

Disenfranchised Grief in the 21st Century: New Problems, New Strategies

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Beyond Feeling Rules

- It is acceptable to grieve the deaths of family members

Not all Losses Are Death Related

A recognition that grief reactions do not necessarily entail death

Secondary Losses
Anticipatory Grief

Transitions inevitably entail loss



Disenfranchised Grief

A loss that cannot be socially sanctioned, openly acknowledged or publicly mourned

Disenfranchised Grief

The Right to Grief

The Dimensions of Disenfranchised Grief

- Sociological
- Intrapsychic (Kauffman)
- Political (Attig)
- Interactional
 - Neimeyer & Jordan “Empathic Failure”

Socio-Political Dimension of Disenfranchised Grief



- Cultural feeling rules assign sympathy to victims considered “above reproach”. This process is influenced by class, race, and ethnicity. (Martin, 2005)

Contexts of Disenfranchised Grief

- Relationship is not recognized
- Loss is not acknowledged
- Griever is not recognized
- Disenfranchised deaths
- Ways individuals grieve

Relationship is not recognized

- Friend
- Ex-spouse
- Lover/partner
- Co-Worker
- Therapist/patient
- Caregiver
- Teacher/coach
- Celebrity

Disenfranchised Grief Sensitivity to Online Relationships

- Online Relationships
- Chat Room Relationships
- Participants in massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG)
- The funeral of Toxik/Chris (Hensley, 2009)



Loss is not acknowledged

- Perinatal loss
- Elective abortion
- Incarceration
- Job loss
- Infertility
- Family abandonment or alienation
- Broken relationships - divorce
- Loss of an animal companion
- Relocation
- Psychosocial loss
- Illness and anticipatory grief

Developmental Losses

- As we age, we may experience a range of losses as we transition to another developmental period
- These losses can be profound as we move to later life but can even be significant as we give up childhood activities and toys to embrace the responsibilities of adolescence and emerging adulthood



Griever is not recognized

- Persons with developmental disabilities
- Persons with mental illness or dementia
- The very young
- The very old

Disenfranchising deaths

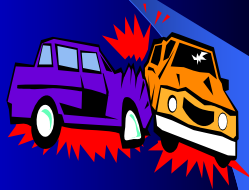
- Homicide
- Executions and Martyrdom
- Suicide (including Assisted Suicide)
- HIV/AIDS

“Devalued” Deaths

- The very old
- Persons with disabilities

Disenfranchised Trauma

- In traumatic events such as car crashes, individuals may grieve over injuries or fatalities even when they are not legally culpable
- Such grief may be disenfranchised by significant others as well as by the demands of an adversarial legal system



Ways individuals grieve

- Cultural aspects
- Styles of grieving

These contexts are neither exclusive nor exhaustive

Disenfranchised Grief in the Lifecycle

Example - Siblings

Caution

- Selected sub-cultures may enfranchise
- Disenfranchisement may vary across time
- Disenfranchisement may vary between cultures or classes

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Culture and Disenfranchised Grief

- Certain sub-cultures may recognize certain losses as important even if these are not always acknowledged within the larger society
- African-Americans and fictive kin
- Hispanics/Latinos and godparents/godchildren

The Degree of Disenfranchisement

Assessing levels and sources of support

All grief becomes disenfranchised over time

The Evidentiary Basis of Disenfranchised Grief

- A number of studies have identified disenfranchised grief in a number of populations including adult children of dysfunctional families, carriers of Huntington's disease, persons with genetic abnormalities, migrants leaving or re-entering, parents of children with disabilities, gay partners, families with AIDS deaths, Nursing Assistants, Families of Death Row inmates
- Verity and Gwyn (2008) found deleterious effects on psycho-social health for disenfranchised grievers
- Thupayagale-Tshwenaegae (2008) and Sobel & Cowen (2003) found heightened depression scores in populations experiencing disenfranchised grief

Possible Complications of Disenfranchised Grief

- Often intensified reactions
- Lack of social support
- Inability to participate in dying process
- Problem of ritual
- Concurrent crises

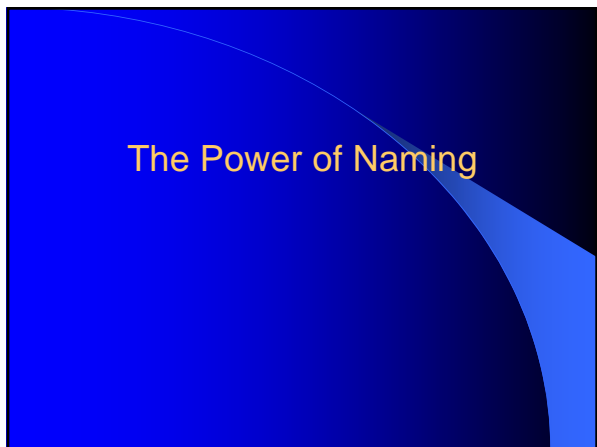
The Paradox of Disenfranchised Grief

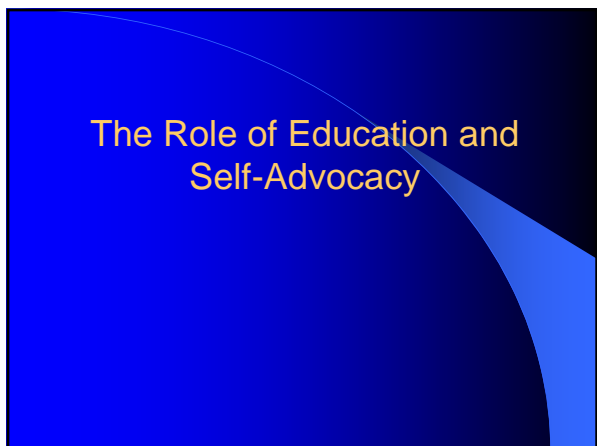
Grief is intensified but the usual social supports are missing

