

MAY 2025



HUNGERFORD
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*02 Out of the Darkness and Into the Light:
A Series of Postpartum Stories*

HILLARY MILLER, TESSA KEENA, AND EMILY PASZKOWSKI

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DEI NEWSLETTER

May is Mental Health Awareness Month — and within it, Maternal Mental Health Awareness.

Welcoming a child is often filled with joy, but it can also bring unexpected emotional, physical, and mental challenges. These experiences don't always get talked about, but they are deeply real — and more common than many realize.

Whether you've lived it yourself, walked alongside a partner, or supported a loved one through it — or even if this is something you've yet to face — we believe in the importance of making space for these conversations. Awareness today can become comfort, wisdom, or support tomorrow.

*In the spirit of awareness, healing, and hope,
we are sharing some personal stories —
raw, honest, and full of grace —
in the hope they may help someone feel less alone.*





01

“HOW WAS MATERNITY LEAVE?”

I'd love to say it was rainbows and butterflies; that it was focused on bonding with my baby girl and in my free time, I was able to recover my own body and relax. After all, that's what maternity leave is for, right?

Well, that wasn't exactly my experience. I'm not saying I didn't get to do any of those things in some capacity, but some factors weighed so heavily on me, my focus on those things was a little blurry. When people would ask me, I'd usually avoid answering in a way that sounded ungrateful and instead say something like, “We just love our baby girl so much.” It wasn't a lie. We do love Liliana beyond words, but here's the rest of the story...

I cried almost every day. Instead of being able to cuddle with my baby girl while she slept, I hooked up to a machine. I avoided seeing family and friends. I gained more weight post-partum than I did during my pregnancy. I couldn't sleep.

My pregnancy was a “breeze”. I considered myself to be a very healthy, non-geriatric, pregnant woman (but seriously we need to change the term geriatric for pregnant women over 35!). My husband and I read many What to Expect When Expecting books and signed up for all of the in-person classes – The Birth Experience, Breastfeeding 101, Car Seat Safety, etc. I planned and wanted so badly to breastfeed. I saw this as an honor and a privilege to provide for my daughter. And something only mom gets to do, another special bond with our babies. What a woman's body can do is truly amazing.

I had a natural birth with no complications. We had a beautiful and healthy baby girl, Liliana Josephine. I wanted to be kind and give thanks to my body for her because, as you know, some women struggle to get pregnant and aren't even able to get to that point. But I wasn't grateful to my body during maternity leave. I hated it with every ounce of my being. I'd never known so much hatred. Even after it gave me this beautiful and healthy baby girl. Because I never produced enough milk to fully provide for her. I felt like a failure to her and to her father. And to all the women who breastfed. And to myself, who will question for the rest of my life, "Why couldn't I?" "What can I do differently next time?" "What did I do wrong?" We'll never have those answers.

We gave birth at the Women's Center at Butterworth. Of course, Corewell encourages breastfeeding. For infants, it reduces the risk of various illnesses and diseases, improves digestion, and supports healthy brain development. For mothers, breastfeeding aids in postpartum weight loss, reduces the risk of certain cancers, and promotes a strong bond with baby. Lili was passing her meconium during our recovery time in the hospital, which led us to believe I was producing an adequate amount of colostrum (earliest stage of breastmilk), her latch was good, and my milk would "come in" soon. Typically, this happens by day 5. The best way to gauge how much milk baby is getting from mom is through wet and dirty diaper counts. So, we took our handy worksheet home that we were told to use to track these and were instructed to contact our pediatrician if she didn't have enough. Day 1 at home went by. Day 2. No dirty diapers.



Our first pediatrician visit came. She told us Lili was very dehydrated and not getting enough milk and we needed to supplement with formula. I held back the tears as I thought to myself what a terrible mother I was for starving Lili. She was hurting. I told the nurse I didn't want to introduce an artificial nipple yet because it can interrupt natural breastfeeding. She said I could use a syringe of formula instead of a bottle before or after breastfeeding. She said to do this for a few days, then come back so we could do a weighted feed to see how much milk Liliana was getting from me. So, we did.

