Grief & Mourning Across Cultures

Building Strong Families Conference
Messiah College

Winston Seegobin, Psy.D. &
Robert Reyes, Ph.D., CFLE

Grief & Mourning Across Cultures

- Introductory Comments
  - Brief overview of cultural factors in grief and mourning
- Learning Objectives:
  - Examine and build awareness of how culture influences the ritual and/or practices associated with death and dying.
  - Consider implications for psycho-educational and/or therapeutic interventions.

Presentation Outline

1. Defining grief and mourning
2. Grief and mourning in
   - Latino families
   - Asian families
   - Caribbean families
   - Amish families
3. Therapeutic interventions

Defining Grief & Mourning

- Grief
  - **Grief** is a multi-faceted response to loss. Although conventionally focused on the emotional response to loss, it also has physical, cognitive, behavioral, social and philosophical dimensions.
- Mourning
  - A cultural complex of behaviors in which the bereaved participate or are expected to participate.

Grief & Mourning
Latino Cultural Values

- Familism and the Protection of Individual Family Members

- What is Familism? (or familialism)
  - Individuals experience a "strong identification with and attachment to their nuclear and extended families and strong feelings of loyalty, reciprocity, and solidarity among members of the same family."

Grief & Mourning
Latino Cultural Values

- Three predominant value orientations which develop out of familism
  - A perceived obligation to provide material or emotional support to their extended family.
  - The reliance on relatives for help and support.
  - The perception of relatives as behavioral and attitudinal referents.

Grief & Mourning
Rituals & Practices among LATINO Families

- <u>Examples</u>: Mexican Culture & the Day of the Dead

- <u>Examples</u>: Immigration and Ambiguous Loss
  - The concept of ambiguous loss proposed by Pauline Boss (1991, 1999) describes situations in which loss is unclear, incomplete or partial *(two types of ambiguous loss)*.
  - Physically absent but psychologically present
  - Physically present but psychologically absent

Grief & Mourning
Rituals & Practices among ASIAN Families

- Variations among Asian cultures
- Tendency to somaticize the grief, i.e. express the pain in physiological ways
- May express grief and mourning in private and quiet manner
- Complex rituals are performed. E.g. In Chinese culture, paper money, paper houses, and other material goods are often burned in order to give the deceased a good "send off" and to ensure that they will not live in poverty

Grief & Mourning
Rituals & Practices among CARIBBEAN Families

- Variations among the ethnic groups
- In African families, there are more outward expressions of emotions, such as loud crying and wailing
- In Indian families, mourning is done in private and some family members (e.g. mothers) may not go to the cemetery
- Most funerals occur in cemeteries
- Sometimes Hindus are cremated

Grief & Mourning
the Amish Community

- Grief is very private
- Public displays of grief are rare
  - This does not mean that they are grieving any less than those who make strong emotional outbursts
- The funeral service is simple with no eulogy or flowers; hymns are read , not sung
- Mourners will wear black; the immediate family will mourn for a year
- Strong community support

Therapeutic Interventions

- Explore how the client perceives the cause of death
- Discuss how the client followed the burial and mourning rituals at the time of the death
- Examine the client's beliefs about life after death
- Look at communication with the dead person
- Explore family changes that followed a death
  (McGoldrick et al., 1991, p. 203)

5 Questions for Clinicians to Consider

1. What are the prescribed rituals for handling dying, the dead body, the disposal of the body, and rituals to commemorate the loss?

2. What are the group's beliefs about what happens after death?

3. What do they believe about appropriate emotional expression and integration of a loss experience?

5 Questions for Clinicians to Consider

4. What are the gender rules for handling the death?

5. Are certain deaths particularly stigmatized (e.g. suicide), or traumatic for the group (e.g. the death of a child in Puerto Rican culture)?
   (McGoldrick et al., 1991,p. 179)