

Amplify: Chrissy Teigen's very public miscarriage brings pregnancy loss out of the shadows. It's about time

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PUBLISHED 2 DAYS AGO


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Chrissy Teigen and John Legend are seen inside the hospital after pregnancy complications that led to the death of their baby son in this undated picture obtained from social media.

CHRISSEY TEIGEN/REUTERS

Angela Pacienza is The Globe and Mail's executive editor.

The first time it happened we were celebrating Liv's 2nd birthday.

We were sitting at our kitchen table, just the three of us. She had a little chocolate cupcake with pink sprinkles in front of her. My husband and I looked on with delight as she smashed her tiny fingers into the icing. Her highchair tray was a goopy mess. We snapped photos and cheered her on. Our sweet princess.

Then I felt a sudden wetness down there and went to the bathroom.

Only to find a bright red splatter.

Off I went to emergency, alone. It was kiddo's bedtime and we didn't have anyone to call on to relieve us of storytime. At least no one we wanted to explain why to.

The confirmation came devastatingly quickly via a compassionate young ER doctor. "Get some rest, okay?" she said encouragingly, her half-smile overtaken by her sad eyes.

This week's news that Chrissy Teigen and John Legend lost a baby was met by some with deep sympathy and others revulsion. The couple was accused of being self-indulgent over-sharers.

Talking about the loss of a baby is brave. It normalizes something that happens to far more people than we realize. It's nothing to be ashamed of.

And yet miscarriages remain a taboo subject.

My first pregnancy was so easy that it didn't occur to me the second would be anything but.

It never occurred to me because no one I trusted ever talked to me about the possibility. I thought miscarriages and stillbirths were super rare.

I was wrong. Very wrong. According to the Society of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists of Canada, as many as one in five pregnancies ends in miscarriage.

Years later I told a friend about my miscarriages (yes, multiple). She said she'd had three. I told another friend. She'd had one too. We both said we wished we'd known so we could have been there for each other. We recalled hiding it from family and colleagues (I called in sick saying I had a stomach ache).

"I couldn't help but feel that my miscarriage was a biological failure – that my body let me down in the one thing it was built to do," a coworker told me. "And so, even though I know it's ridiculous, I didn't tell a soul."

Over the years I learned I was part of a club that was, in fact, quite huge. As Georgina Blanchard wrote in this hauntingly beautiful Walrus piece about her son Charlie, who was stillborn: "Perhaps the most surprising thing I learned was the size of the dead baby club that I suddenly found myself in."

And yet, still, we're uncomfortable talking about it. We continue to hide it. We are ashamed. We think we did something wrong. Or that our bodies

don't work properly. Or perhaps we worry that talking about death will jinx things.

“Society does not like to hear from us castaway mothers,” Jen Gunter, the world's most famous OB, wrote in The New York Times. “You may not even know that your friend or cousin or even your own mother lost a baby before or shortly after birth. That is how secret we have learned to be. Our grief carries shame and stigma. Do you wonder if it is our fault? Are you worried it is contagious? Is it just too much for you to imagine what we bear?”

So we put it in a box and lock it tight. And when it happens again, shock is piled on top of devastation. We grieve in private.

This isn't anything new. There have been dozens and dozens of articles written about how we hide miscarriages. As the executive editor of The Globe and Mail I've read plenty of them, and try to make sure we break down taboo subjects in our coverage.

But on a personal level, we just aren't talking enough about the particular loss women feel after miscarriage and stillbirth. In some ways, I think we just don't always know how. As Alexandra Kimball wrote in her moving Globe piece about her own experience: “There are words for other kinds of woman: bride, mother, widow. But there's no real term for a woman who has been pregnant and then is not. Unpregnant: This is the best label I could come up with.”

And let's not forget that fathers are also affected by miscarriage and stillbirth. “The entire arc of the miscarriage, from conception to loss, occurs within the female body,” writes Charles Feng in the Washington Post. “I had an ancillary role in the pregnancy, so I wasn't sure I even had a

right to feel devastated.” Therapy and reflection helped him come to this conclusion: “It’s not only my wife’s loss – it’s our loss, together.”

As a society we need to more openly share and talk about this kind of loss. We need to grieve together.

Teigen and Legend brought us into their world and invited us to grieve with them. We shouldn’t judge them for expressing their grief. They have given many of us an opening to talk about it.

What else we’re thinking about:

I love this podcast I recently discovered, [How to Talk to \[Mami e Papi\] About Anything](#), covering all the awkward, difficult conversations adult children, like me, have with their immigrant parents. Episodes include sticky subjects like convincing parents COVID-19 is real, work-life balance and racism. A recent favourite was how to talk to your parents about their wills, an uncomfortable conversation I just had with my 74-year-old father.

Inspired by something in this newsletter? If so, we hope you’ll amplify it by passing it on. And if there’s something we should know, or feedback you’d like to share, send us an e-mail at amplify@globeandmail.com.