We went in for our follow-up on day 7 to see if my milk had sufficiently come in. Lili was still dehydrated and not back up to her birth weight. My milk still hadn't come in yet. The doctor said we needed to introduce a full bottle of formula, and I should start pumping. Triple feeding is what she called it. Pump for 10 minutes. Breastfeed for 20 minutes. Pump for 20 minutes. Then while I was pumping, dad gave baby her bottle of formula. This was to be done around the clock each time Lili gave me feeding cues. It's no wonder that triple feeding has led women to psychotic breaks. We did this for a week.

Next visit (our 2-week visit) to the lactation consultant, we were happy to learn that with a bottle Lili had surpassed her birth weight. However, my own milk production still hadn't increased. Lili was exerting so much effort into such little milk from me, she was falling asleep or getting fussy while feeding.

Baby was almost fully relying on formula at this point. The Lactation consultant said there was not much else we could do because there isn't anything wrong with the baby's latch, and two weeks have passed since delivery. That wasn't something I was willing to accept.

I took it upon myself to research. I found many stories of women who had a similar problem and were able to get their milk to come in even after one month from the date of birth. So, I did what they did. I rented the hospital-grade pump from Corewell that plugged into the wall. I set my alarm for every two hours, day and night. I pumped for 20 minutes every time the alarm went off, plus a "power hour". I took 6 supplements a day- sunflower lecithin, Liquid Gold, brewer's yeast, fenugreek, Upspring Milk Flow, and Body Armor. I bought every lactation cookie and protein bar under the sun. I spent 3+ hours a day/night hooked up to the pump, staring at the drops trickling into the container. Forcing a few more minutes for a few more drops. Crying over Tik Toks of women storing bricks of breastmilk to sustain their baby well past 6 months. I wasn't even focused on bonding with my baby and spending time with her because I was so concerned about my supplements and pumping schedule. Constant mental math, crying over every spilled drop, the amount of time spent cleaning pump parts and sanitizing -- the most milk I ever produced was 10 ounces a day and that was on a good day. Lili was drinking 30 ounces a day. This went on for two months.

My husband knew I wasn't doing well. I was living in a haze. He kept trying to encourage me to keep going because some breastmilk was better than no breastmilk. I don't blame my husband. He couldn't understand what I was feeling. We decided that if my milk production stayed the same, it was worth it, but if it started to decrease, I would stop. Sure enough, it started to decrease. I sometimes wonder if my mental status had the largest effect on this more than anything else. I was so conflicted. I didn't want to let Joe or Lili down by stopping, but I was not living. I was not, in my mind, being a good mom, even though what I was doing was for my baby girl.

I found peace with the decision to stop pumping. I focused on being with my sweet girl. We fell into a good routine. We started seeing friends and family. I started finding the time to move and recover my own body. And then it was time to go back to work. It felt like it was starting all over again. And I wasn't even breastfeeding or pumping at this point!

I want to honor all of you at the firm and your spouses who have gone through any version of this story. You are magical. Moms are seriously out-of-control amazing for breastfeeding/pumping for ANY period of time.

Saying it is hard, is an understatement. And for those who use/used formula- your baby loves it and you. Just sayin'! Everyone's feeding journey and experience are different, and that's OK.

*At the end of the day, we love
our children and want only for
them to be happy and healthy.
That is what truly matters.*



The light shines
in the darkness,
and the darkness
has not overcome it.

– John 1:5

TESSA KEENA



02

MY JOURNEY THROUGH POSTPARTUM DEPRESSION, BREASTFEEDING GRIEF, AND THE HEALING POWER OF FAITH AND COMMUNITY

I have always been the kind of person who sees the glass half full — or as I like to say, overflowing. I have always been able to look for the smile after the tears, the rainbow after the storm, the lesson found inside the hardest moments in life. Despite overcoming life-threatening health scares and many life challenges, unexplained sadness and depression was something that happened to other people, not me.

Until it didn't...

