The Effects of Anticipatory Grief on Intrapersonal Development

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This article will examine the effects of anticipatory grief and its effects on Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory on intrapersonal development. Aldrich (1974) defined anticipatory grief as the process of grief that occurs prior to a loss versus grief that occurs after a loss (as cited in Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990, p. 1073). For some undergraduate students, the deaths of close friends or family are unexpected and happen quickly, therefore causing the grieving process to begin after the death. Others may be dealing with terminal illness and must live with the anticipation of death causing the grieving process to begin before the death occurs. This phenomenon is known as "anticipatory grief." The following article will provide insights about anticipatory grief and strategies for student affairs professionals.

Death is an unfavorable experience we all must face at some point in our lives. Whether it is our own death, or the death of others, it touches us in some way or another and it can happen at any point in our lives. According to Balk (2001), an estimated 22% to 30% of undergraduate students experience the death of a close friend or family member over the course of a year during their time as an undergraduate. Balk (2001) also suggested that this percentage of bereaved college students rises between 35% and 48% when increasing the span to two years as an undergraduate. Students who cope with the effects of death have their own unique experience and grieving process.

For some students, deaths are unexpected and can happen quickly. This causes the grieving process to begin after the death. Others may be dealing with a loved one with a terminal illness and must live with the anticipation of death causing the grieving process to begin before the death occurs. This phenomenon is known as "anticipatory grief." Aldrich (1974) defined anticipatory grief as the process of grief that occurs prior to a loss versus grief that occurs after a loss (as cited in Sweeting & Gilhooly, 1990, p. 1073). The experience of anticipatory grief involves a range of intensified emotional and interactional responses, which may include: separation anxiety, existential aloneness, denial, sadness, disappointment, anger, resentment, guilt, exhaustion, confusion and desperation (Balk, 2011; Miller & Segal, 2010; Rolland, 1990). Lattanzi-Licht, Kirshling and Fleming (1989) reported that in most bereavement literature, there is increased psychological distress in the first 1-2 years following the death of a loved one. While an individual may experience a wide range of emotions while grieving and dealing with anticipated grief, there is little discussion on how these types of experiences can inhibit undergraduate student development. To address this gap, pre-existing literature involving theories on bereavement and Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory on intrapersonal development will be reviewed, followed by a discussion on how these two experiences intersect to show dissonance that is created by anticipatory grief, and how anticipatory grief creates a delay in an individual's developmental process.

Literature Review

Early Grief Theories

It is important to note that within the field of Higher Education and Student Affairs there is little to no research on topics regarding grief and its effect on student development. According to Wright and Hogan (2008), early grief theories span back to Sigmund Freud who defined grief as "an experience that usually follows a normal course but could lead to serious psychological consequences if the bereft failed to emotionally detach from the deceased" (p. 350). Wright and Hogan (2008) explained that it was Freud's belief that a healthy recovery from this traumatic experience required removing emotional bonds associated with the deceased and a return to pre-loss behavior.

While Freud examined the experience after the death of a loved one, other psychologists like Erich Lindemann began to observe grief for those individuals not bereft (Duke, 1998). Lindemann (1944) based his observations of detachment and the effects grief has on bereavement, and the differences between sudden and expected deaths. While the theories presented by Freud and Lindemann are compelling, they were based on observations and have not been systematically tested for validity (Duke, 1998; Wright & Hogan, 2008).

Another psychoanalyst, John Bowlby, based his works off of Freud by empirically studying how grief can be influenced by the intensity and the type of attachment with the deceased (Wright & Hogan, 2008). Bowlby presented three phases of mourning that he later adapted with the addition of a fairly brief phase that preludes the original three (Bowlby, 1980). Bowlby's (1980) four phases include:

1. Phase of numbing that usually lasts from a few hours to a week and may be interrupted by outbursts of extremely intense distress and/or anger
2. Phase of yearning and searching for the lost figure lasting some months and sometimes for years
3. Phase of disorganization and despair where an individual is easily distracted, has trouble concentrating, and may become depressed
4. Phase of greater or less degree of reorganization, individual realizes life continues and reconstructs life without the deceased (p. 85)

Bowlby acknowledged that these phases could be predicted in sequence to some degree. However, they are not linear, and any one individual can oscillate back and forth for a time between any two phases (Bowlby, 1980). The theories presented above offered a foundation for grief studies and, in later years, were expounded upon by other theorists. The following theories are known as second-generation grief theories.

