Loss of the Assumptive World: Knowledge Creation and
Grief Theory

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July 14, 2008
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INTRODUCTION

In the field of psychology several theories of the way that people deal with grief have developed and been used to explain the process of getting over someone’s death. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1975) is one of the pioneers of this exploration and her theory of the stages of grief forms the base of much of our knowledge of Grief Theory. In the last few years, Jeffrey Kauffman (2001) has introduced a theory called the loss of the assumptive world which deals with the loss of the world as we assume it is and how that relates to how people deal with grief.

The emergence of the loss of the assumptive world theory and how it is diffused through the psychological community is a good example of the information transfer cycle and will be explored in this paper.

CREATION

As with many kinds of knowledge, grief theory arose from people attempting to make sense of their world and of the death around them. In O’Connor and Copeland (2003), the authors identify this as foraging for relevance and state “In the information-seeking realm, we…hunt and gather, whether the hunting and gathering takes place on a public access catalog or in the grocery store (117). In the same way that hunters and gatherers once foraged for food, modern societies forage for relevance and by so doing create information. An example of this knowledge creation could be from Elisabeth Kubler-Ross one of the first and foremost practitioner’s and theorist’s of grief theory.
Kubler-Ross recognized five stages of dealing with and making meaning of death: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and finally acceptance (Kubler-Ross 14).

Another theory of grief that has emerged recently has been identified by Jeffrey Kauffman (2001) and is called the loss of the assumptive world and claims that the “assumptive world is the set of illusions that shelter the human soul” (206). When death occurs, the assumptive world is also lost. This can cause people to attempt to make meaning in a variety of ways, both healthy and unhealthy. Kubler-Ross’s (1975) theory led the way and made it possible for Kaufman to have a launching point from which to pose his theory. Both of these theories developed from a shared information need expressed by a variety of people and can be classified as grief theory.

DISSEMINATION

Knowledge dissemination is defined by Hutchinson and Huberman (1993) as quoted in Owens (2001) as “…transfer of knowledge within and across settings, with the expectation that the knowledge will be ‘used’ conceptually (as learning, enlightenment, or the acquisition of new perspectives or attitudes) or instrumentally, (in the form of modified or new practices)” (2). Knowledge about grief theory is disseminated through the academic journal, Journal of Death and Dying, which discusses a variety of topics relating to grief and bereavement and how people handle it individually. This method of dissemination is particularly useful for therapists and others who are in the psychology field who frequently read journals pertaining to subjects that their clients are dealing with.
Information is also disseminated on the internet by sites such as Grief Watch (2008) for the purpose of familiarizing people with the issues of those who are grieving. Receiving information via the internet allows people who probably would not otherwise have access to academic theories to have access to them.

**ORGANIZATION**

Information about different grief theories and especially the theory of assumptive loss are organized in a variety of different ways in the library setting. They can be found in the 155.93’s or 155.937’s according to Chan (1994) in Dewey decimal classification. When using the Library of Congress System they would be found in the RC455.4.L67 (Library 2008). Information about grief theory is also stored on the internet and haphazardly in therapists’ offices.

**DIFFUSION**

Rogers’ (2003) identifies four main components of diffusion; innovation, communication, time, and social system (14-24). Grief theory is diffused by a combination of these components. Kaufman’s (2002) Loss of the Assumptive World theory augments and brings innovation to Kubler-Ross’s (1975) theory.

Additionally, the annual International Grief and Bereavement Conference (2008) provides a great deal of communication and interaction with grief theory. Conferences are an excellent example of diffusion because they allow participants, who are generally practitioners in the field, the opportunity to interact with the material and to communicate about it. Annual conferences also allow time for material to diffuse because participants
share information they learned from year to year and topics that remain relevant are more likely to be a topic for the next year.

Liechty (2002) suggests that much of peoples’ knowledge of and relationship with death and grief comes from their families and close relationships (84). This can be identified as information coming from their social systems.

UTILIZATION

Much of the information created, organized, and disseminated about grief theory is hard to track for utilization purposes because it is used by therapists with their clients (International Death, Grief, and Bereavement Conference 2008). This form of utilization illustrates the challenge of tracking information utilization because there are privacy issues involved. There are also challenges of tracking which therapists use which methods.

Books about grief theory found in library collections may be utilized in a variety of ways unbeknownst to knowledge creators or disseminators by patrons who check them out or use them in the library to address their own concerns about grief.

PRESERVATION

Items on this topic are preserved through books and journals that librarians seek to protect. They are also preserved through people’s memories of dealing with grief.
CONCLUSION

The information transfer processes allows us to explore how information is created, disseminated, organized, diffused, utilized and preserved. In the case of the grief theory knowledge is transferred in a variety of ways and to a variety of populations.
References


New York: Free Press.