Six weeks after giving birth, I sat in the exam room, filling out the Edinburgh Postnatal Depression Survey:

- I have felt sad or miserable — Yes.
- I haven't been coping as well as usual — Yes.
- I have been so unhappy that I have had difficulty sleeping — Yes.

Each answer peeled back a layer of pain and uncertainty. I wasn't okay — and I didn't know how to fix it.

I learned through my journey that approximately 1 in 5 women experience postpartum depression (PPD), though the numbers can vary based on social and medical factors. Symptoms can include sadness, hopelessness, guilt, irritability, changes in sleep or appetite, and difficulty bonding with the baby. Risk factors include hormonal shifts, stress, sleep deprivation, lack of support, and traumatic birth/labor experiences.

The pandemic amplified many of these factors — increased isolation and social media pressures made things harder. I also learned that PPD doesn't only affect mothers. About 1 in 4 new fathers also experience symptoms, though many go undiagnosed. Women of color often face even greater barriers to care and diagnosis, underscoring the urgent need for awareness, advocacy, and culturally sensitive support.

This pregnancy was a miracle — my second full-term journey after more than 13 years of infertility, two ectopic pregnancies, and endometrial cancer. I had mourned. I had feared. But I always found glimpses of hope. I was strong, independent — the one others leaned on in their storms.

This time was different.

I entered a darkness I couldn't see past — a weakness and hopelessness I had never known. I couldn't explain it. I couldn't escape it.

Many women I spoke to shared their own experiences with postpartum depression. Each story was unique. For me, it was the crushing weight of stress, hormone imbalance, severe sleep deprivation, breastfeeding struggles, and the added responsibility of being my mother's primary caregiver as she declined with Alzheimer's and dementia.

I had been unable to fully breastfeed my first daughter more than 20 years earlier — only managing to pump half of what she needed. This time, I prayed it would be different. Our daughter was born healthy and beautiful. She latched well, and I had access to lactation consultants — something I hadn't had before.

At first, we were concerned about jaundice and her slow weight gain, but thankfully it wasn't serious. Still, those first few nights at home were a fog of exhaustion and tears. I didn't want to give her formula — not because I was told not to, but because I believed it was my job to nourish her. When my husband made a late-night trip to buy formula, it felt, to me, like the beginning of the end.

Then came a whisper of hope — a phone call from the lactation consultants. Even in the darkness, God's presence shone through. They encouraged me to attend a breastfeeding support group. It was the only time I left the house, other than for pediatric appointments. I showed up in a baseball cap, no makeup, barely holding it together — but I showed up.

I also connected with a lactation consultant through our firm's employee assistance program. She offered one-on-one coaching, virtually and in person. I tried everything — supplements, special foods, pumping. Weeks passed, and nothing changed. I felt defeated. I questioned my ability to care for my daughter. I didn't trust my instincts. I second-guessed every decision. I reached out to friends constantly; afraid I'd do something wrong.

I couldn't give up on my dream to breastfeed, but it was tearing me apart. I isolated myself in my determination, sinking deeper into the shadows. Eventually, my husband and I made the decision to stop nursing and just pump. I hoped I could at least give her some of the milk I longed to provide.

Then came the final blow.

Early on, I had asked the pediatrician to check for a tongue tie. She said everything looked fine. But a month later, the doctor reversed her diagnosis: our daughter did have a tongue tie. We got a second opinion, and the new pediatrician found not only tongue tie, but lip and buccal (cheek) ties as well. Within a week, we got her into a pediatric dentist, and they performed the laser revision that same day.

I'll never know if that was the reason breastfeeding didn't work. But it hurt — deeply — to feel that the system failed us. That I was failed.

All of this was unfolding while I was also caring for my mother, whose Alzheimer's was progressing. It was as if her decline accelerated after the baby was born.

I was mourning her mental loss while navigating my own. We took away her car, hired a caregiver, and tried to manage her needs while balancing my own circumstances.

After a ten-hour hospital visit with my mom, I came home too exhausted to pump. My husband was in Europe. I was alone with a newborn and caring for my mother. Friends and family stepped in to support, but that moment marked the end of my pumping journey.