Second-Generation Grief Theories

Second generation grief theorist, Collin Parkes (1972), a student and colleague of Bowlby, posited grief as a series of pictures in waves that fade in and out over time. Following this non-linear approach to grieving, psychiatrist Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) studied how people diagnosed with a terminal illness grieved the loss of their health. Kubler-Ross (1969) identified five stages of grief: Denial, Anger, Bargaining, Depression, and Acceptance. Both Parkes (1972) and Kubler-Ross (1969) believed that these emotions are all experienced at

some point but are not experienced in the same order for everyone. Sweeting and Gilhooly (1990) stated, "the early observational studies with respect to 'anticipatory grief'…are consistent in recognizing a phase-like process, with initial shock and efforts to deny the fatal diagnosis, followed by clinging and mourning behaviors" (p. 1078). From these grief theories, it is evident that there are emotional effects, but in order to understand the effects on students, Baxter Magolda's self-authorship student development theory will be examined.

Self-Authorship: Baxter Magolda

Based on a seventeen-year longitudinal study of college students at Miami University, Baxter Magolda (2004) created a theory of self-authorship, an individual's internal ability to base judgments on one's own beliefs, identity, and social interactions. Baxter Magolda's (2004) study found that students develop in three dimensions: epistemological, intrapersonal, and interpersonal on their path to becoming self-authored. Baxter Magolda (2004) claimed that there are three questions individuals try to answer through this process: "How do I know?" (Epistemological), "Who am I?" (Intrapersonal), and "How do I relate to others?" (Interpersonal). Within these three dimensions, Baxter Magolda (2004) described three phases individuals travel through in each dimension: external formulas, crossroads, and self-authorship. Individuals begin in external formulas, allowing others to define them (Baxter Magolda, 2004). As individuals progress towards the crossroads, they become dissatisfied by others definition and desire to become more independent (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Once individuals develop the ability to choose their own

beliefs and live them out, they become self-authored (Baxter Magolda, 2004). In order to progress towards self-authorship, individuals must experience dissonance, which is the conflict or disagreement with previously held beliefs (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Regarding intrapersonal development and the path towards self-authorship, the dissonance created by grief will be explored.

In intrapersonal development, Baxter Magolda (2004) stated that individuals in external formulas lack awareness of their own values and social identity. Individuals also seek the approval of others that creates an externally defined identity subject to external pressures. In the crossroads of intrapersonal development, individuals begin to develop an awareness of their own values and sense of identity apart from external perceptions (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Additionally, Baxter Magolda (2004) stated "tension between emerging internal values and external pressures prompts self-exploration" (p.12). As a result, individuals shift from accepting external perceptions and take responsibility for creating their own identity (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Intrapersonally, self-authorship is achieved by establishing an internally generated sense of self and values that then regulates interactions with the external world (Baxter Magolda, 2004).

In respect to student affairs, it is important to examine theories about grief in relation to self-authorship due to the implications grief can cause with emotions, self-identity, and the way individuals perceive the world. Death is often a sensitive topic and can be uncomfortable to discuss. Understanding the experiences of students and how they are being affected personally is important for student affairs professionals.

Considering these implications, the following section will explore the ways in which grief may create delays on the path to self-authorship for students.

An Adaptation for Intrapersonal Development

Within Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory of self-authorship and specifically the intrapersonal development dimension, an adaptation to the theory is necessary to understand how an individual who has experienced anticipatory grief can reach the crossroads and ultimately self-authorship. This adaptation for intrapersonal development provides an applicable understanding to the development of individuals who have experienced anticipatory grief.

Considering relevant literature, the following framework seeks to better explain the effects of bereavement on individuals as they transition into the crossroads phase of intrapersonal development. The framework of Baxter Magolda's (2004) intrapersonal development model remains the same, but a delay in reaching the crossroads is introduced as a result of the dissonance created by grief. Individuals are still able to progress through the crossroads, but there is a delay caused by anticipatory grief. Until the loved one has passed, the individual experiencing anticipatory grief, is stuck in the external formulas phase, unable to move forward. Once the loved one has passed, the individual can complete the grieving process, and they can continue progressing towards self-authorship.

Proposed Adaptation for Intrapersonal Development

Balk (2011) suggested the development of college students could be significantly influenced by the implications associated with bereavement. In the intrapersonal dimension of self-authorship, individuals gain a sense of who they are and what they believe, and begin to answer the question, "Who am I?" (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Balk (2011) further explained that a deep turmoil of emotional and cognitive confusion may be induced by the loss and subsequent challenges which may also challenge an individual's core assumptions about life and its meaning to them. Schwartzberg and Janoff-Bulman (1991) found that college students who lost a parent exhibited a worldview that was much different than their peers who had not experienced such a loss. Students faced with the death of a loved one learn about the challenges and unfairness of life in a way that is different from their peers who have not had this experience. As Baxter Magolda (2011) stated "an integrated identity serves as a foundation for interpreting experience and conducting oneself in the world" (p. 9). It is evident that bereavement has an effect on an individual's ability to interpret experiences and the world around them. Balk (2011) suggested that bereavement causes individuals to restructure their understanding of self, their connection to the world, and their relationship with others.

