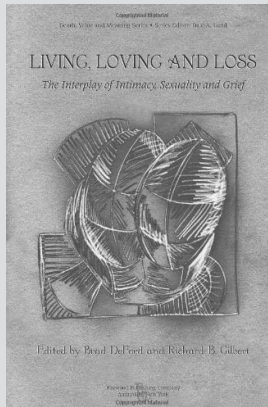


# Book Reviews



## **Living, loving and loss: the interplay of intimacy, sexuality and grief,**

Brad DeFord and Richard B Gilbert (editors)

New York: Baywood Publishing Company Inc  
2014  
252 pp  
£41.50  
ISBN: 978 0895036537

The thirteen contributors to this book come from a variety of professional backgrounds and they bring experience of diverse contexts of loss and grief. Some are therapists or councillors, others teachers, academics in the field of thanatology, or religious guides.

The fact that only four of these authors are women is a weakness of this book. Nevertheless the scope is wide, addressing both the universal experience of loss and death for us all, and also more specific experiences that can disenfranchise and isolate sufferers from those around them.

The Foreword, Preface and Afterward in this volume offer particularly interesting reflections on the transformative experience of loving, losing and grieving.

Amongst the many perspectives represented are viewpoints from the Christian and Jewish traditions, from an existential or humanistic spirituality, from the LGBT community, from the young and the elderly, from those approaching the end of their lives, and from those caring for them.

The impact of loss on current and future intimacies is explored in relation to a number of specific life experiences. These include the trauma of serving soldiers and war veterans and the impact on their partners, the suffering engendered by HIV- and AIDS-related losses, and the grief experienced in contexts as diverse as infertility and dementia.

There is a powerful evocation of the experience of loss in relation to gender identity, sexual orientation and intimacy as a result of dominant stereotyping discourses,

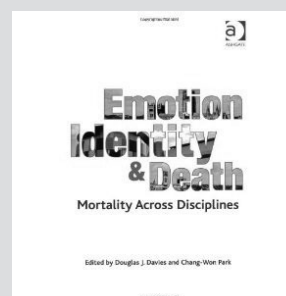
making clear that when social discourses deny value to intimate relationships they suffocate the natural expression of grief, halt the healing process and hobble future experiences of intimacy.

The authors emphasise the human need for intimacy in the meaning-making process of living, the role of sexuality in exploring and developing intimacy, and the loss, in the aftermath of bereavement, of one's sense of self as a sexual being and as intimately connected with others.

The overall message of this book is a positive one and as such, although it is slanted towards a more professional readership, it is likely to be helpful to people who are grieving as well as those supporting them. A connection is made between intimacy with oneself and intimacy with others. The disorientation and pain of loss are seen as providing opportunities to learn more about one's identity and needs and so to re-establish intimacy with oneself. This deeper intimacy with oneself is conceived of as a step towards developing deeper physical and emotional relationships with others. In this way grief is welcomed as a deeply painful but transformative journey towards more meaningful and intimate experiences of life. ■

## **Cathy Taylor**

Systemic Psychotherapist



## **Emotion, identity and death: mortality across disciplines**

Douglas J Davies and Chang-Won Park (Editors)

Ashgate  
2012  
£57.64  
ISBN: 978 1409424147

Being a book reviewer over the past years has certainly posed its challenges. Some books were more accessible than others, some I just couldn't put down, some have been educational, and some were poignant and inspiring; conversely some books were more difficult, either because of content, structure, language and terminology, or

because I simply couldn't identify with them.

For me, unfortunately, *Emotion, identity and death* falls into the second category.

Assembled by the international organisation Death Dying and Disposal (DDD), this book indisputably offers readers a diverse yet skilfully organised collection of papers invited from multidisciplinary academics on the topic of emotions, identity and death. Its 15 chapters contain a variety of themes, from explorations of modern day technological tributes, and the increasingly popular rebirth of celebrating All Souls' Day in the Netherlands, to the impact of Death Row on the prisoner's identity, and an exploration of the significance of requiem compositions for the bereaved individual.

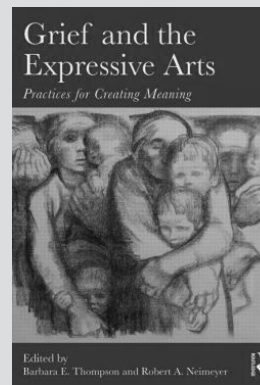
The contributors write from a variety of academic perspectives, including theological, cultural, sociological, anthropological, linguistic, archaeological, literary, geographical, and musical, each one's field of expertise determining the focus and approach to their chosen topic and reflected in the writing.

It was this vast diversity and disparity within the book's structure and authorship that I found difficult to navigate – although each chapter is potentially informative and intriguing, I felt there was a lack of continuity and flow. However, it would be unfair to criticise the book without acknowledging the influence of my perspective – working as a counsellor and bereavement volunteer for almost fifteen years, my reading interests have rarely ventured into some of the areas focused on in this text. I was therefore especially impressed (and more familiar with) with Chapter 5's quest to discover more about the concept of 'presence' in continuing bonds theory, and with Chapter 7's personal narrative about dealing with the illness and death of an ex-spouse.

