The Psychology of Love & Loss
- a book list with comments -


2. Atwater, P.M.H. (1995). *Beyond the light: The mysteries and revelations of near-death experiences*. New York: Avon. Based on the author’s research, this work presents the details of a multitude of NDEs and tracks the individuals’ long-term responses to their experiences. Organized in three parts (*Aspects of Near-Death, Aftereffects and Implications of Near-Death, and Steps Beyond*) this is a wonderful summary of the types of experience (some are characterized as hell-like), long-term effects, and a wealth of information and research-related resources.

3. Bender, S. (2001). *Stretching lessons: The daring that starts from within*. New York: HarperOne. This is a wonderful compilation of personal experiences and the lessons learned. Each is an inspirational delight. Most experience/lesson tidbits are one page long. You can pick this up, open it to any page, and enjoy a quick lesson.

4. Bonanno, G.A. (2010). *The other side of sadness: What the new science of bereavement tells us about life after loss*. New York: Basic Books. An interesting mix of research, anecdote, and fiction presented with a focus on one’s response to death. Some cross-cultural experiences are noted, and George includes a chapter on the *Chinese Bereavement Ritual*. It is my impression that this book presents no other side to sadness only that – with the passage of time and accumulation of new experiences – the sadness rings out like the peal of a bell with alternating sharp and then dull moments decreasing in intensity over time. And this process is accelerated by what he identifies only by way of various examples as *resilience*. I’ll be curious to learn if you have a different impression of this book.

5. Bulkeley, K, & Bulkley, P. (2006). *Dreaming beyond death: A guide to pre-death dreams and visions*. Boston: Beacon Press. This book serves to validate and illuminate some difficult-to-share experiences such as: visions before death, visitations from a deceased loved-one, and how to prepare for a good death. (Yes, the authors do spell their last names differently. I checked three times.)

6. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The psychology of optimal experience*. New York: HarperCollins. On the 5th day of our class we discussed Flow – the experience we enjoy in moments during which our level of skill matches our level of challenge. This research-based work is written very engagingly. The author’s end notes serve as an enlightening delight in themselves, each note tied to a particular passage and page in the book. A few of the ten chapter titles include: Happiness Revisited, Enjoyment and The Quality of Life, The
Conditions of Flow, and Enjoying Solitude and Other People. In the chapter, *Cheating Chaos*, you’ll learn of: (a) people whose lives of flow were initiated by devastating injury or illness, and (b) characteristics of the autotelic self – the type of person who can translate potential threats or moments of potential boredom into enjoyable challenges.

7. Davis, D. (1991). *Empty cradle, broken heart: Surviving the death of your baby*. Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Group. From the title and from much of the content it is clear that this book is intended for parents whose young infant has died. But I think this also is a valuable resource for others who have suffered the death of a loved one. Everybody is somebody’s baby. The book includes: *Points to Remember* sprinkled throughout, first-person quotes keeping the subject matter well-grounded, and age-related issues (for sibling children) and relationship issues that are addressed with great insight and sensitivity. In one appendix is *A Note to Caregivers* that could serve as guide for all who would increase the peace of the dying.

8. DeVita-Raeburn, E. (2004). *The empty room: Surviving the loss of a brother or sister at any age*. New York: Scribner Book Company. When Elizabeth was fourteen her seventeen-year-old brother died. In this wonderful work, based in large part on many interviews, Elizabeth offers us an in-depth understanding of the anguish felt when a brother or sister dies. One of the eight chapters addresses the death of a twin. It is after the end of the last chapter, however, that you’ll find this book offers a wealth of comfort beyond its own pages. In the section, *Resources*, you’ll find an annotated list of memoirs, books about siblings, and children’s books that address sibling loss. Additionally, you’ll see both an annotated list of organizations and websites, as well as a selected bibliography (not annotated).