According to Balk (2011) the emotional effects an individual may experience as a result of grief include lower self-confidence, lack of belief in self-efficacy, and depression. He also stated the importance for bereaved individuals to maintain or regain their sense of personal control and confidence in self-efficacy. Depending on how long the grief lasts, doubts that a sense of

balance will ever return may arise (Balk, 2011). Balk (2001) brought up a key point concerning the bereavement process: the intensity and duration of grief. Depending on the prognosis of the loved one, the length of bereavement can be short or last for an extended period of time. Rolland (1990) stated, "the salience of anticipatory loss varies depending on members' transgenerational experiences with actual and threatened loss...[and] with the kind of illness, its psychosocial demands over time, and the degree of uncertainty about prognosis" (p. 229). Revisiting Bowlby's (1980) second stage of mourning, individuals urge to recover the lost object—characterized by yearning, searching behavior, and frequent anger. If students are experiencing anticipatory grief with the threat of loss rather than actual loss, they are essentially at a standstill in the grieving process until the death occurs. When viewing the framework of Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory of self-authorship, this standstill, or anticipatory grief, creates dissonance that delays an individual's progress moving into the crossroads, assuming they are in external formulas.

The experiences students face while anticipating the death of a family member or loved one vary and for some students this can include being the primary caregiver for the person who is dying. According to Dearden and Becker (2000), some disabled parents rely on the care and support of their children versus external support services. Bass, Bowman, and Noelker (1991) claimed that family caregiving and grief are often looked at as separate events, but argues they are both part of one continuing situation. As a result of the reliance some parents have on their children, the decisions children make are often made to gain the parents

approval, for example, trying to decide where to attend college. Dearden and Becker (2000) stated that leaving home was problematic for students whose parents required their help and support as their primary care taker. Dissonance is created through the conflict students face between needing to stay at home to support their loved one, but wanting to move out and gain their independence. Volandes, et al. (2008) further explained that the anxiety and fear of loss experienced by an individual could actually lead them to avoid making decisions all together. As a result of the students' inability to make decisions and reliance on external approval experienced during anticipatory grief, students are living out their externally defined self and submitting to external pressures. If students are unable to recognize their own identity, this can be problematic when considering Baxter Magolda's (2004) theory on intrapersonal development.

Baxter Magolda (2004) stated that it is essential for an individual to have the ability to reflect, explore, and choose values in order to form their own identity that is internally constructed versus an identity that is created to gain external approval. This internally formed identity allows for the interpretation of experiences and understanding of how to answer the question, "Who Am I?" (Baxter Magolda, 2004). These intrapersonal development capacities for those moving through the crossroads are important in order to move forward towards self-authorship. The experiences and implications from bereavement affect how students experience intrapersonal development. However, understanding the experiences of an individual and recognizing that there may be a delay to the crossroads as a result of students

following external formulas, like making choices based on providing care for a loved one, can help student affairs professionals better understand how to help a student progress.

Recommendations for Student Affairs Practice

Students have their own sets of experiences and challenges they must face. For student affairs professionals, it is important to understand these challenges and experiences in order to help students further develop. Working with students dealing with anticipatory grief is unique because each student's experience is different. Bonanno and Kaltman (2003) stated that it is imperative to obtain the most comprehensive understanding of the grief experience in order to best help the individual. Talking about death is often difficult. Perhaps it is our own sadness, our fear of making someone upset, or thinking that addressing the death may suggest abandonment for the hope of a cure (Miller & Segal, 2010). Students who experience bereavement may feel unsupported, isolated, or disconnected from the college experience (Zeiher, 2012). These effects have the potential to impact the individual's development, if not adequately supported.

Willimon and Naylor (1995) stated that a college education should "provide a conceptual framework and a process to facilitate the search for meaning that attempts to integrate the spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physiological dimensions of life" (p. 130). To best address the needs of bereaved students, institutions need to develop services, policies and procedures to serve students during times of need (Zeiber, 2012). Bereavement can create instability and vulnerability where individuals may not know what they need. Clinicians who work with people with terminal illness address three main behaviors: some crave reassurance, some want to talk, and some are afraid and want empathy (Miller & Segal, 2010). Considering the fact that 22-48% of students experience grief over the course of two years, it is important for student affairs professionals to understand how to meet the needs of this large student population (Balk, 2001). As previously mentioned, there is little to no research on the effects of bereavement on student development. However, the research that does exist supports how bereavement can create dissonance. It is important to support students as they make meaning of dissonance at the intersection between external formulas and the crossroads of intrapersonal development in order to help them progress towards self authorship. Student affairs practitioners must understand that grief and bereavement are indeed a part in student's holistic development; neglecting to support students through this experience can be detrimental to their overall development.

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