

9:15 am-10:45 pm:

EMOTIONAL GEOGRAPHIES OF GRIEF: THE HONORING OF PLACE



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Level of Instruction: Intermediate

Presentation Summary: Physical landscapes can serve as a repository of memory, particularly following sudden deaths in public places resulting from fire, floods, natural disasters, destruction of buildings, road accidents, war, criminal actions, or terrorist attacks. The specific location of these tragedies moves the grief response among mourners from the intrapsychic and the private to something more public and collective. Likewise, lost or irretrievably altered places can anchor profound memories that survivors wish to honor. Thus, the psychological and emotional realities (i.e., the “interior” world) with which grief counseling traditionally concerns itself has real linkage to physical spaces/places (i.e., the “external” world). Rituals connecting these two domains can be powerful therapeutic interventions, serving to express grief constructively and to honor place, e.g., roadside memorials, commemorative statues/art, or cathartic actions. The presenter provides examples from Australia, including memorials following bushfires, responses to public disasters, and Aboriginal practices such as Returning to Country.

Objectives: Upon completion of this lecture, the participant will be able to:

- Contrast private aspects of the grief experience with what happens when death occurs in public places
- Discuss rituals which connect interior grief responses with physical places where death or loss occurred
- Describe the notion of honoring place as an important aspect of grief adaptation and recovery

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References:

- Burk, A. L. (2003). Private griefs, public places. *Political Geography*, 22(3), 317–333. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298\(03\)00035-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0962-6298(03)00035-0)
- Jonsson, A., & Walter, T. (2017). Continuing bonds and place. *Death Studies*, 41(7), 406–415. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1286412>