

**Beyond Gender:
Understanding the Ways Men
and Women Grieve**

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Three Major Goals

- To Discuss and Differentiate Grieving Styles (Martin & Doka)
- To Apply the Concept of Grieving Styles to Family Systems
- To Explore Implications for Counselors

Biography of a Concept I

- Father's Death
- CPE
- Dennis Ryan's chapter in *Disenfranchised Grief*

The Myth of Men and Grief

- Emotionally Unexpressive
- Unable to Relate

Simply put there is only one way to grieve. That way is to go through the emotional core of grief. Only by exploring the necessary emotional effects of your loved one's death, can you eventually resolve grief

Staudacher, Men and Grief

The Myth of Men and Grief

Not supported in theory, clinical practice or research

Grief is manifested in many ways

- Physically
- Emotionally
- Cognitively
- Behaviorally
- Spiritually

Grief is a very individual reaction

The need to assess

The Tasks of Grief

- Acknowledge the loss
- Express manifest and latent emotion
- Adjust to a changed life
- Relocate the loss
- Reconstitute faith and philosophical systems challenged by the loss

Worden (Modified)

Biography of a Concept II

- Martin & Doka – ADEC Paper “Take It Like a Man”
- Nichols
- Masculine Vs. Feminine/Conventional

Advantages of Masculine

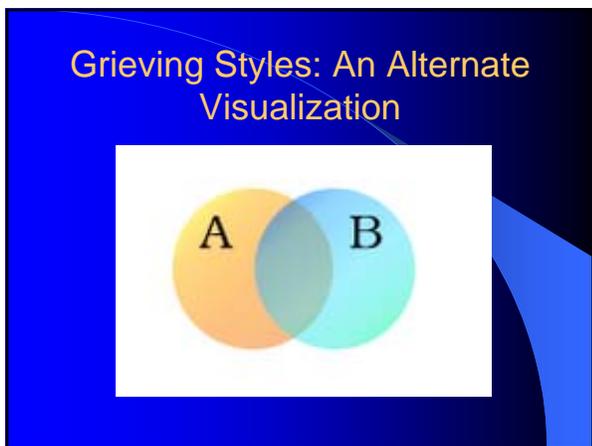
- Theoretical Value
- Related to Gender
- Challenge Concept that Men Were Ineffectual Grievors

Disadvantages of Masculine

- Confusion with Gender
- Perpetuates Stereotypes
- Difficulties of Gender Based Terminology







Intuitive Grief

- Experiences Strong Affective Reactions
- Expression Mirrors Inner Feelings
- Adaptation Involves Expression and Exploration of Feelings

Instrumental Grief

- Experience of Grief Is Primarily Cognitive or Physical
- Grief Often Is Expressed Cognitively or Behaviorally
- Adaptation Generally Involves Thinking and Doing

Instrumental Grief



- “Most contemporary Western philosophies with the possible exception of empiricism, can be understood as instrumental ways to encounter death, loss, and grief” D. Klass

A Question

When instrumental grievers are “doing” their grief, how conscious does the connection to the deceased need to be?

- We believe that the connection does not have to be fully conscious though there often is a connection
- It should be accessible and consistent with the way the energy generated in grief is experienced by the person involved

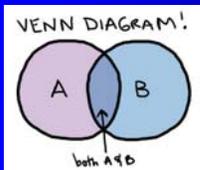


Men's Grief

- Smith suggests that Shakespeare's way of dealing with his grief over the death of his 11-year-old son, Hamnet, was to process his grief in his subsequent plays
- His contemporary, Ben Johnson, composed moving elegies to his two deceased children



Blended Grievors



- Share experiences, expressions and adaptation strategies of both intuitive and instrumental grievers
- Will often have varied experiences and use strategies depending on the relationship to the deceased, the situation experienced, and the time since the loss

Dissonant Grief

Discontinuity in Experience vs.
Expression

Oregon Center for Applied Science

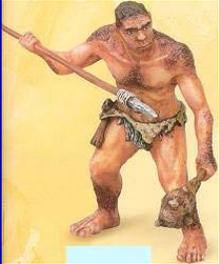
Ways of Portraying Model

- Heart Grievers
- Head Grievers
- Head + Heart
- Head vs. Heart



Grieving Styles Are Influenced By

- Gender
 - Biological?
 - Cultural?
 - Affected by change in gender roles
- Culture
- Temperament
- Other



Grieving Styles in the Life Cycle

- While there is likely to be consistency in a grieving styles, they can change
- During the life cycle some movement toward the poles in adolescence and toward the center in later life is not unusual



Differences – Not Deficiencies

These Styles Exist as General Adaptive Patterns and Can Be Seen in Other Circumstances including the Illness Experience

Each Style Has Its Own Advantages and Disadvantages

Grieving Styles

- With Intuitive – the problem of overwhelming potential support
- The Paradox of Support
- Widowers with strong social support fared well (Silverman & Campbell)
- With Instrumental – the problem of premature problem-solving
- Alcohol and substance abuse – the different reasons persons abuse substances



What about androgynous approaches?

