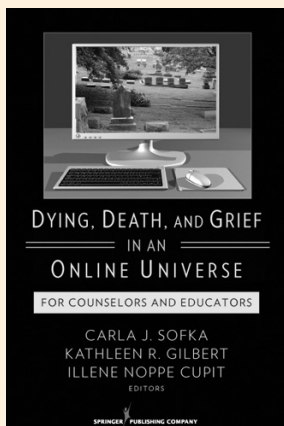


Book Reviews



Dying, Death, and Grief in an Online Universe

Carla J. Sofka, Illene Noppe Cupit & Kathleen R. Gilbert (Eds.)

New York: Springer Publishing Company, 2012
271 pp
£48.50
ISBN 978 0 8261 0732 9

Like its cosmic equivalent, the online universe referred to in the title of this book continues to expand rapidly and in all directions. Such are the complex and far-reaching implications of the digital revolution that academics, thinkers and practitioners from every conceivable discipline are pondering its impact and discovering new arenas for research and practice. Death studies is no exception, and this edited text is the first book to focus on one of these digital-age fields of study – thanatechnology – and to draw together offerings from diverse perspectives and disciplines under that umbrella.

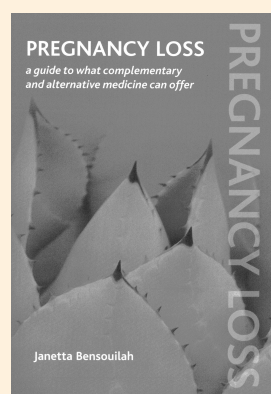
Although most of us are aware of how the computer age has changed our lives, fewer have considered how our Internet-mediated existence is changing our deaths and all the associated aspects – the dying process, the experience of bereavement, modes of memorialisation, and the practices of the funeral industry, grief counsellors, and death educators. Despite being a relatively slim volume at 271 pages, this book attempts to address all of these areas and speak to many different types of professional. While any text that focuses on an emergent field can be forgiven for emphasizing breadth over depth, for many readers the wide-ranging nature of the book will mean that some chapters will offer material of immediate practical relevance, while others may be of little or of only intellectual interest. The individuals seeking guidance on offering bereavement counselling online may not be the same people who want to read about end-of-life blogging or providing death education in an online forum.

Overall, this book may perhaps be most useful to those involved in general death studies, who operate in a multidisciplinary context and have multiple professional

roles. As this cutting-edge field becomes more widely and deeply researched and written about, we can expect new publications targeted towards particular types of professionals and their needs. In the meantime, however, this is an excellent resource for the diverse practitioners and educators who are involved in this nascent area.

Elaine Kasket

Senior Lecturer in Counselling Psychology, London Metropolitan University



Pregnancy loss: a guide to what complementary and alternative medicine can offer

Janetta Bensouilah

London: Radcliffe Publishing, 2011
128 pp
£19.99
ISBN 978 1 84619 374 3

Janetta Bensouilah, a therapist in acupuncture and herbal medicine, has written an accessible text aimed at practitioners in complementary and alternative medicine who are working with women who have experienced pregnancy loss. A cursory glance at existing work in this area suggests that this will fill a gap in the field of CAM and pregnancy loss.

For me, however, the problem with this book was balance. While it is important for practitioners to have knowledge of the definitions, causes, medical management and psychological issues in pregnancy loss, more than half of the book was devoted to these issues leaving little room for the ways in which CAM could help. Were I a CAM therapist looking to find several different ways of supporting mothers through a pregnancy after a loss I fear I would be disappointed: much of the advice presented was around supporting mothers in adhering to pre-existing medical advice.

While not an aim of this book, there was little critical engagement with the medical research that has investigated

environmental causes of pregnancy loss. Bensouilah was correct to argue that it is difficult to separate out the effects of alcohol and smoking on the developing foetus. She then goes on to say that a high proportion of mothers under the age of 20 years are smokers, however, might low socio-economic group be a factor here? Moreover, when she considers body mass index as a factor, she quotes figures from the Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health (2009) that suggest that being either under- or overweight is a risk factor but fails to mention that the report advises caution in accepting this un-problematically as a risk factor. I have written elsewhere of the guilt that medical discourses around pregnancy loss engenders in bereaved mothers (Murphy, 2011) and am disappointed that such discourses are accepted uncritically here.

