ABSTRACTS

'And there's always this great hole inside that hurts': an empirical study of bereavement in later life

Bennett KM, Bennett G. *Omega* 2000-2001: **42**(3): 237-251

Theoretical approaches to bereavement involving stages have long been used in both academic and clinical work. Their impact has been so great that they have become the 'clinical lore' of bereavement. This paper examines this clinical lore from the perspective of older women's narratives of widowhood. The authors suggest that, though the 19 widows who took part experienced the emotions that stage theories predict, there is little evidence to support the notion of steady progression from one stage to another. Nor is there evidence to support the idea that widows 'recover' from their loss in the sense of surrendering their attachment to the dead, or that 'renewal' equates with a fully restored sense of well-being. The widows themselves argued cogently that the idea of 'recovery' is an inappropriate aim for them to strive for. They felt uncomfortable with the pathologising of lasting grief; they also expressed strong views about those who try to help them. The article, which is clearly and convincingly written, concludes that, though stage theories are useful in identifying some of the physical effects and emotions associated with bereavement, they do not adequately reflect the experiences of women widowed in later life.

Mapping grief: an active approach to grief resolution

Clark S. *Death Studies* 2001; **25**(6): 531-548

This article describes a clinical tool, the Grief Map, that is designed to help those who are grieving death and non-death losses. The map provides a constructive multidimensional framework for dealing with the phenomena of the grieving process and for rebuilding life following major loss. It complements, but does not replace, traditional therapeutic methods, and is based on the concept that the grieving process is a journey. The author believes that it can be of particular value for clients who find it difficult to talk about their feelings. The limitations of the map and issues for further research are also discussed.

The role of ritual in children's bereavement

Fristad MA, Cerel J, Goldman M, Weller EB, Weller RA. *Omega* 2000-2001; **42**(4): 321-339

At one, six, 13, and 25 months after the death, 318 children aged 5-17 who had lost a parent were interviewed and asked about their participation in the funeral rituals and about their subsequent adjustment. The surviving parent was interviewed at the same time. The authors describe the reactions of the children, and conclude that those who were involved in the ritual following death fared better, over a period of time, than those who were not, whether the parent had been buried or cremated. Support from others and making the rituals symbolic are seen as greatly desired sources of comfort to the child as well as to the surviving parent.

Talking to children about death

Jackson M, Colwell J. *Mortality* 2001; **6**(3):321-325

The authors of this interesting and sensible article believe that, since death is an inevitable part of life, it should routinely be included in the school curriculum - not as a separate subject but as part of the everyday act of learning. In this way, they feel, children - who are naturally curious about death - would be able to see it as non-frightening. They might also be helped in the event of personal bereavement. An anonymous questionnaire sent to the pupils of a comprehensive school showed that on the whole the pupils were positive about the idea.

Sheila Hodges and John Bush

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