- Schut's research supports the idea that:
 - Men valued from affective approaches
 - Women valued from more cognitive approaches

Disadvantages of Androgyny

- Research was based on gender
- Double burden of androgyny
- Crisis is a poor time to teach new adaptive skills

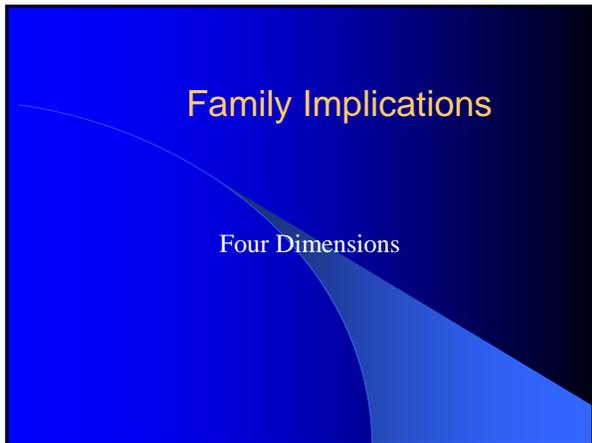
Support for Grieving Styles

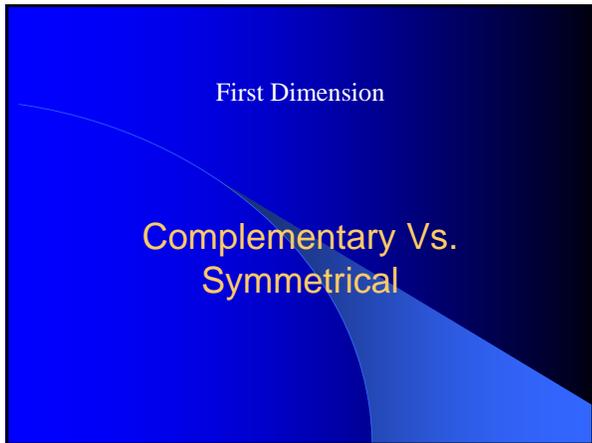
- Theory
 - Grief Reactions and Adaptation
 - Coping Literature
 - Emotion Regulation
- Research
 - Gender (Law of Social Physics)
 - Bonanno, Nolan-Hoeksema
 - Rosenblatt – Cross-Cultural Research
- Clinical Practice
 - Rando
 - Stillion & McDowell

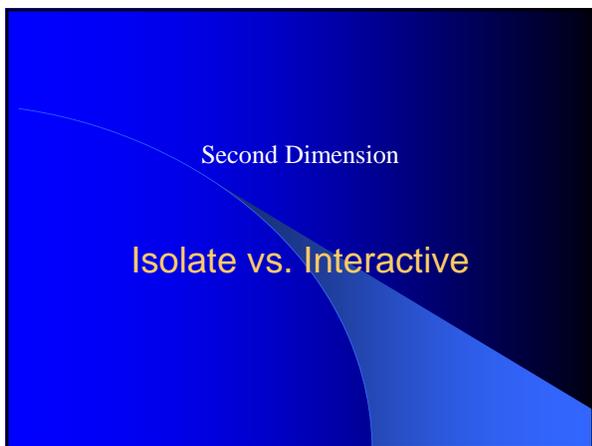
Warning! The Use of Models

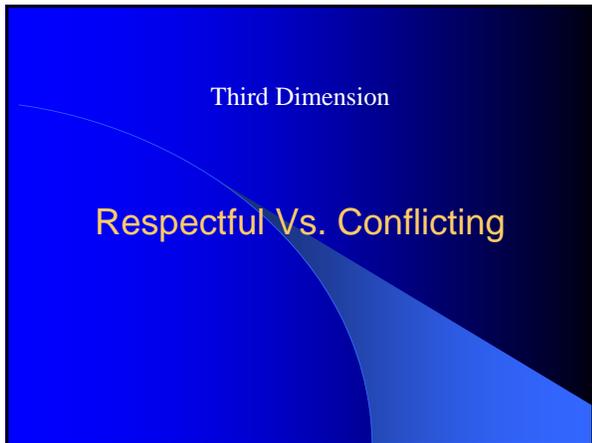
- Models are a tool to understand reality – they should not be confused with reality
- Use models to the extent that they assist you or your client in understanding and responding to a problem
- When they do not – use other models
- “The Chicken George Principle” – *When your plan does not work – get another plan!*