On the whole, I am sure this rather expensive book has much to offer academic individuals familiar with the literature belonging to fields of expertise associated with 'death, dying and disposal'. However I do not believe it would be of significant benefit to workers whose priority is developing their ability and proficiency in supporting bereaved people. ■

### Trish Staples

Counsellor/trainer, bereavement volunteer and writer



### Grief and the expressive arts: practices for creating meaning

Barbara E Thompson and Robert A Neimeyer (eds)

Routledge

2014

312pp

£24.99

ISBN: 978 0 415 85719 2

Barbara E Thompson and Robert A Neimeyer have brought together contributors from diverse perspectives including visual artists, musicians, dancers and creative writers and poets who each have a therapeutic dimension to their work. They explain in jargon-free language how creative techniques can be used with those who have experienced loss and grief and how by honouring the creative urge we enhance the life force.

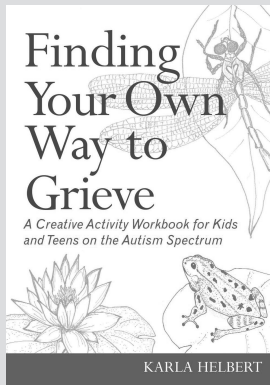
Artists and therapists themselves, Thompson and Neimeyer have edited an excellent book that puts creativity, love and compassion at the heart of grief counselling. The book shows how we can work in different modalities that don't always put verbal expression at the centre. Sometimes, people don't have the words to express what they are feeling. Some cultures emphasise different forms of expression, for example, some American-Indian groups place particular emphasis on visual representation of emotions above spoken exchanges. In counselling we need to always be aware of cultural, ethnic and spiritual aspects of our clients' lives.

*Grief and the expressive arts* is a valuable work for anyone practising in this area, whether you are a newly trained counsellor or someone with years of experience, because the book offers a vast array of creative techniques to use with different age groups and in different settings. As someone who has been working in the field of grief counselling for over twenty five years, I found inspirational ideas in this volume which is also beautifully written. It is practical too, giving 'how to' descriptions and case studies to demonstrate the techniques.

In their 'Closing Reflections', the editors remind us that we are all 'wounded healers' and we bring our own experiences of loss and grief to the counselling process. Reflecting on this can deepen our relationships with others as we accompany our clients through their journey of despair, incomprehension, sadness and anger. Acceptance that life can change in a heartbeat after the death of someone we know, may also lead to personal transformation and this book encourages counsellor reflection and creative activities to enhance our own lives as well as the clients. ■

### Brenda Mallon

Psychotherapist/counsellor and creative writing tutor



## **Finding your own way to grieve: a creative activity workbook for kids and teens on the autistic spectrum**

Karla Herbert

London, UK: Jessica Kingsley  
2012  
192pp  
£14.99  
ISBN: 9 78184905 9220

This is a very effective manual for young people on the autistic spectrum who have experienced a death, with advice to carers, parents, teachers and therapists on how they might support the young person's use of the book.

The manual is arranged around the short story 'When someone dies'. This uses clear words to describe death and many of the different feelings experienced after someone dies. It is very short and to the point. No messing with ambiguous language such as 'We have lost granddad'.

I asked a young woman who is on the Asperger's Spectrum and the mother of a child with autism to tell me about their experience of this manual. Both thought the short story was an excellent starting point – and that this was the best social story about death that they had seen.

The rest of the manual focuses on small sections of the story, and introduces different topics to do with death, grief and other feelings. For example the chapter on feeling sad or angry moves from naming feelings, drawing feelings and things to make yourself feel better when you feel sad. Using a body map, young people are encouraged to pay attention to how they react when angry, and similarly explore safe ways to let anger out, including making a scream box. All the exercises are clearly laid out, and the young person can either use a separate journal, or the author gives them 'permission' to use the book itself to record their responses.

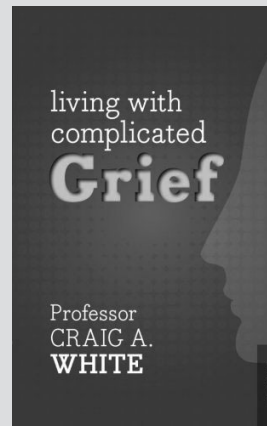
Both my informants felt that not everyone would want to do all the activities. However they both agreed that the range of activities, and the way they have been described in a clear way, would encourage children and teens on the autistic spectrum to use it. The exercises will also work well in a mainstream context, and they have certainly gone into my own tool box.

The young woman on the Asperger's spectrum also highlighted that the book's decoration of frogs, dragon flies and water lilies on the front cover and the short story would be too much of a metaphor for autistic young people, and they would be unlikely to make the connection between the illustrations and their relationship to life and death.

Overall, this is a useful manual for working with young people on the autistic spectrum, and is also a very useful resource for working with all other groups. ■

**Janet Dowling**

Bereavement Volunteer



## **Living with complicated grief**

Craig A White

London: Sheldon Press  
2013  
128 pp  
£8.99  
ISBN 13: 978-184709150

This beautifully written book by a Doctor of Psychology from the University of Glasgow will be invaluable to workers of all disciplines who specialise in services for bereaved people. Careful monitoring will facilitate identification of the, often insidious, indications that the complex processes of grieving are becoming stuck or morphing into psychiatric illness. These are effectively described: a future edition could be helpful in further discussing criteria for referral to specialist services.

Written exercises may be helpful to those who have lost someone, who are verbally articulate, and who are able (or prefer) to work alone, or to subsequently discuss the story of their grief with a counsellor. However, much more will be required of counsellors working with the inarticulate and those who are numb with grief, and further consideration and advice would be helpful here. This reviewer would welcome expansion of the thoughtful chapter on complicated grief with particular reference to the inter-links between grief, clinical depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. ■

Highly recommended.

**Jean Harris-Hendriks**

Hon Consultant, Child and Adolescent Psychiatry