

Disenfranchised Grief: Recognizing Hidden Sorrow

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“You know, we’re just not reaching that guy.”

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

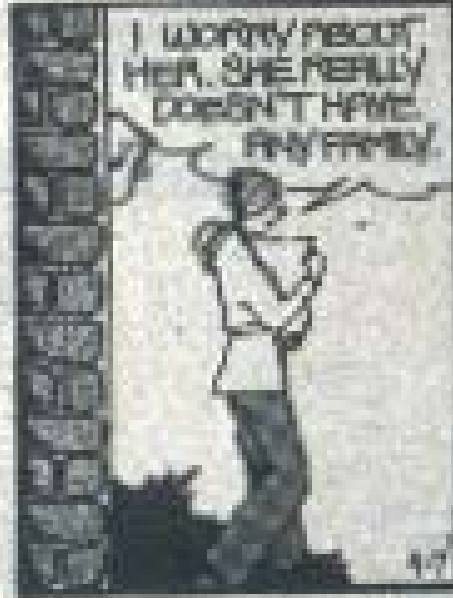


Disenfranchised Grief

Worden's Formulation

Change = Loss = Grief

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE by Lynn Johnston





*My parents don't approve of my new boyfriend. I...
they don't even approve of my husband.*

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

- We can grieve persons we did not even know
- Example –
Grieving a sibling one never knew
(Kempson & Murdock, 2010)



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

Grief in Prison

- *Place* as disenfranchising
- Grief can be highly disenfranchised in prison
- Inability or limits for participation in care or rituals
- Cost of emotional vulnerability
- Likelihood of complicated relationships
- Prison relationships