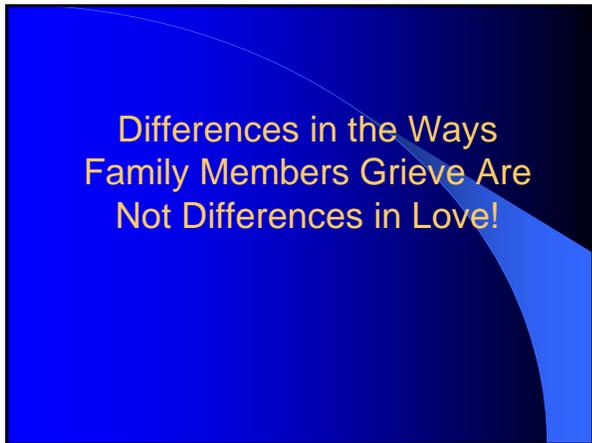














Fourth Dimension

Typical Vs. Atypical
(Culture and Gender)

Working With Families



- Challenge families to acknowledge differences – as differences
 - Illustrate effective models
 - Differences in coping and attraction
 - Challenge inappropriate judgments
 - Take responsibility to meet own needs

Working With Families

- Carefully assess styles and dimensions
- Interview family members individually
- Persons may appear instrumental as they seek to protect other family members
- In effect, they are doing a balancing act – trying to balance their needs with the perception of other's needs



How Can Counselors Help?

Begin with Self

- Acknowledge Different Grieving Styles
- Recognize the Culture of Counseling (Sue & Sue)

Validate Grieving Styles

- Instrumental Grievers (especially early in the grief process)
- Intuitive Grievers (later in the grief process)
- Male Intuitive Grievers
- Female Instrumental Grievers (the most disenfranchised)

Assess – Do Not Assume

- Consistency in history of coping
- Comfort in discussing loss
- Sense of movement in grief
- Assessment instruments



Counseling Approaches

- Avoid the “F” Word
- Use Eclectic Methods – including Expressive Approaches (intentionally)

Counseling Intuitive Grievers

- Traditional Approaches Work Well
- Individual Counseling Can Focus on Expressing and Exploring Affect (within a holistic framework)
- Traditional Support Groups Can Help (within a holistic framework)



Counseling Dissonant Grievors



- Assess Pattern Carefully
- Explore Factors Inhibiting Emotional Expression
- Create a Safe Environment for Expressing Emotion
- Carefully Led and Structured Support Group Can Work especially men's groups

Dissonant Grievors



- Some men can be prone to dissonant patterns of grief
- Dominant male ideology
 - "No sissy stuff" – avoid feminine behaviors
 - "Big wheel" – success and achievement valued
 - "Sturdy oak" – do not show weakness
 - "Give 'em hell" – seek adventure and risk
- Failure to adhere to these norms can create gender role strain (Levant)

Gender Identity and Grief



- Giddens – identity is constantly recreated. Yet, we retain a sense of continuity
- Cairns – The strong feelings of grief can collide with entrenched ideas of masculinity creating a sense of ontological insecurity that threatens identity continuity

Gender Construction



- Movies and other media often portray men grieving stoically or in active ways (*Death Wish*)

Counseling Dissonant Male Grievers

- Assess developmental experiences and socialization experiences in family of origin that inhibited emotional awareness and expression
- Create a safe, connected, equalitarian environment
- Use self-disclosure and model emotional expression
- Use action modalities – body movement, writing etc.
- Strategies may include dosing and private expressions of grief



Counseling Dissonant Female Grievers



- Assess developmental and socialization experiences that might inhibit emotional expression
- Create a safe environment
- Teach strategies of dosing

Dissonant Grief: Case



- Mark, normally a male who copes in a very affective way, now works excessively after his daughter's death. He refuses to discuss his grief or daughter and claims it does no good to "wallow in the past".
- In counseling he expresses the fear that if he encounters his emotion, "the dam will burst"
- In counseling addressed the idea that perhaps the dam has an overflow valve – the value of dosing