In the stillness of that season — when my joy felt far, and darkness pressed in — I clung to the only certainty I had left: God's light.

"The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it." (John 1:5)

Even when the nights were long and my heart felt hollow, His promise remained — steady, undefeated, unshaken.

Alongside the truth of God's protection, I had another lifeline: a faithful community. Friends and family who lifted me up when I could not stand. They prayed over me, encouraged me, showed up for me — often when I didn't have the strength to ask. I will never forget their kindness. Healing often begins in community, and I'm forever grateful for mine!

I recently listened to a podcast episode titled "The Climb Out of Pain is Taller Than Everest," featuring climber and photographer Cory Richards. As I reflected on my own journey, three truths from that conversation stayed with me:

Healing requires agency. It's not passive. It asks us to take ownership of our stories, even when they feel too heavy to hold.

Healing requires discomfort. We must sit with the pain, not run from it. This isn't easy — and I can't say I did it perfectly — but I knew it was necessary. I pray that my experience might one day be light for someone else's path.

Healing requires courage. It invites us to imagine a life not just restored but rebuilt. I began to recognize the ways I was holding myself hostage — how my inner pain was spilling out onto those around me. I asked God for wisdom, for strength, and for a new way forward.

When I returned to work after maternity leave, I gave myself permission to ease into it slowly. Each week, I felt a little stronger. With the love of my community, the anchoring of my faith, and the grace to take small steps, I began to find my footing — and eventually, my joy.

I'm not the same Tessa I was before. But maybe that's a good thing.

I am more deeply aware of what it means to walk through fire and come out whole. I rejoice in the miracle of our daughter's life. I give thanks for the grace that carried me through the dark. And I honor this new season of motherhood with compassion for all it has cost — and all it has given.

Our daughter is healthy, thriving, and loved. And so am I.



EMILY PASZOWSKI



03

CARRYING THE LIGHT FORWARD

I was overjoyed when I found out Tessa was pregnant—I actually cried in front of an entire conference room full of people. So, when she gave birth to her sweet daughter, I was counting down the days until I could check in, see how Tessa was doing, and meet the newest Keena.

But weeks passed, and despite my efforts to connect, Tessa wasn't ready to see me. At first, I didn't understand. She saw a few other people, so why not me? I'll be honest — part of me felt hurt and confused.

It wasn't until I finally got her on the phone that I realized something was deeply wrong. Her voice lacked its usual energy. She sounded uncertain, like she didn't fully trust herself to care for her baby. The spark I had always known in her was missing, and there was a weight in her words I couldn't shake.

That's when it started to click—this wasn't just exhaustion or new-mom overwhelm. Tessa was struggling with postpartum depression. She wasn't herself, because depression had taken hold.

That experience opened my eyes to how complex and isolating the postpartum period can be—not just for the parent, but for those who care about them. And it helped me reflect on my own postpartum experience after delivering my twins.

My journey looked different, but I still felt the weight. The moment we brought the boys home, the silence of the house was deafening compared to the constant presence of NICU staff who had supported us 24/7 for months. I was overwhelmed. I felt isolated. And although I loved my babies fiercely, I didn't fully trust that I knew what I was doing. It's a frightening thing to feel unsure in your own motherhood.

It's because of my experience and witnessing Tessa's experience that I've become so passionate about spreading the word of MomsBloom and their mission.

MomsBloom steps into that fragile space after birth with compassion and purpose. They provide companionship that cuts through loneliness, and action-oriented support—someone to hold the baby so you can shower, help with laundry, or give the older kids the attention they're craving. They are also trained to screen for postpartum depression and anxiety, making sure no family slips through the cracks unnoticed.

Because no one should have to face those early days alone. And sometimes, just having someone show up and say, "You're doing okay. I'm here," can make all the difference.

