

Men responding to grief

There is a growing interest in men's psychology and a greater acknowledgement by men of a need to express their feelings in some way. In the field of bereavement more research-based attention is being given to the subject of men's grieving and this must be welcomed. These three American books share a common theme: to explore how different men in different circumstances react to grief, and how those working with them may need to listen to, acknowledge, and affirm what is essentially an individual experience.

WIDOWER – WHEN MEN ARE LEFT ALONE

Scott Campbell, Phyllis Silverman

New York: Baywood, 1996, 246pp. \$39.95 hb. ISBN 0 89503 140 X

Campbell and Silverman focus on the experience of 20 widowers in this series of powerful, often poignant, first-hand accounts. The men discuss their adjustment to the loss of a central relationship in their lives, the difficulties encountered and the importance of family and others for support. The introduction and the commentaries following each account provide insightful psychological analysis.

The experiences of this group of widowers may not ring true for some men with different relationships to the deceased. What is vividly recognisable here is the attempt by each of the men to reconcile their experience of their internal distress with the accepted ways of demonstrating it externally. Implicit in the accounts and commentaries are issues common to all who are bereaved: understanding the difference between loneliness and being alone, trying to bring feeling to consciousness through talking or writing, opening new horizons, taking risks, and deciding how happy we want to be. The authors have drawn out common themes from individual experiences which touched every aspect of these men's lives, and have said as much about the nature of relationships as the process of grieving. This book should be of immense encouragement to bereaved widowers as well as enlightening to professionals offering support.

MEN COPING WITH GRIEF

Dale Lund (ed)

New York: Baywood, 2000. 363pp, \$58.00 hb. \$34.95 pb. ISBN 0 89503 211 2; 0 89503 212 0

In this rich and varied collection of essays, Dale Lund discusses what he calls 'the multi-dimensional nature of grief'. To respond effectively, he suggests that we need a multi-dimensional perspective, one that moves away from identifying and advocating for just a single viewpoint. He

points out that we have relied for years on cultural beliefs, practices, norms, values and, oftentimes, stereotypes to answer questions about gender difference, and by doing this we may have related inappropriately to both men and women. He cautions us not to be too prescriptive in our search for differences but to look out for what both men and women might have in common in their reactions to bereavement.

The contributors to Dale's book consider conceptual issues relating to death, bereavement and gender, research findings and practice implications, and in doing so deal with many issues of male insecurity in modern Western society. Support interventions and differences in men's ability to use various strategies for externalising feelings are discussed, whilst it is acknowledged, as in *Widower*, that most men do use some emotive forms of expression.

Both these books point out that many men are unlikely to become the new 'ideal' of the expressive, emotive male overnight, or just for the purposes of bereavement. Lund cautions us to be careful about creating a code of expectation, the 'new man' syndrome, which could become as restrictive as previous stereotypes. He challenges accepted cultural messages about gender and grief and questions whether current grief models are sufficient, arguing for models that make room both different and common expressions of pain and sadness.

MEN DON'T CRY – WOMEN DO

Terry Martin, Kenneth Doka

Philadelphia, USA: Brunner/Mazel, 1999, 188pp, £30.00 hb, £15.00 pb. ISBN 0 87630 993 4 5; 0 87630996 3

Building on many of the arguments presented in the two previous titles, Martin and Doka ask if there is a bias towards expression of feelings in bereavement literature and practice. Indeed, their ideas question whether Western styles of counselling may see affective expression as more therapeutic than cognitive and behavioural responses. They argue that this emphasis may not be valid for all individuals, or for groups or cultures that do not place as much significance

on affective disclosure.

Throughout this book the authors challenge the idea that one bereavement pattern could be the norm. They acknowledge that gender must play any part in a person's response to grief, but also recognise the struggle to understand how 'masculine' patterns may also be 'feminine' patterns of response and vice versa. The message is to take care when using gender-related terminology and not to lose sight of the individual in our attempts to categorise experience.