Counseling Instrumental Grievors

- Assess
- Traditional Approaches May Not Work Well
- Cognitive Therapies
- Active Approaches
- Therapeutic Metaphors (Carrying a heavy load etc.)
- Psycho-educational approaches – especially the use of books and videos



Instrumental Strategies

Cognitive



- Logical Analysis – breaking the crisis down to manageable units
- Logical restructuring – Benefit finding
- Diversion/Cognitive Distraction
- Information –Seeking
- Humor

Instrumental Strategies

Behavioral

- Problem-Solving
- Physical Activity
- Spiritually-Focused Strategies



Instrumental Strategies

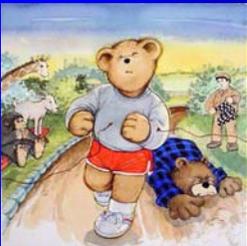
Affective



- Ventilation – in safe places
- Affect Regulation – dosing
- Indirect Ventilation – humor, music etc.
- Remember – Pastels vs. Vivid Colors

Counseling Instrumental Grievors

Motivating Instrumental Grievors



- *Whose needs are being met?*
- An altruistic frame
- A competitive frame

Counseling with Male Instrumental Grievors



- Use styles compatible with the male role such as storytelling
- Recognize that men will move in and out of emotions – often using dosing and humor

Counseling with Male Instrumental Grievors

- Rituals have had an important cultural and historical role with men – such as rites of initiation
- Rituals draw on the need to “do” and offer elements of symbolic control
- For example, building a coffin for a dead cat with one’s son



Counseling with Male Instrumental Grievors



- Reframing strengths
- For example, men take pride in coping with hardship
- *“It might be tough to sit with your wife as she expresses pain – but that could be a helpful sacrifice”*

Counseling Male Clients



- Build on strengths
- Case: Widower focuses on work to the detriment of children.
 - Commend him on ability to care for family in this difficult time
 - Assist him to assess the effect of his work on his children so that he can decide whether he needs to bring in more balance.

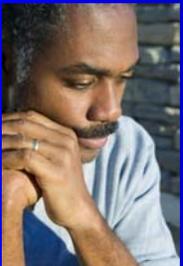
Troyer, *Counseling Widowers*

Counseling Male Clients

- While Levant *et. al* stress dysfunctional elements of male ideology, other, more positive aspects can be utilized
 - Self-sacrifice
 - Protect the weak
 - Courage valued
 - “Take one for the team” – social responsibility and being a team player



Resilient Widowers



- Resilient widowers advice to other widowers
 - Stay active
 - Have interests or develop them
 - Seek companionship
 - Rely on faith

(Moore & Stratton, 2002)

The Value – and Danger – of Internet Support

Instrumental and Dissonant Grievors

- Allows dosing
- Offers information
- Anonymous support
- The danger is that is unregulated – information may be poor, support destructive or exploitive



Utilizing Media in Counseling



- Application of teaching methods
- Value of the familiar to model or engage discussion
- Illustration: *Home Improvement* – model of effective complementary styles, humor, and ritual

Illustration: Support Groups

- Validation
- Ventilation
- Respite and Support
- Learn Coping Techniques
- Hope

Developing Groups for Instrumental Grievers

- Whose needs are being met?
- The importance of needs assessment



Traditional Models May Not Meet the Needs of Instrumental Grievers

- Adventure-Based Groups
- Discussion and Reading Groups
- Educational Seminars
- Informal Groups (Sharing Wives' Recipes)
- Problem-Solving Groups (Parents without Partners)
- Expressive Art Groups

Innovative Ideas

- *Grief at the Bar*
- Chris Hall runs a men's bereavement group that meets at a pub over pizza and beer



Men's Groups

- The Harvard Bereavement study suggested that fathers were best served by offering a group on how to be good single parents – rather than offering emotional support (Worden, 2008)



Innovative Ideas

A Native-American Men's Support Group in a Sweat Lodge

- In a trip to Alaska, the Inupiat – a Native-American Group held a men's grief support group in a sweat-lodge
- Linking the activity with a traditional way that men found healing and support



Counseling Approaches

- Use Methods that Transcend Styles
 - Journal Writing
 - Expressive Approaches
 - Therapeutic Ritual



The Possible Paradox

- Instrumental Grievers Attraction to the Field
- The Culture of Counseling