Disenfranchising deaths

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

“Devalued” Deaths

- The very old
- Persons with disabilities

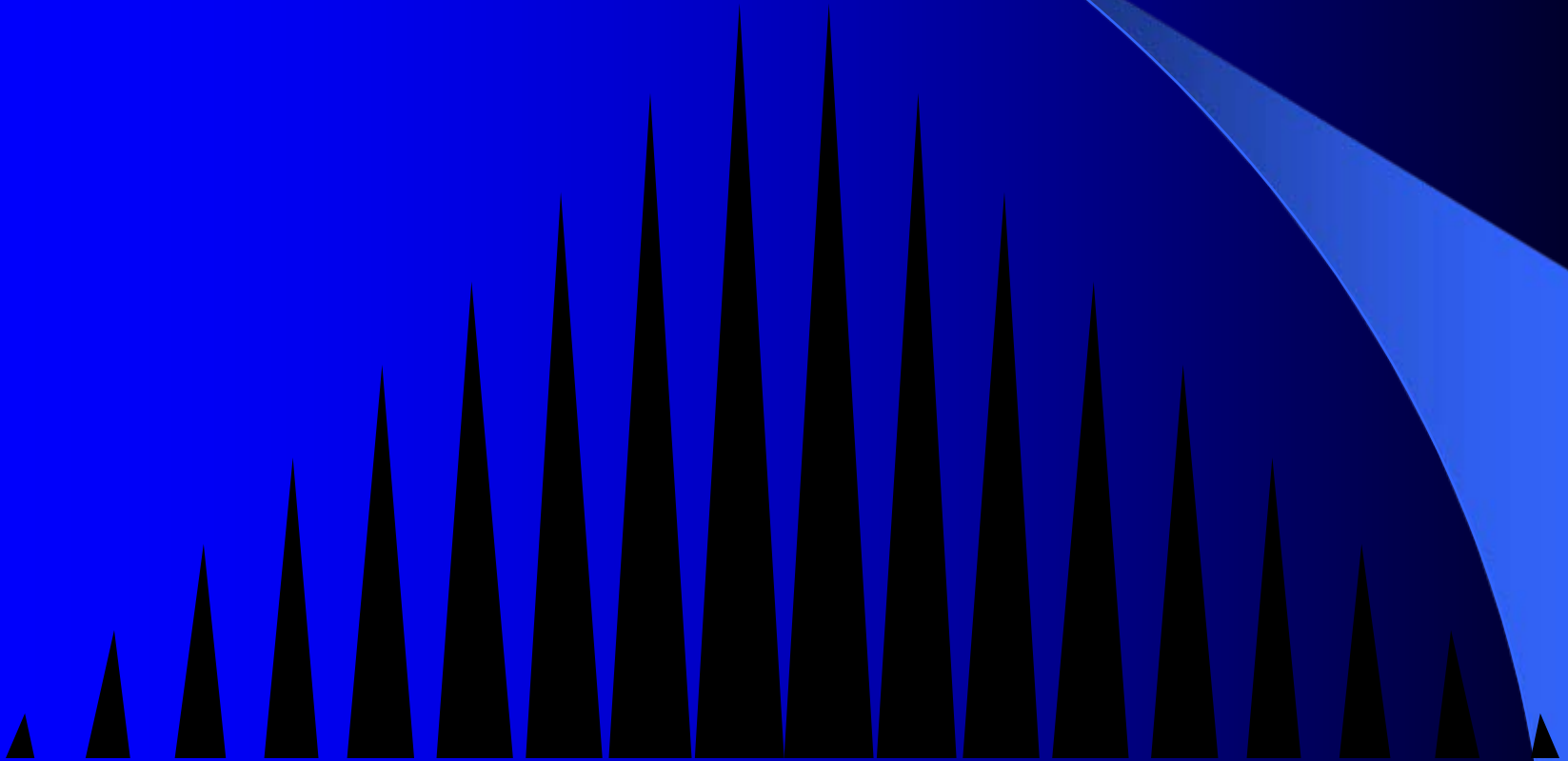
Ways individuals grieve

- Cultural aspects
- Styles of grieving

Intuitive vs. Instrumental



Grieving Styles Exist along a Continuum



Disenfranchisement and Grieving Styles