To encourage a more integrated approach, Doka and Martin use the terms 'instrumental' and 'intuitive' to replace gender-based descriptions of responses to grief. They suggest that these terms carry 'less emotional baggage' allowing us to look at different and common patterns of coping without linking them to a gender or defining one as better than the other. Particular emphasis is paid to exploring 'instrumental' grieving which, they say, may be used more by men and needs greater acknowledgement and affirmation from those who offer support.

The authors end by arguing the need for a model which encompasses and explains the essentially individualistic response to grief, as well as the generic patterns which support those individual responses and give them value. Their strongest argument is for a 'blending' of the instrumental and intuitive approaches in order to reduce any problems inherent in the use of gender-related terminology.

All three books indicate that much is still to be learned about the responses of men to grief. The authors support a view that many men would benefit from widening and blending strategies of coping to become more evenly balanced, reflecting a greater symmetry between cognitive and affective responses. We professionals are encouraged to listen and reflect on the individual lives of people we talk with and, in particular, to support a move away from any prescriptive thanatology that suggests one way of grieving may be preferable to another. This may be a challenge to many counselling services. **BC**

Malcolm Williams

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FORTHCOMING EVENTS IN 2001

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Setting standards: an open and shut case? Bereavement Research Forum symposium. 14 November 2001. Oxford, UK. Details from Anne Burrows, c/o Bereavement Care, Linda Machin Rooms, Dudson Centre, Hope Street, Stoke on Trent ST1 5DD, UK. ☎ 01782 683155; brf@bereavementcare.freemove.co.uk

BOOKS

MUDDLES, PUDDLES AND SUNSHINE

Diane Crossley

Stroud, Glos, UK: Hawthorn Press, 2000, 32pp. £4.99 pb. ISBN 1 869 89058 2

This is a workbook from Winston's Wish – a much admired service for Gloucestershire bereaved children. It is meant for bereaved children with guidance for adults working with the child. There is no guide to age-suitability but I would guess it is intended for primary school children. The illustrations are delightful and the text, which is primarily to help the child recognise and express the multitude of feelings following bereavement, is interspersed with 'fun' activities, including how to make a scary spider (spelled 'scarey') which is perhaps somewhat irrelevant, and how make a 'feelings volcano' which is more relevant. However, after making the volcano and studding it with sad, angry and other feelings – what do you do then? Like the feelings, the child is left up in the air. What is missing also is any attempt to help a child to understand what death is, how it manifests itself, what causes it.

Cognitive understanding is an essential preliminary to successful mourning. Of course, the child should have the services of an adult as they work through this book, but the adult most likely to use this workbook with the child would be the surviving parent(s), themselves grief-stricken and not necessarily that expert at explaining death to children. My benchmark for workbooks for bereaved children are the ones by Heegaard*. *Muddles, Puddles and Sunshine* is better illustrated, has activities designed to divert children from grief, but to my mind is less good at helping them to understand what happened to their dead loved one, and what is happening to them. Counsellors who can tackle the questions it stimulates will find it an attractive addition to their therapeutic tools for bereaved children but Heegaard's books are, I think, more helpful for the novice adult to use with a child.

Dora Black

Consultant Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist.

*Heegaard M. When Someone Very Special Dies; When Something Terrible Happens. Minneapolis, MN, USA: Woodland Press, 1991.

Available from Cruse Bereavement Care, ☎ 020 8939 9530; info@crusebereavementcare.org.uk

THE SPIRITUAL LIVES OF BEREAVED PARENTS

Dennis Klass

Philadelphia, USA: Brunner/Mazel, 1999, 218pp. £20.00 pb, £49.00 hb. ISBN 0 87630 990 2; 0 87630 991 0

The palliative care literature these days often speaks of spirituality, but there is surprisingly little written on the spirituality of bereaved people. This is odd, given that many chaplains and other ordained ministers organise and chair bereavement services.