If you know someone who has recently had a baby, there are simple but powerful ways to help:

- **Do: Be direct.** Ask, "When can I bring you a meal?" or "When can I watch the baby so you can rest?"
- **Don't: Be vague.** Saying "Let me know if you need anything" often leaves the burden on the mom to reach out — and she may not have the strength to.
- **Do: Respect her boundaries** and keep checking in.
- **Don't: Take it personally** if she withdraws.
- **Do: Listen without judgment.**
- **Don't: Compare** her experience to yours or others'.
- **Do: Educate yourself** on signs of postpartum depression and anxiety. Encourage professional support if needed.
- **Don't: Ignore signs of crisis.** Early help saves lives.

If you are reading this and find yourself standing in that same darkness I once knew, I want you to know:

You are not broken.

You are not alone.

Reach out. Speak up. Trust that healing is possible.

The darkness has not overcome you — and it never will.

"Even the longest nights end with sunrise."

We hope that these stories remind you of the power of honesty, the importance of checking in on one another, and the strength found in shared experience. No one should have to walk through the postpartum season — or any mental health struggle — in isolation.

If you or someone you love is navigating a similar journey, please don't hesitate to seek help. Below, you'll find links to supportive organizations like MomsBloom, educational resources, and ways to offer real-life help to parents in the vulnerable days after birth.

HELPFUL RESOURCES LOCATED ON FINAL PAGE



JOIN NOW

BOOK CLUB

E-MAIL
KERRY!

Killers of the Flower Moon: The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI by David Grann

Overview: A nonfiction work that follows a series of murders in the 1920s of wealthy people of the Osage Nation. The newly formed FBI investigated the murders.

Timing: We plan to start the discussion the week following Memorial Day weekend (the week of May 26) and wrap up with a meeting the week of July 7, followed by a viewing of the 2023 film adaptation.

Format: We're changing things up this time around. Instead of regular meetings, we will be sharing discussion questions via Webex every week. Hopefully, that allows everyone interested to participate despite summer schedules.

Books: Matt is working to reserve as many copies as he can through the Kent District Library if readers would like to borrow a copy. Readers can also reserve their own copies. It is also available at your favorite bookstores and websites. It was published in 2017, so it should be easy to find. It also appears to be available in audiobook formats.

MAY

Mental Health Awareness Month
Asian American & Pacific Islander Heritage Month
Jewish American Heritage Month
Haitian Heritage Month
Indian Heritage Month
National Speech-Language-Hearing Month
Older Americans Month

May 1 – National Day of Prayer
May 5 – National Day for Awareness of Missing and Murdered
Indigenous Women and Girls
May 5 – Cinco de Mayo
May 12 – Vesak (Buddha Day)
May 15 – Global Accessibility Awareness Day
May 17 – International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and
Biphobia
May 17 – Armed Forces Day
May 21 – World Day for Cultural Diversity
May 28 – Ascension of Baha'u'llah (Baha'i)

JUNE

LGBTQ+ Pride Month
National Caribbean American Heritage Month
Black Music Month

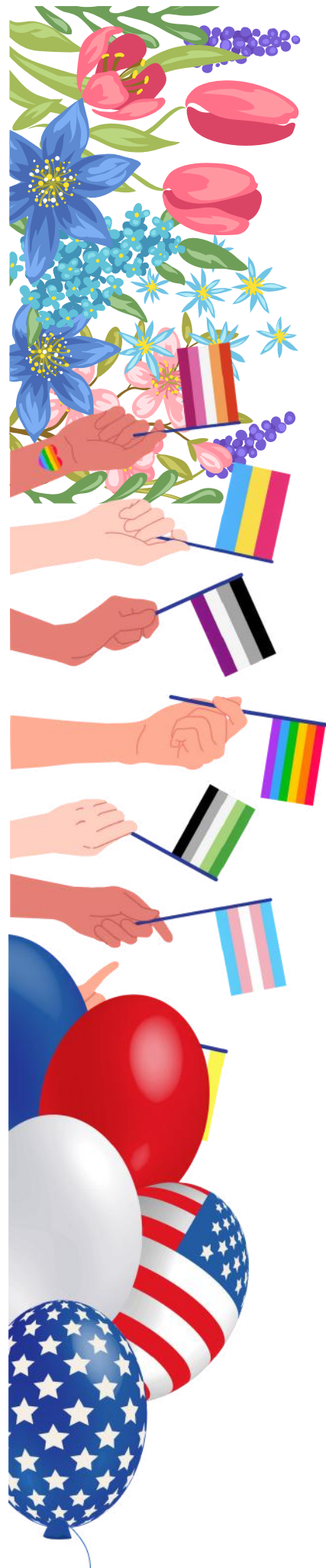
June 2-3 – Shavuot (Jewish)
June 7-10 – Eid al-Adha (Islamic)
June 12 – Loving Day
June 12 – Philippines' Independence Day
June 12-13 – Shavuot (Jewish)
June 18 – International Day of Countering Hate Speech
June 19 – Juneteenth
June 28 – Pride Day