- Male Intuitive Grievers
- Female Instrumental Grievers
- Instrumental Grievers (early)
- Intuitive Grievers (late)
- Counselor's Disenfranchisement of Instrumental Grievers

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

Eyeseinitian

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

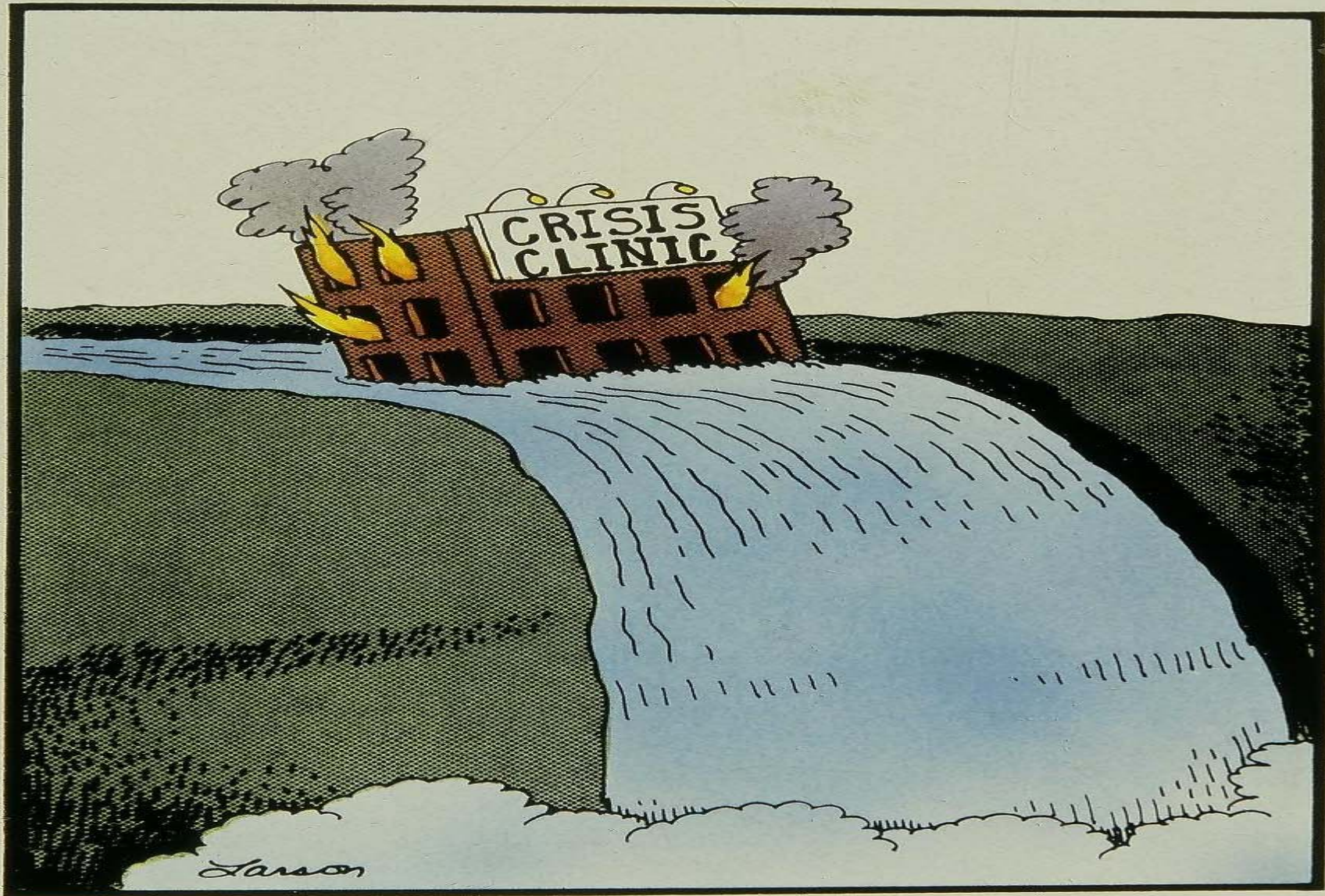
All grief becomes
disenfranchised over time