Finally, while the aim of this book was not to challenge medicalised approaches to pregnancy loss, I find it surprising that a proponent of alternative medicine – a tradition that has broadly been seen as in opposition to it (Bakx, 1991) – is as unquestioning of biomedicine as is Bensouilah.

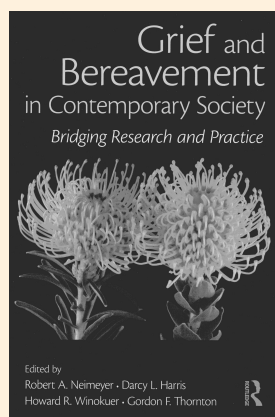
Dr Samantha Murphy

Lecturer, Faculty of Health and Social Care, The Open University

Bakx K (1991). The eclipse of folk medicine. *Sociology of Health and Illness*, 13 (1) pp. 20-9.

Confidential Enquiry into Maternal and Child Health (CEMACH) (2009) *Perinatal Mortality 2007: United Kingdom*. CEMACH: London.

Murphy S. (2012) Reclaiming a moral identity: stillbirth, stigma and 'moral mothers'. *Midwifery* 28(4) 476–480.



Grief and bereavement in contemporary society – bridging research and practice

Bob Neimeyer, Darcy Harris, Howard Winoker and Gordon Thornton (eds)

Hove/New York: Routledge, 2011
442pp
£28.99
ISBN 978 0 415 88481 5

This book sets out to generate a dialogue between eminent researchers and practitioners in the field of death, dying and bereavement. Each chapter brings together, often for the first time, pairs of authors who represent contrasting perspectives derived from research and practice experience. It is an innovative approach which is excitingly refreshing and one which will contribute

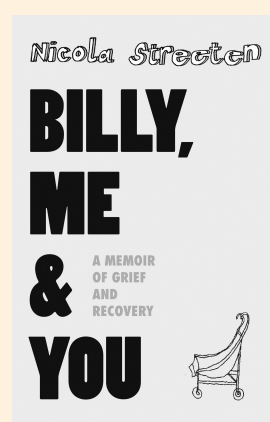
hugely to the development of a new level of integrative thinking in the field of bereavement care.

The diversity and scope of this volume provides a rich resource for further study and discussion by researchers and practitioners alike. It is divided into six sections, each of which makes extensive use of case studies. 'Current Conceptualizations of the Grief Response' explores influential contemporary models of grief, such as attachment theory and the Dual Process Model, alongside the clinical implication and application of these concepts. 'The Contexts of Grieving' identifies the risks and resources in responding to particular relationship losses eg. spousal, child, sibling etc. 'Challenges in Bereavement' engages with the complexity of complicated grief. It also addresses ambiguous loss and chronic sorrow which may be generated by intangible or ongoing loss eg. the grief of infertility, parenting a child with a disability etc. To these challenges are added the clinical needs of those bereft by disaster. Attention is given in the fourth section to 'Specific Populations' who may be especially marginalised in their grief: this may be because of their sexual orientation, situations where death was sustained in military combat and those who have lost pets. The section on 'Special Therapeutic Modalities' looks at family therapy, expressive arts, ritual and the links between palliative care and bereavement care. 'Grief in a Global Perspective' attends to issues of culture, religion and spirituality, technology, social justice and professional ethics.

I believe that this book represents a powerfully new dialogic formula which will enrich, as a joint enterprise, those engaged in extending the boundaries of knowledge about grief and those committed to ameliorating its impact on grieving people.