This book is refreshingly unlike most on spirituality in health care. First, it is written by neither a chaplain nor a nurse, but by a professor of the psychology of comparative religions, who for 20 years has been consultant and researcher for a self-help group of bereaved parents. Second, Klass recognises that, though the search for meaning is personal and individual, it occurs in the context of millennia of world views and belief systems – spirituality and religion cannot be easily separated.

The death of a child challenges faith and trust, so grief becomes 'a spiritual journey, not just a psychological process'. The core of the book examines the communities within which the relationship with the dead child can evolve (though this chapter seemed to me more about psychology than spirituality), the ways in which parents find solace, and how world views are remoulded. Klass also examines provocatively the helper's own faith and assumptions; both optimistic and pessimistic world views have their merits, and helpers need to have become immersed in both traditions if they are to assist all clients.

There is considerable recycling of Klass' previous work, and one wonders to what extent he is writing about the USA, a peculiarly devout society, or about all Western societies. But the book reports state-of-the-art research, is well-written, personal, full of case studies, practical and certainly worth reading.

Tony Walter

Lecturer in Sociology

GRIEF AS A FAMILY PROCESS

A developmental approach to clinical practice

Ester R Shapiro

New York: Guilford Press, 1994, 286pp. £25.95 hb. ISBN 0 89862 196 8

I found it difficult to understand this elaborate book by a Massachusetts

assistant professor in psychology. Ester Shapiro claims the test of her 'systemic developmental' therapy is its usefulness, but gives no clear outline of what she means by this and no examples, not even: 'Here, a grief counsellor might do X, while I, a systemic developmental therapist, I did Y.'

Her writing style is sloppy, vague and over-referenced. Five pages describing 'beginning therapy' omit to mention how many sessions were involved. 'The son of Jewish survivors of the Holocaust' is, eight pages on, 'born to Jewish parents who survived the Holocaust'. The obvious is stated as profound: 'The death of the same-sex parent deprives teenagers of the opportunity to test the evolving sense of their own adult possibilities against the adult they are most like.' Doctors, police, funeral directors and clergy may help families, but Ms Shapiro calls it 'informational and supportive intervention', quoting seven people writing between 1979 and 1985.

She is over-involved and sometimes insensitive, concerned when a woman's family encouraged her to move away from what Shapiro calls 'our therapy'. To help a bereaved boy, she and his mother find ('our search') a tape of his father's voice at his circumcision. There is a cultural significance to many circumcisions, but others view this practice as mutilation without consent: I wish that Shapiro had paused to wonder what Sam, when an adult, might decide.

Peter Bruggen

Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist

ON THE DEATH OF A CHILD (2nd edn)

Cella Hindmarch

Oxford, UK: Radcliffe Medical Press, 2000, 230pp. £17.95 pb. ISBN 1 85775 445 X

Hindmarch begins by recognising that 'child status extends from prebirth to any age while parents are alive to grieve their loss.' Her style is clear and concise with plenty of subheadings, and case vignettes are used appropriately.

The first chapter gives some useful statistics and covers different situations of child death (for example, deaths from prenatal and perinatal loss, death from acute and chronic illnesses, deaths from murder or suicide, and so on). Subsequent chapters discuss features of mourning when a child dies, the roles of various professionals – including ambulance personnel, counsellors, funeral directors, general practitioners, clergy, doctors, health visitors, nurses

and midwives, the police, and registrars of births, marriages and deaths – and the need for proper professional supervision.

The author reminds us of the importance of using the child's name in discussions, avoiding platitudes and euphemisms, and of the need to recognise that every bereavement is unique. Seeing the body after a death may be helpful – fantasy is, often, worse than reality. Other chapters give guidelines for stressful situations, on talking to children and to families and on supporting families and schools. The roles of counselling, psychotherapy, psychology, and psychiatry are considered and there are appendices with lists of useful contacts and other resources, and suggestions for further reading.