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

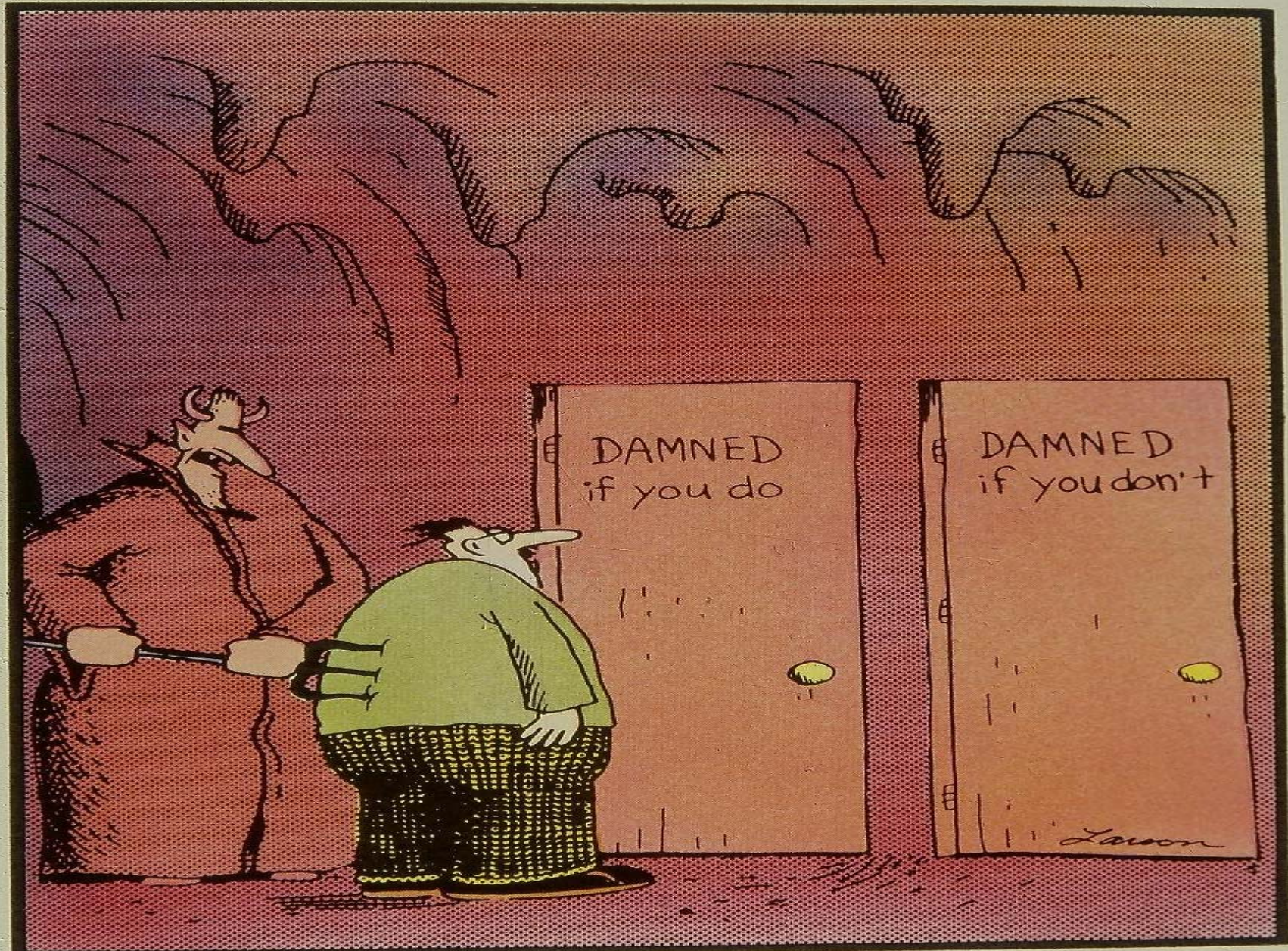
Possible Complications of Disenfranchised Grief