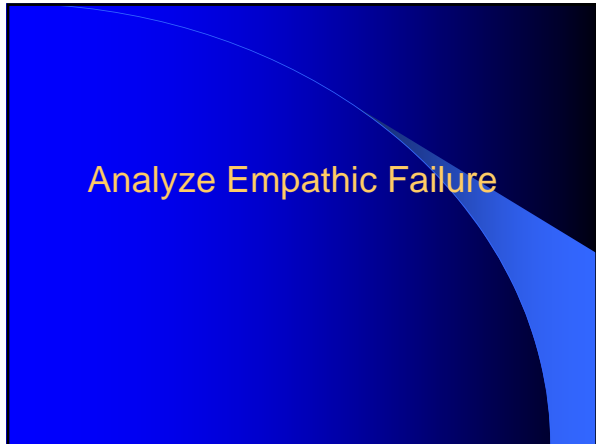
How Can We Help?

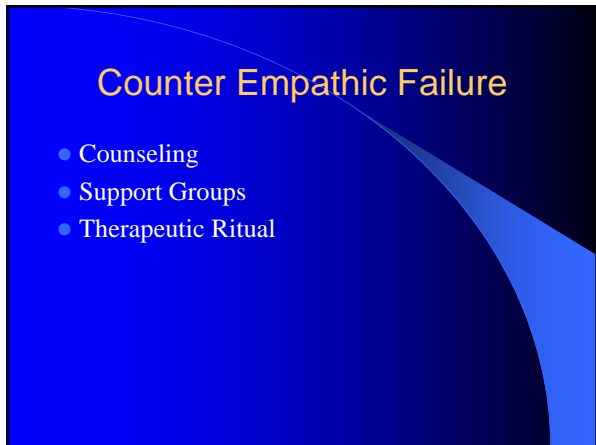
Sensitivity to Loss

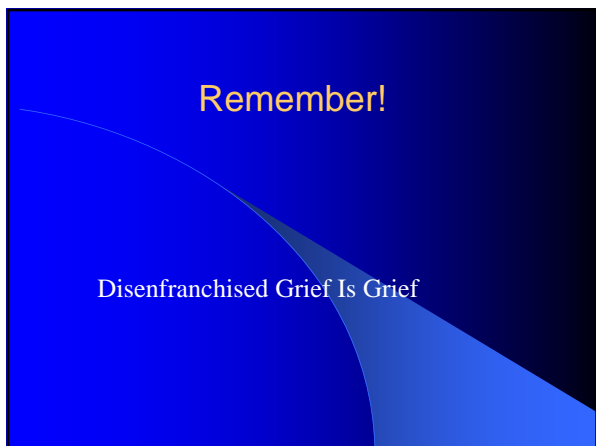












The Value of Support Groups

- Validation
- Ventilation
- Respite and Support
- Learn Coping Techniques
- Hope
- General v. Specific -- Isolation v. Critical Mass
- Critical Mass and Disenfranchised Grief

Ritual and Disenfranchised Grief

The Problem of Ritual in Disenfranchised Grief

- Lack of Meaningful Ritual
- Unintentional Symbolic or Physical Exclusion
- Intentional Exclusion

Utilizing Rituals

- Widening the circle
- The mandate of noninterference – respectful of other mourners
- Creating therapeutic rituals



Therapeutic Ritual

- Continuity
- Transition
- Reconciliation
- Affirmation




Developing Meaningful Rituals

- Emerge from the narrative
- Objects are both visible and symbolic
- Planned and processed
- Use primal elements

Value of Concept of “Disenfranchised Grief”

- Increased sensitivity to dimensions of loss
- A sociological perspective to loss that challenges a solely intrapsychic perspective
- New therapeutic approaches (Neimeyer & Jordan – analyze empathic failure)
- Heuristic Value

Heuristic Value Related Concepts



- Ambiguous Loss (Boss)
- Chronic Sorrow (Roos)
- Nonfinite Loss (Bruce & Schultz)

Criticisms of Concept of “Disenfranchised Grief”

- The cost of enfranchisement (Kamerman)
- The risk of trivializing the definition of grief (Cable)

The Stockholm Syndrome

- We bind quickly in times of stress (Fulton)
- Caregivers experience multiple and cumulative losses
- Caregiver grief can be disenfranchised by others – or self



The Charge of Disenfranchised Grief

Enfranchising the disenfranchised