I like this book – it is clear and easy to read, is comprehensive yet concise, and covers a good breadth of subjects. The author conveys her experience and knowledge well. It is, therefore, a useful book to have available and to refer to when helping the bereaved parent.

THEY DYING GAME

A young person's guide to death

Martin Davies (ed)

Birmingham, UK: Movement Publications, 1997, 43pp. £4.50. ISBN 0 90635 931 9

This illustrated A4 booklet, published by the Student Christian Movement, is described as 'a collage of snapshots' by its editor. Quotations from over 100 people, ranging from Shakespeare to Woody Allen, are included. There are also moving accounts from those who are facing their own death or the death of someone they love. I found particularly vivid Caroline Bailey's account of her brother's life and death, in which she describes how her brother, a Church of England priest, died of AIDS-related illness in 1995. Throughout the booklet, there are references to Christianity but also to other beliefs and religions. A few spelling mistakes mar the text.

The editor recommends that such a resource is probably best 'dipped into', rather than being read from cover to cover, and I agree. It is not entirely clear at whom the book is aimed but, since there are a number of suggestions for group tasks, it would be relevant material for school and college libraries as well as church groups, and could provide a useful resource for counsellors who work in, for example, hospices.

Martin Newman

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BOOKS

REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH

A social psychological perspective

Mary Bradbury

London, UK: Routledge, 1999, 197pp. £55.00 hb, £15.00 pb. ISBN 0 41515 023 1; 0 41515 022 1

This rich and readable book synthesises the medical and bureaucratic aspects of death, the disposition of the corpse and the interplay between rituals and symbolic representations, leaving the reader understanding why 'the British way of death cannot be explained away in terms of mindless tradition.' Mary Bradbury, a researcher currently training at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London, penetrates the culture of death by combining in-depth interviews with visiting the worlds of the 'deathworkers' as participant observer.

Her thorough and well-written study critiques traditional models of grief while illuminating the perspectives of both grieving kin and those involved in the care of the dying and disposal of the dead. Undertaker, funeral director, embalmer, were familiar appellations for those who work in the 'death industry'; 'memorial counsellor' (salesperson of cemetery headstones and crematoria markers) is a new such professional for this reviewer.

Bradbury argues convincingly that many of the activities that appear to be rational, such as embalming, also have expressive roles. Making the deceased look better is more a function of beautifying the dead for viewers than of removing or reducing infection. Peter Rauter's 15 black-and-white photographs support her thesis, documenting current mortuary practices not only by reminding us of the expected but also by allowing us to be privy to traumatic acts the public never gets to view. His images include a funeral parlour interviewing room, storage facilities and portraits of hands taken in the embalming room, the removal of flowers from a horse-drawn hearse, and an 'operative' peering through a peephole

monitoring the computer-operated cremator.

Readers of *Bereavement Care* will be especially interested in the chapter on social representations of loss, and the author's wariness of the medicalisation of grief and its presentation as a disease from which one could 'recover'. Though psychiatric research would now concur – even proclaim – that grief is neither ailment nor unhealthy, just the suggestion that grief can turn into a life-threatening condition is a subtle delineation of it as disease. Bradbury reminds us that representations have power, even worse, tendencies of becoming reality. Her interviews with bereaved women brought out their needs for practical help – a bowl of soup, or assistance with the new role of budgeting and maintaining the cheque book, and the time and understanding for rebuilding a new self which includes space for the continuing relationship with the dead person.

Two pictorial resources are readily available companion pieces but, though amply illustrated and expansive in their examinations of burials across cultures, they are more narrowly focused. *Corpses, Coffins, and Crypts*¹ sets out to furnish a history of burial. *Beautiful Death*² is an artful tour of cemeteries, capturing in gorgeous detail and large colour photographs the affecting beauty of tombs, statuary and monuments in Europe, for example Père-Lachaise, the Jewish cemetery in Prague. **BC**

Sandra Bertman

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1. Coleman P. New York: Henry Holt, 1997.
2. Robinson D, Koontz DR. London: Penguin Studio, 1996.