- 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



DAMNED
if you do

DAMNED
if you don't

Lawson

How Can We Help?

Sensitivity to Loss

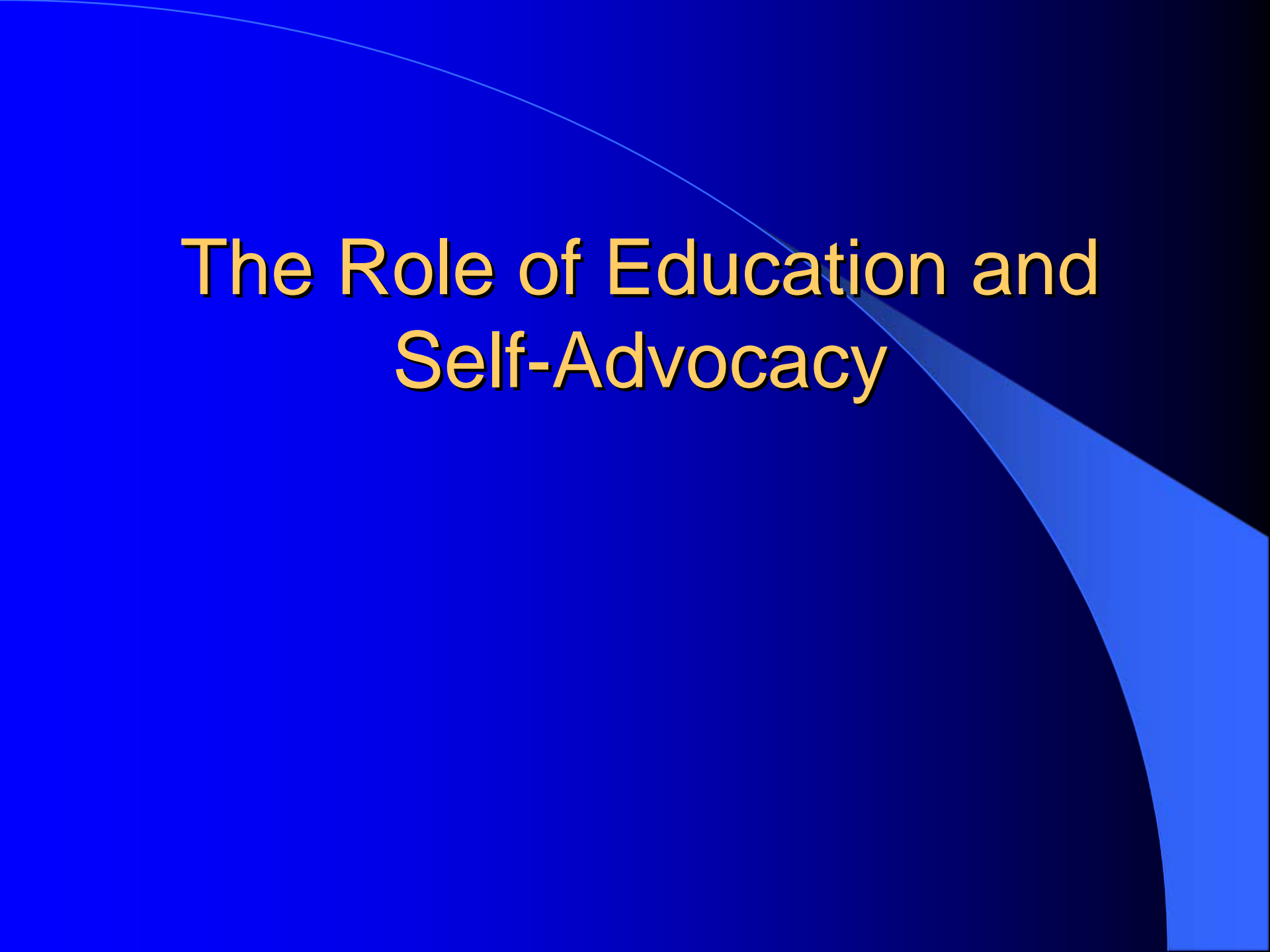


Validation

The Power of Naming

The background is a dark blue gradient. A white arc starts from the top left and curves towards the right. On the right side, there is a white shape that looks like a stylized 'L' or a corner piece, also in white.

The Role of Education and Self-Advocacy

The background is a dark blue gradient. A thin, light blue curved line starts from the top left and arcs across the top. A larger, lighter blue triangular shape is positioned on the right side, pointing towards the center.

Analyze Empathic Failure

Counter Empathic Failure

- Counseling
- Support Groups
- Therapeutic Ritual

Grief is manifested in many ways

- Physically
- Emotionally (including positive emotions)
- Cognitively
- Behaviorally
- Spiritually

The Grief Process

A Roller Coaster of Reactions



Grief is not a time bound
process that ends in
detachment

Amelioration of Grief

- Over time the intensity of grief reactions lessen
- Persons function at similar (or sometimes better levels) than prior to the loss
- Yet, grief still has a developmental aspect

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)

Remember!

Disenfranchised Grief Is Grief

Case

Martha is a 43 year-old divorced, white female. She has been divorced for 7 years after being married for 13 years. She has custody of her 14 year-old son and her 18 year-old daughter. The divorce was very bitter, the result of her husband's extra-marital affair with her close friend. Her relationship with her late ex-husband was tenuous, but he did share weekend custody of her son. Her daughter, on the other hand, refused to visit.

Her husband had been sick for 2 years. She had visited him once in the hospital, but felt the visit uncomfortable and tense. After much soul searching, she did attend the funeral with her son. She found the experience "horrible," resenting the new wife's warmth, the interaction between that wife and her son, and the funeral homily where her ex-spouse was praised as "a loving family man" and the wife as "a courageous caregiver". She says she needs to talk with someone before "she goes crazy." She is upset with her children resenting both her son's grief and her daughter's indifferences. She also feels her friends do not understand and she doesn't feel comfortable in talking with her new boyfriend.

The Challenge of Grief Groups

- The limits of heterogeneous groups
- The value of need assessment



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Support
Group*

*Emotions of Pet Loss
Bereavement
Surviving Loss
Conquering Guilt
Helping Children Cope*

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Utilizing Rituals

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



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)

Chronic Sorrow



- *A set of pervasive, profound, continuing, and reoccurring grief responses resulting from a significant loss, or the absence or crucial aspects of self or another to whom there is deep attachment” (Roos)*
- The role of fantasy – “What might have been”

Criticisms of Concept of “Disenfranchised Grief”

- The cost of enfranchisement (Kamerman)
- The risk of trivializing the definition of grief (Cable)
- Hierarchies of Grief (Robson & Walter)

The Charge of Disenfranchised Grief

Enfranchising the disenfranchised