9. Didion, J. (2005). *The year of magical thinking*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. The first three sentences of this autobiographical work are, “*Life changes fast. Life changes in the instant. You sit down to dinner and life as you know it ends.*” In late 2003, Joan and her husband returned home and were just sitting down to dinner one evening after they had visited their daughter in the hospital who was in an induced coma and on life support. They were just sitting down to dinner when her husband suddenly died. If you start to read this, I ask that you read it all the way through. Even to the very last paragraphs she offers us the gift of her eloquently-phrased and unfinished emotional experience.


11. Fisher, H. (2004). *Why we love: the nature and chemistry of romantic love*. New York: Holt Paperbacks. As noted above, Helen conducts research and writes from an evolutionary perspective. In this work she documents her study of intense, passionate love. What happens when we experience this, and what happens when we experience this and are rejected? Her research
includes a fascinating look at what is going on in the brain when the person of desire is in mind. She describes her use of functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to document the neurophysiologic response associated with such passion, but she presents her results only in words. They are easy to read and fascinating words, but you’ll see no images here.

12. Gardner, H. (1983). Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences. New York: Basic Books. This is the primary source for information about multiple intelligences. Well-referenced and more academic than most books on this list, you’ll see Howard’s own description and defense of MI Theory. In this work, he proposes the following intelligences: linguistic, musical, logical-mathematical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, intra-personal, and inter-personal intelligences. In later work, he added naturalist intelligence to the list.

13. Garfield, C., Spring, C., & Cahill, S. (1998). Wisdom circles: A guide to self-discovery and community building in small groups. New York: Hyperion Books. If you want to establish a discussion group in which everyone benefits from the collective wisdom of all participants, then this is a wonderful resource. This book outlines the benefits of various processes including: passing the talking-stick, making I-statements, refraining from over-talk, and offering no advice. I offer this as a wonderful guide if you’d like to explore any topic – not just love or loss – in a small group.

14. Goff, B. (2012). Love does: Discover a secretly incredible life in an ordinary world. Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson. Bob writes with a humble, faith-filled exuberance for life as he recounts his first-person experiences throughout these 31 chapters and the inspiring lessons he has learned from each about himself, about Jesus, and about how to approach life. Every chapter details a well-told event from his life. My wife asked me what was so funny when I actually laughed out loud while reading this book. You don’t need to be religious to enjoy this book or to appreciate the lessons. In the chapter titled, Ryan in Love, he observes, “Being engaged is a way of doing life, a way of living and loving. It’s about going to extremes and expressing the bright hope that life offers us, a hope that makes us brave and expels darkness with light.” Bob’s work warmly nudges us to become braver in our love and to focus more on the light and on the silver linings in our lives than on the oppressiveness of those dark cloud moments.


16. Gottman, J.M., & Silver, N. (1999). The seven principles for making marriage work. New York: Three Rivers Press. Long after our course has come and gone, you may reflect on John Gottman’s ratio, his description of destructive and constructive communication patterns, and his work with one couple on their communication patterns. This work is filled with information based on his real-world research, and you’ll find the book peppered with brief
questionnaires throughout that enable you to assess yourself and your relationship.

17. Gray, J. (1992). *Men are from Mars, women are from Venus*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers. Many people are familiar with the books of John Gray. He has authored several popular books in the Mars and Venus genre. You might like John’s style of presentation, but I strongly recommend you drink from the source. Deborah Tannen (a professor at Georgetown University) conducts wonderful research and writes very engagingly. I know you’ll enjoy her work – and she fills her pages with actual conversational snippets. She is a professional eavesdropper!

18. Hanh, Thich Nhat (1998). *Teachings on love*. Berkeley, CA: Parallax Press. I’m quoting from the first and last paragraphs of this wonderful treasure in which the author states, "Happiness is only possible with true love. True love has the power to heal and transform the situation around us and bring a deep meaning to our lives.


