such as the Virtual Hope Box, a smartphone application created by Veteran Affairs, as a resource at the end of the intervention. We shared with them that when they need some hope, they can utilize the app and select “distract me,” “inspire me,” “relax me,” or “coping tools.” Lastly, we gave our participants each a \$15 Starbucks electronic gift card as an appreciation of gratitude to thank them for offering their time to have this conversation with us.

Thank you!

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