

Editorial

Jane McCarthy

We have five varied pieces in this issue of *Bereavement Care*: two powerful first person articles, two pieces of empirical research, and a helpful introduction to mindfulness practices in therapy.

I offer here some personal reflections of my own in response to the first person articles, particularly thinking about cultural issues since I am working on cross-cultural projects myself at present (for example see bit.ly/19xttdz). In a powerful and helpful article, Anne Geraghty writes about her experience of the sudden death of her adult son, aged 34, drawing also on her professional background. As expected for a first person article, Geraghty writes in the first person singular, but also slips frequently into the first person plural, suggesting something universal about 'our' responses to death and loss – 'whatever form our grief takes, universally the dead are no longer with us in the body'. In two recent publications (Ribbens McCarthy, 2012; Ribbens McCarthy & Prokhovnik, 2014), I have explored culturally variable views of the deceased body and of personhood, as well as how far the dead remain with us, not only in our internal psychic worlds as these are conceived within western cultural thought, but engraved into our bodies, as a form of embodied relationality. Anne Geraghty perhaps offers a particularly western view, then, when she considers her personal experiences of encounters with her son after his death, writing: 'I wanted more than this... I wanted proof that my sense of Tim was somehow real and not all in my own head'. This evokes for me an incident that I experienced after my husband's death in 2000, when I 'saw' him very clearly walking into our bedroom. My thinking process immediately started to question whether this was a 'real', external manifestation, or a projection of my inner psyche. What startled me was that the figure of my husband then put his finger to his lips, to indicate that I should hush my analytic, intellectual thinking, and just accept the experience on its own terms.

Nature figures explicitly in the article by Caroline Jay, where she elaborates her responses to the death of her stillborn daughter, and her later work to harness themes around nature – such as change and loss, cycles and seasons – to help children think about death. A striking feature of her account is her initial use of the resources she developed, at the invitation of a head-teacher. When she asked the children whether any of them had someone they loved who had died, 'nearly 200 small hands shot up in the air' – a strong indication of how far death is in fact a 'normal' part of the life experiences of young people, even young children.

Deaths of children (of varied ages) are central to the research conducted by Camille Hannays-King, *et al* exploring Black mothers' experiences after the death of a child through gun violence. Their study focuses on the significance of social networks and support for coping with the death, but the stigma of a death due to gun homicide meant that the mothers might become socially isolated. Sadly, this could be the result of the actions and responses of others, both families and friends, and of the mothers' own anticipations of such responses, leading to social withdrawal. The article also provides significant insights into the relevance of social inequalities due to race, and their impact on bereavement. The article points to how experiences of discrimination can combine with the stigma of a violent death to result in mothers' reluctance to engage with relevant services. They thus suggest that 'their experiences of loss were much more multifaceted and interconnected with their social milieu than traditional grief theories suggest,' and the authors conclude with recommendations for interventions that include family and friends.

Hannays-King's research is based on in-depth qualitative interviews, using an approach known as grounded theory. The article by Lindsey M Knowles and Mary-Frances O'Connor presents results from empirical work using a very different methodology, namely regression analysis based on statistical data. Drawing on the Dual Process Model, the article examines the dual elements of trauma focus and forward focus coping strategies, to consider 'coping flexibility' amongst older widows and widowers. Their results suggest that coping flexibility may be connected to, or 'predictive' of, grief severity, loneliness, yearning and perceived stress. For readers unfamiliar with such statistical analysis, the language of prediction should not be mistaken as establishing the presence of causality however. As the authors state in their discussion, whether their findings represent causal relationships is a question for future research.

Finally, in our Broader Horizons article by Margot Hasha, research is cited to evidence the effectiveness of mindfulness practices. The article provides a very helpful and inspiring account of the relevance of such approaches to therapeutic practices in palliative and bereavement care.

Ribbens McCarthy J (2012). *Caring after death: issues of embodiment and relationality*. In: Rogers C and Weller S (eds) *Critical Approaches to Care*. London: Routledge.

Ribbens McCarthy J, Prokhovnik R (2014). *Embodied relationality and caring after death*. *Body & Society* 20(2) 18–43.