Linda Machin

Visiting Research Fellow, Keele University



Billy, me and you: a memoir of grief and recovery

Nicola Streeter

Brighton: Myriad Editions, 2011
194pp
£12.99
ISBN: 978 0 9565599 4 4

Billy, Me and You is a true story of the death of a two-year-old boy, and how his parents eventually came to terms with their loss. It is a black-and-

white graphic novel with cartoons, sketches, photographs and blank diary pages. It is touching, enlightening and endearing. The movement between the different graphic forms allows the author to give a diverse emphasis to different parts of her grieving process. It also allows the reader to 'fill in the gaps' by reference to their own experiences.

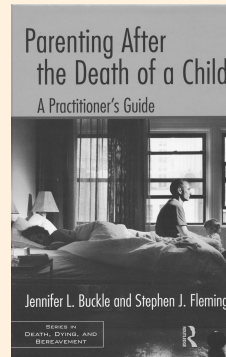
This is a story that pulls no punches. Based on her diaries and drawings at the time of her bereavement, it is written 13 years later as a means of sharing the ways the author and her partner dealt with their grief and made their journey. From the opening scenes of leaving the hospital with the 'patient's property' bags to the final scene of the acceptance by a publisher of her graphic novel, she records, rages, muses and celebrates the grief process.

She shows how people responded to her by what they said and didn't say – and as a thought balloon what she thinks about what they have said. She refers several times to the ranking of responses – that's a 7 out of 10 answer, that's a 10/10, and that's a minus 20/10. The responses of other people are varied and predictable (we have each muttered these words) and she gives her commentary on her own tart internal response. Most poignant is how she deals with the dilemma of 'I am not a mother, but I am not "not a mother". I don't have a script to follow any more.'

By having the contemporaneous diaries she is able to reflect on 'the forgotten details absurdities and assumptions that make us laugh and helped us heal'. Bringing it together in this graphic art form gives the reader an opportunity to experience the grief process at its rawest through to its positive resolution. It's a story of pain, angst, and recrimination but also of tenderness, patience and hope. It could be very useful for bereavement counsellors and other interested parties to explore some of the issues for themselves, and used sensitively with the bereaved, is a resource that shows the mess, mixed messages and misunderstandings of bereavement and how lives can grow around the loss.

Janet Dowling

Cruse Bereavement Care Volunteer



Parenting after the death of a child: a practitioner's guide

Jennifer L Buckle, Stephen J Fleming

Abingdon: Routledge, 2010

206pp

£22.00

ISBN 978 0 415 99573 3

This short 200-page book addresses the hitherto relative lack of literature examining how parents continue to parent remaining children after the death of a sibling. It is divided into eight easy-to-read chapters with a final pair of appendices. In this book, an attempt is made to summarise the existing bereavement literature. There is also an extended account of a qualitative study of bereaved parents and lastly some advice given on how better to help families caught up in such tragedies.

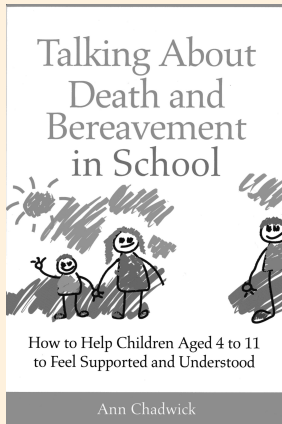
The authors suggest that bereaved parents have both to 'live the duality of devastation and regeneration' – managing the tension of parenting remaining siblings in the context of grief. They suggest that the losses faced can be likened to 'a house of refracting glass' and that continuing in the difficult task of parenting involves 'picking up the pieces'.

I thought that the book made an entirely appropriate attempt to marry theory with a clear account of the qualitative study of bereaved parents that underpins the suggested framework. In particular I found, that unlike elsewhere, the focus on qualitative research was a refreshing one. In this age of randomised controlled trials being touted as the gold standard, it was good to see the authors keen to share with us the reader both the range and depth of their study through the use of many clinical case examples. This added a certain poignancy to the material as I read it, helping me and no doubt others to keep in touch with the devastating nature of the subject matter. In my work as a psychiatrist, I have encountered families suffering significantly from the death of a loved child. Knowing how best to help is an important and relevant dilemma.