21. Hendrick, S, & Hendrick, C. (1992). *Liking, loving and relating*. Pacific Grove, California: Brooks/Cole Publishing Company. These two have made relationships the focus of their academic life work at Texas Tech. This book is somewhat academic in tone, but richly informative. The authors cite more than 280 references in a section that serves as a wonderful pantry for anyone hungry to read more about love.


23. Kaplan, H. S. (1974). *The new sex therapy: Active treatment of sexual dysfunctions*. New York: Brunner/Mazel, Inc. We didn’t get to discuss completely the topic of human sexual response, but we did get to discuss desire. (Remember our discussion about the bases and romance?) Helen added this important dimension of desire to our understanding of human sexual response, and expanded significantly on the work of Masters and Johnson. Written specifically for therapists, this book is plain enough for many to enjoy the benefits – even those without any sexual dysfunction.

24. Kelly, L. (2000). *Don’t ask for the dead man’s golf clubs: What to do and say (and what not to) when a friend loses a loved one*. New York: Workman Publishing Company. The title of this one allows you to reliably judge this book by its cover. Lynn has done a great service with this work – a copy of which I once loaned out, and I trust it is still changing hands somewhere even today. One woman whose
husband had recently died found this book to be a great comfort in coming to terms with some of the distressing visits she received.

25. Kessler, D. (2000). *The Needs of the dying: A guide for bringing hope, comfort, and love to life's final chapter*. New York: Quill. David worked as an associate of and co-author with Elizabeth Kübler-Ross toward the end of her professional career. In this work he presents very clearly the needs of the dying that are often left to the kindness of others to fulfill. He lists 16 different needs on page ix, and expands on these throughout the book. This serves as a valuable resource for all who care for those whose life is near its end.


27. Langer, E. (1989). *Mindfulness*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison Wesley Publishing Company. I know of no other work that so powerfully demonstrates the influence our attention exerts on our experience of life. In the chapter titled, *Mindful Aging*, Langer summarizes the results of a structured, week-long retreat for a group of elderly men – they were instructed to live as though the time was twenty years earlier, and they benefitted both physically and mentally. Each chapter is a gem of research and practical application. The easy wisdom within the chapter titled *Decreasing Prejudice by Increasing Discrimination* astounds me, still. I offer this book as relevant, because our mindful attention (or inattention) affects all our relationships. Browse to the following url, and you can read chapter #1 of her new book: *Counterclockwise*
http://www.ellenlanger.com/information/9/read-chapter-one-of-counterclockwise


New York: Basic Books, Inc. This data-filled book emphasizes the human cost of loneliness in terms of physiological distress. James’ old work is timeless and includes many specific examples. The significant power of a gentle touch and a reassuring word to increase one’s sense of peace is well-documented here – along with the harmful effects of neglect. Do you remember from earlier in our course the story and photograph of those pre-term, infant twins, one with an arm around the other, in a neonatal intensive care hospital crib? Although published in a more recent journal article, the image and story of those twins would fit in perfectly with James’ book.

31. Malkinson, R. (2007). Cognitive grief therapy: constructing a rational meaning to life following loss. New York: W.W. Norton & Company. This is one of those that is written for therapists, but may well benefit others who take a look. Ruth organized this work into three parts: the theoretical foundations of cognitive grief therapy, the practice of cognitive grief therapy, and the difficulties and challenges for therapists. As noted on the jacket, “Cognitive grief therapy...promotes a framework for continuing bonds with the deceased in order to facilitate a healthy grief process that reconstructs and recreates meaning for life after loss.” If you are a therapist, you’ll find this very useful. If you are not a therapist, and you read this, then you’ll know something valuable that not all therapists know about working with grief.

