


Chapter 2

Anticipatory Grief: The Pain of What's to Come

Amy Maturen

 <https://orcid.org/0009-0003-9262-1145>

Mid America Christian University, USA

ABSTRACT

Anticipatory grief is unique from traditional grief as it involves experiencing a loss prior to the loss actually occurring. This form of grief can be experienced by an individual, family members, or both. This grief is not exclusively due to the loss of another person. Anticipatory grief can include loss of dreams, safety, autonomy, marriages, homes, and many others. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of anticipatory losses the world faced all at the same time was monumental. Those effects are still affecting many people today. In this chapter, the theory of anticipatory grief will be explored in detail along with the impacts from COVID-19, therapeutic interventions that can be utilized when working with clients and family members and how those implications impact counselors within the field.

HISTORY

Anticipatory grief (AG) differs from traditional grief in that it is not about the loss of someone or something *after* the fact. Anticipatory grief is about contemplating, planning, and mourning future losses *prior* to the actual loss. This can include loved ones, pets, hopes, dreams, future plans, an individual's health or even one's own mortality. The concept of anticipatory grief was first introduced in 1940 by Erich Lindemann, a German-American psychiatrist (Dekker, 2023; Najafi et al. 2022). During his work in psychiatry, Lindemann became interested in the psychological effects that were present when a patient experienced an amputation or surgical removal

DOI: 10.4018/979-8-3693-1375-6.ch002

of organs (Rosenfeld, 2018). Lindemann felt that the patients experienced a “loss” when they were missing a limb or an organ even though they were still alive. This led to studies about how grief worked. Lindemann was a psychiatrist in a hospital in Boston in 1942 when there was a fire at Boston’s Cocoanut Grove Nightclub which led to the deadliest nightclub fire in United States history with over 492 deaths. As Lindemann studied the reactions of survivors to the loss of their loved ones, he began to realize that this was similar to a loss of part of the person themselves. Anticipatory grief grew from Lindemann’s studies on the survivors of the nightclub fire and Sigmund Freud’s psychoanalytic theory where Freud conceptualized grief as an “object” and that an individual needed to be able to detach themselves from that lost “object” in order to move forward (Dekker, 2023).

Building on those concepts, Lindemann began to take an interest in the wives and girlfriends of World War II soldiers and the grief that they experienced while waiting for their husbands or boyfriends to return home from the war (Plant, 2022). The women began actively grieving to prepare for the potential loss and the fear that they would never see their loved one again. An interesting aspect of anticipatory grief that Lindemann discovered was that once that type of grief had been completed, it was not possible to reverse it as that person had already fully processed the grief (Plant, 2022). In the case of wives and girlfriends during World War II, many ended up divorcing their husbands or breaking off the relationship when they returned home due to processing the loss already and not wanting to work through that a second time.

TYPES OF ANTICIPATORY GRIEF

Illness and Age

There are many categories of anticipatory grief. Two of the most common that are considered anticipatory involve grief with a loved one suffering from a chronic or terminal illness and the other is with the elderly, whether that is with medical illness or dementia/Alzheimer’s disease (Ghezeljeh et al., 2023; Najafi et al., 2022; Supiano et al., 2022). In the case of chronic or terminal illness, it is not just the loss of life that can be grieved early. There is the potential limitation of one’s length of life which previously may not have been considered if the individual is not elderly. Watching the slow decline of the health of a loved one can lead to an extended period of grief which can be very traumatic for the caregiver (Varga & Gallagher, 2020). When there is a chronic illness, there is also the anticipatory grief of the caregiver and the losses within their life, which includes: loss of quality time with their own family, inability to go far from their loved one, loss of social support and activities,

22 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage: www.igi-global.com/chapter/anticipatory-grief/351315

Related Content

Literacy and Decision Making on Health Issues among Married Women in Southwest Nigeria

Adejoke Clara Babalola (2016). *Handbook of Research on Advancing Health Education through Technology* (pp. 191-212).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/literacy-and-decision-making-on-health-issues-among-married-women-in-southwest-nigeria/137962

Medicine With the Military

Robert A. Liotta, Aaron Saguil, Timothy L. Switaj, Don J. Sarmiento, Kenji L. Takano, David S. Sachar, Gregory W. Hall, Joshua D. Gustafson, Jonathan R. Bear, Marc A. Molenat, Kenisha R. Heathand Craig M. Yugawa (2022). *Handbook of Research on Advising and Developing the Pre-Health Professional Student* (pp. 183-212).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/medicine-with-the-military/303438

Reflections of Spiritual Narratives

(2022). *Using Narrative Writing to Enhance Healing During and After Global Health Crises* (pp. 171-188).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/reflections-of-spiritual-narratives/287744

The Perspectives of Medical Errors in the Health Care Industry

Kijpokin Kasemsap (2017). *Health Literacy: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (pp. 243-265).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-perspectives-of-medical-errors-in-the-health-care-industry/181196

Promoting Complex Learning through Relevant Learning Experiences for the Health Sciences

Jill E. Stefaniakand Barbara L. Joyce (2015). *Transformative Curriculum Design in Health Sciences Education* (pp. 194-213).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/promoting-complex-learning-through-relevant-learning-experiences-for-the-health-sciences/129431