I believe this book is one that should be read by professionals and interested families alike. It serves as a useful addition to a neglected area of bereavement research. It reminds clinicians not to be fearful of asking about a family's grief in such matters. The appendices and references are particularly helpful for professionals thinking about setting up and running a service for bereaved families. At the very least, this book reminds us that a comprehensive systemic assessment can assist such families as they adapt to the profound changes brought upon them.

Phil Ferreira-Lay

Consultant Child Psychiatrist and Psychotherapist



Talking about death and bereavement in schools

Ann Chadwick

London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers, 2011
73pp
£11.99
ISBN 978 1 84905 246 7

School can be an important supportive and stabilising environment for children who are coping with the death of someone close to them but school staff often feel that they lack the necessary skills to support bereaved children. This book aims to provide advice and guidance for primary school staff as to how best to understand and respond to pupils who have been bereaved.

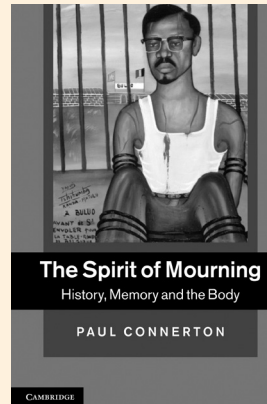
The author provides an overview of children's understanding of death, their emotional responses and the ways in which grief may affect behaviour and learning in the classroom. She also considers the wider impact which the death of a pupil or teacher may have on the school community. As well as practical advice on how to support children to express their grief, there are suggestions on how death and loss can be incorporated into the curriculum, developing a school bereavement strategy and how best to deal with external agencies. The author highlights the importance of considering spiritual, social and cultural issues which shape children's experience and understanding of death and bereavement. A helpful list of related reading and resources is also provided.

The book is very short and is written in an accessible style which should make it easier for busy teachers to find the time for additional reading. The use of case studies throughout the book helps to illustrate and personalise the topics discussed. However, I am uncertain whether this book adds anything unique to the excellent existing resources which are available to schools. The Help the Hospices booklet, *Supporting Bereaved Children: A Handbook for Primary Schools* and the free schools information pack from Winston's Wish cover many of the same topics but in more detail and provide more clear, comprehensive practical guidelines.

Catriona Matthews

Chartered Clinical Psychologist

Brown E (2009). *Supporting bereaved children: a handbook for primary schools*. Help the Hospices



The Spirit of Mourning: History, Memory and the Body

Paul Connerton

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011
147pp
\$28.99
ISBN 978 1 107 64883 8

Do not be misled by the title of this book. Connerton's scholarly work is focused upon how memory is inhabited within and inscribed upon our bodies, rather than being concerned with the quality of mourning and bereavement *per se*.

Connerton uses an impressive array of sources, spanning cultures, time and discipline, to illustrate his thesis that in the absence of bereavement customs, people turn to histories in order to cope with collective trauma, suffering or the uncontainable experience of loss. Moreover, the very fact that people do so he argues, challenges the assumption that histories legitimate the current status quo, and therefore, calls the 'legitimation thesis' into question. Rather, many histories are generated from a shared loss, trauma or emphasis on a painful past, to make sense of this experience through a particular mourning culture.

Histories of mourning and cultural bereavement highlight the continuous victimisation of particular groups along the divisions of class, gender and race and Connerton provides many and varied anthropological and historical examples in the first half of his book.

The focus shifts in the latter part of the book to analysing how cultures of mourning and experiences of shared trauma or loss are manifest within the body, so that a cultural bereavement may be felt and bodily re-enacted. In this way a tradition and history of mourning becomes carried within each of us as a living, felt thing.

This is not an easy read, as Connerton's learned writing is constantly referring to philosophical and historical debate, but it is a book worth seeing through as his analysis of how the memory of traumatic events and loss is inscribed within each and every one of our bodies is fascinating, erudite and profound.

Hannah Rumble

Research Officer & Teaching Associate at Bath University