ABSTRACTS

A proposed model of health professionals' grieving process

Papadatou D. *Omega* 2000; **41**(1): 59-77

This valuable article is based on the author's extensive experience as a clinical psychologist in a large paediatric hospital in Athens, and on a study conducted in Greece and Hong Kong which explored how professionals working in oncology and intensive care units experience and cope with the death of children. The commitment they bring to their work often produces emotional exhaustion and post-traumatic stress. The author describes ways in which these professionals learned to cope with the sense of loss

which they felt as a result of experiencing the illness and death of a succession of patients.

She stresses the importance of being able to share grief with co-workers; of the necessity of combining a sense of involvement with professional detachment; and of the need for information, help with making meaning of death, and clinical, practical and emotional support. She concludes that this is an area of grieving which merits further research from various angles.

Death, dying, and bereavement in relation to older individuals

International Work Group on Death, Dying and Bereavement. *Illness, Crisis & Loss* 2000; **8**(4): 388-394

This short article focuses on issues of death, dying and bereavement in relation to older individuals, with the aim of promoting a more positive view of old age. After listing various inaccurate myths that exist regarding this age group, the article identifies, from a holistic point of view, a more balanced, non-discriminatory set of assumptions that should be at the root of practices relating to bereaved older people. The topics raised are discussed in a clear and objective way. It is proposed to follow this article with other studies in relation to older people: these should produce some interesting material.

Grief adjustment as influenced by funeral participation and occurrence of adverse funeral events

Gamino LA, Easterling LW, Stirman LS, Sewell KW. *Omega* 2000; **41**(2): 79-92

The authors of this article, who carried out a study of 74 bereaved people in relation to their experiences with funeral services for their loved ones, discuss how these services helped or failed to help the mourners. Their findings provide empirical support for the conventional wisdom that participation in funeral rituals helps the bereaved to adjust, both by facilitating social support and by connecting them with deeper levels of meaning through which to understand their loss.

However, adverse events connected with the burial service, which happened with surprising frequency, contributed

to a perception of the funeral rites as not comforting. These events are categorised and illustrated in order to guide grief therapists and funeral directors in helping mourners to be vigilant towards such adversities.

Grief reactions to the death of a divorced spouse revisited

Scott S. Omega 2000; **41**(3): 207-219

This research report shows grief following the death of a divorced spouse to be a common event which frequently is not understood, acknowledged, and/or accepted by society, family members, and friends. With a high divorce rate in many western countries and an increased expectation of life, there will be a growing number of people who may suffer such a grief experience. This article (which is based both on recent research and on a study carried out in 1984-5) focuses on the reasons why people often grieve for an ex-spouse, the unique factors which influence their response, and the importance of helping them to manage their grief. There is at present little research into the grief of these individuals, or into the reactions of any children of the marriage, and this creates an urgent need for further study which can be used to educate society concerning the necessity of helping survivors to cope with their loss.

It makes a difference

Silverman PR. *Illness, Crisis and Loss* 2001; **9**(1): 111-128

This issue of *Illness, Crisis & Loss* is devoted to women leaders in thanatology, and many of the articles are not concerned with bereavement. However, the author of this interesting and sympathetic article was responsible in 1965 for developing a programme called Widow-to-Widow, the *raison d'être* being that there is a special value in the help offered by one widowed person to another. The programme challenged the (then) generally accepted idea that bereavement can be neatly resolved within a specified period of time, and proposed instead that the concept of transition, focusing on accommodation rather than recovery, might reflect more accurately what these women experience. They cannot simply let go of the past, but must learn to define themselves differently in relation to others, and develop fresh skills that will enable them to develop coping strategies appropriate to their new position. **BC**

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

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