JULY

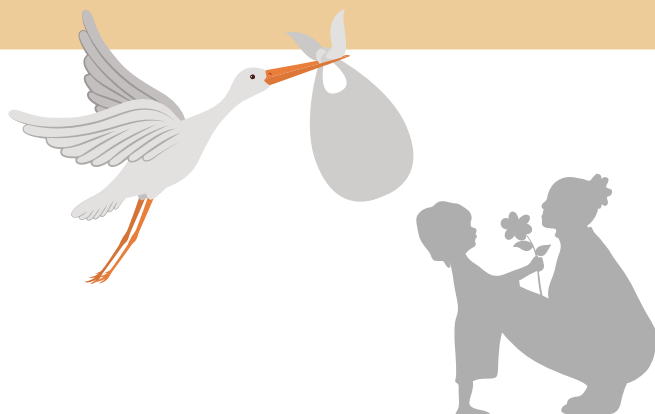
Disability Pride Month
French American Heritage Month
BIPOC Mental Health Awareness Month
South Asian Heritage Month (July 18 – August 17)
July 4 – Independence Day
July 9 – Martyrdom of the Bab (Baha'i)
July 14 – Bastille Day
July 18 – Nelson Mandela International Day
July 24 – Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Pioneer Day
July 26 – National Disability Independence Day
July 30 – International Day of Friendship

BROWSE

<https://www.experiencegr.com/events>
<https://www.holland.org/events>
<https://www.stjoetoday.com/events>
<https://www.visitmuskegon.org/events>



RESOURCES



POSTPARTUM & MATERNAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT

Postpartum Support

International (PSI)

postpartum.net

24/7 Helpline: 1-800-944-4773 (Call or Text)
Support for moms, dads, partners, and providers, including peer support groups and provider referrals.

MomsBloom

momsbloom.org

In-home postpartum support, companionship, and advocacy. Helps reduce isolation and provides hands-on care during the fourth trimester.

The Blue Dot Project

thebluedotproject.org

Raising awareness of maternal mental health disorders. Offers stories, tools, and social campaigns to reduce stigma.

BREASTFEEDING & LACTATION SUPPORT

Baby Beloved

www.babybelovedinc.com

Offers lactation support and online courses

Le Leche League International

llli.org

Global peer-led breastfeeding support groups and expert resources.

KellyMom

kellymom.com

Evidence-based information on breastfeeding, parenting, and maternal health.

Lactation Network

lactationnetwork.com

Connects families with insurance-covered lactation consultants for one-on-one care.

Pediatric Dentist / Tongue Ties

pdsofwestmi.com

[Breastfeeding and Tongue Ties | Gold Coast Doula's](#)

Information and evaluation for lip, tongue, and buccal (cheek) ties

FOR PARTNERS, FRIENDS, AND FAMILY

Kent & Ottawa County Resources

- [MomsBloom Resources](#)

- List of resources for recovery, support, therapy, and more

Fathers' Mental Health – PSI Resource

- [Postpartum Support for Dads](#)

- [Paternal Postpartum Depression: PPD in Men & How to Find Help For Dad](#)

- Guidance for partners, including signs to look for and support options.