Grief

- Grief refers to the interpersonal and personal emotions generated from and associated with the experience of loss (Cicchetti, McArthur, Szirony & Blum, 2016)

Theories of Grief

- Melancholia – Freud (1949) wrote of people experiencing melancholia after someone has died. He believed that people experiencing grief had to work towards emotional detachment or their ongoing grief would be considered pathological (Hill et al., 2018).
- Meaning-making – Frankl (1969) believed that a person's will towards finding meaning helped to maintain mental and physical health and assist in surviving conditions of suffering and grief.
- Attachment – Bowlby (1980) describes attachment as the bond between child and parent that ensures the survival of the infant. Bowlby notes that grief is a similar process of a pained separation response and identifies phases of grief as: numbing; yearning and searching; disorganization, despair; and reorganization.
- Rituals – Lindemann (1944) wrote about group mourning and the importance of generating rituals around death.
- Tasks – Parkes (1975) and Worden (1991) identified tasks that the grieving person needs to work through to integrate grief.
- Dual Process Model – Stroebe and Schutt (1999) explain how grieving people go back and forth between behavior related to experiencing grief and behavior related to adjustments in their lives to live with the absence of their loved one
- Adaptive grieving style – Martin & Doka (2000) identified different grieving styles: Intuitive grievers show grief through affect/emotional expression and desire to talk about the loss and instrumental grievers experience grief in a more cognitive, behavioral, problem-solving
- Disenfranchised grief – Doka (2002) refers to three types of grief categories: the relationship between the bereaved person and the deceased is not acknowledged, the loss itself is not recognized, and/or the griever is excluded

Disenfranchised Grief

- Grief theorists initially worked under the assumption that the losses of the grieving were validated and acknowledged by those around them and the cultural norms of their society (Wilson & Kirshbaum, 2011), however when a loss occurs in a work setting with clients/patients, this loss often goes unrecognized.
- Doka (1987) defined the concept of ‘disenfranchised grief” meaning that people may be unable to share their grief or feel they are not allowed to express it.
- Three main components to Doka’s (2002) concept of disenfranchised grief are these three types of scenarios
  - The relationship between the bereaved person and the deceased is not acknowledged
  - The loss itself is not recognized
  - The griever is excluded

Counselors’ Grief Experiences

- “The death of a client is probably one of the most painful experiences that we will encounter as professionals” (Scofield, 2005, p. 25).
- Personal loss can have a great impact on counselors’ way of thinking, feeling, behaving, and connecting to self and others (Kouriatis & Brown, 2011).
- Counselors are story holders for their clients.
• Counselors cannot recover in the typical ways that people process grief such as participating in shared public rituals. Protecting the confidentiality of the client can limit connectedness to resources and healing experiences.

• Counselor cannot show their grief response at work, as working environments often communicate that emotional issues and self-care occur during personal time.

• When a client dies, the workplace becomes the setting of a clinician’s pain with frequent reminders of the client. Clinicians may feel like they are stuck in emotional limbo with no acceptable place to grieve.

• Because there are implicit expectations and common misconceptions of what grief looks like, people can engage in concealing common aspects of the loss experience (Wortman & Silver, 1989).

• Counselors’ focus on their role as caregiver toward the client may factor in as an aspect of neglecting the value of their own painful experiences in their therapeutic work (Kouriatis & Brown, 2011).

**Art Through Grief**

• The use of symbolism and metaphor can help the counselor alleviate difficult to express feelings while also being able to protect the confidentiality of their client.

• Express stress through metaphor, express professional strengths through imagery/symbolism, express noticing and responding to experiences through imagery, and express mixed feelings in relation to death through imagery (Potash, 2014).

• Making artwork can have a primary purpose of investigation and reconstructing meaning, rather than solely a means of expressing feelings (Rosen & Atkins, 2014; Cornell, 2014).

• Nature imagery can be powerful in grief recovery as symbolic nature imagery “can act as symbolic bridges of personal connection” (Courtney & Mills, 2016, p.19).

**Art & Collage**

• Art is like a research process (Liberati & Agbisit, 2017) because art creation generates new knowledge, creates representation of larger ideas, and ignites new pathways.

• Art helps remove the ego from the experience and this absence of restriction from ego or insecurity allows for a more fully immersive and visceral experience when working with creative media (Williams, 2002).

• Collage process involves gathering image fragments and the re-assemblance into a new arrangement, this can parallel the client’s review and processing of memories as they adjust to their loss.

• Collage creation involves no artistic training, skills, or preconceived notion of how it ‘should look’

• Collage creation can
  - Lessen resistance to creative expression
  - Increase self-efficacy
  - Enable new meaning
  - Create hope towards healing

**Creative Arts in Supervision**

• Since the sole action of making art may not be sufficient for new knowledge generation (Liberati & Agbisit, 2017), supervisors can bear witness to the creation and meaning making of their supervisees

• Through an attachment theory lens, when counselors experience loss and feel alone as they grieve, the supervisee-supervisor relationship and intimacy shared can assist in reorganization and healing

• Creative arts in supervision can
  - Provide a language based on metaphor and imagery as art can ignite a new way to talk about the deceased (Grebin & Vogel, 2007)
  - Conjure depth of emotions and experiences which can lead to more meaningful connections with self and others (Grebin & Vogel, 2007)
• Enliven the emotional, perceptual, and creative world of the supervisee (Newsome, Venderson & Veach, 2005)
• Enhance supervisees' personal awareness (Newsome, Venderson & Veach, 2005)

• Rezenbrink (2004) identifies features such as burnout, compassion fatigue, and vicarious traumatization, as having a detrimental impact on the work of practitioners as well as the practitioner’s well-being.

Considerations

• American culture typically communicates hiding and controlling grief and returning to work rapidly, mourners from other cultures and/or religions may have very different rituals or structure to grief experiences (Kwon, 2016)

• Individual grieving style

• Supervisors will want to be protective of boundaries between supervision and counseling with their supervisees (Newsome, Venderson & Veach, 2005). Using creative interventions in supervision helps send the message that the supervisor is a first line of support for the supervisee. It is appropriate to also provide additional resources to supervisees

• Collage interventions serve the purpose of demonstrating active care, teaching coping skills, and igniting the healing process for the supervisee. Prompts for collage creation can guide supervisees to choose imagery/symbols that address
  • Themes of disenfranchised grief experiences
  • Attachment issues (valued counselor-client relationship, changes to their connection with the client)
  • Complex emotions and thoughts connected to their grief experience
  • Cultural beliefs about death and grief
  • Calm place creation
  • Use of nature-based metaphors (such as the change of season) to demonstrate resiliency, growth, and grounding

• Supervisors will need to save time to allow for reflection and exploration of completed imagery

• Supervisors can integrate ongoing grief resources and creative supervision interventions

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"Last Night"

By David Whyte

Last night they came with news of death not knowing what I would say.
I wanted to say,
“The green wind is running through the fields making the grass lie flat.”
I wanted to say,
“The apple blossom flakes like ash covering the orchard wall.”
I wanted to say,
“the fish float belly up in the slow stream,
stepping stones to the dead.’”
They asked if I would sleep that night,
I said I did not know.
For this loss I could not speak,
the tongue lay idle in a great darkness,
the heart was strangely open,
the moon had gone,
and it was then
when I said, “He is no longer here”
that the night put its arms around me
and all the white stars turned bitter with grief.
References


