

Exploring Narratives of Death (END)

ASG 2019-2020

Making meaning of death, dying and grief through narrative: An exploration of texts, rituals and artefacts.

Today, in the growing absence of religious narrative and cultural tradition in Western societies, medicine has been given both medical and social responsibility over death, dying and grief. As medicine has become the primary storyteller of these experiences, a focus on cure and containment predominates in the care of the dying—through pharmaceuticals, or consumption, or professional management. As a result, modern modes of death, dying and grief are often described as “lonely” or “invisible” because they have become privatised and institutionalised. There is therefore a growing need to work and commune with diverse narratives of death, dying and grief today in order to broaden possibilities for better and more humane experiences at the end of life.

Between medicine, social science, and humanities, we hope to locate and explore diverse rituals, artefacts and texts which tell stories and give meaning to these experiences. Examples of a rituals, artefacts or texts could be a wide range of things such as a burial ceremony, memorial and/or support sites on internet, a section of fans honouring a respected player, a motorcycle funerary cortege or a picture on the wall. Death is also found in popular culture, such as television series, literature, pop music. A text is here understood as a basis for construction of meaning, an artefact is a text in material form, a ritual is a practice that construct meaning. Running through all these examples is the presence of narrative.

From this vantage point, we will explore some central themes: 1. Subjectivity of the old, ill and/or dying person and their families, 2. The role of fear in modern relationships to death, 3. Modes of resistance, remembrance, and acceptance of death.

Our vision

The vision of the ASG is to 1) begin to systematically assess and build knowledge about modern narratives of death, dying and grief, and 2) attempt to expound upon the usability of narrative in social transformation (including “compassionate societies” and death literacy).

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