32. Masters, W.H.; Johnson, V.E. (1966). Human Sexual Response. Toronto; New York: Bantam Books. This is the masterpiece work by Masters and Johnson. Every textbook on human sexuality includes one chapter devoted to a brief and incomplete summary of the wealth of information presented in this work. Get the original in your hands and you’ll learn much. For example, in one section they present wonderful information about common misunderstandings about the vagina and common misunderstandings about the penis. They reveal the truth about both by presenting empirically-based evidence from their laboratory studies of real live humans. They refer to the misunderstandings as fallacies. If size matters to you, then you might need to convert their measurements from metric units to English units. (I’m confident that, if this book was more widely read, then the United States would have switched to the metric system years ago. Everything sounds larger in metric.)

33. Masters, W.H.; Johnson, V.E. (1974). The Pleasure Bond. Toronto; New York: Bantam Books. This handy little gem details the work of Masters and Johnson as sex therapists. Sections of therapy session conversations are transcribed. It is in this work that they identified the problem of trying to punctuate the end of a long and exhausting day by having sex. They describe the pleasure bond in contrast to the obligation bond that may develop within a relationship. This book is an easy, informative, enjoyable read.

34. Morse, M., & Perry, P. (1990). Closer to the light. New York: Villard Books. After Melvin, a pediatrician, became aware of children’s near-death experiences, he began a more systematic study of this phenomenon. In his book he details many first-person accounts and takes to task the traditional,
death-denying approach to medicine. The hospital ultimately shut down his research, because of the concern that it would become known as the “death hospital.” This work highlights some of the similarities and differences between the experiences of children and adults.

35. Neeld, E. (2003). Seven choices: Finding daylight after loss shatters your world. New York: Warner Books. As noted on the back: “This book was used by volunteers working with victims’ families after 9/11.” Within this book you’ll find a rich array of information that: targets the concerns of children of a variety of ages/developmental levels, addresses the concerns of the grieving as well as their caregivers, identifies self-help groups and useful web-sites, and provides a list of supportive resources in such categories as books, movies, art, photography, writing, dance, outdoor activities, gardening, prayer, and pets. This is a practical information enriched resource!

36. Prager, D. (1998). Happiness is a serious problem: A human nature repair manual. New York: Harper Paperbacks. This is a nifty, easy to carry collection of thirty one brief essays in which the author, “…combines ideas about happiness with a practical guide to applying these ideas to your life.” This is not a chicken-soup collection of stories – although you will find a healthy sprinkling of stories – but it is more a personal challenge to question what it means to be happy along with a generous helping of suggested activities for the mind and a few for the body that will facilitate living the happy life. A couple chapter titles might give you a better idea of this collection: Equating happiness with fun (The problem with this approach to happiness is illustrated with several examples.), and Happiness is a by-product (Six values are described that are suggested to bring happiness, including the not-so-fun sounding: meaningful pursuits, clarity of who you are, and goodness.)

37. Rinpoche, S., Gaffney, P., & Harvey, A. (1994). The Tibetan book of living and dying. San Francisco: Harper Collins. Similar in intent to Kessler’s book, The Needs of the Dying, Sogyal drew from his own training and expanded on the lessons first shared in The Tibetan Book of the Dead. Based in Tibetan Buddhist teachings, this book offers guidance about living well, dying well, and helping others die well. This is not a quick read, but you can zero in on specific topics and learn. Living is the focus of half the book. This concept-dense book is very well-referenced and includes chapter notes, four appendices, and a forward by the Dalai Lama.

38. Schacter, D. (2002). The Seven sins of memory: how the mind forgets and remembers. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. After our 5th class session, if you forget to remember the seven sins of memory, then refer to this resource. Within this book you’ll discover much more. Daniel writes well and uses many real-world examples to make his points – and help us remember why we forget.

with them about identifying a new field in psychology – Positive Psychology. This book stems from his earlier research emphasis on depression. Using a cognitive and behavioral perspective he emphasizes the importance of control.

40. Seligman, M.E.P. (1995). What you can change and what you can’t: The complete guide to successful self-improvement. New York: Ballantine Books. This book precedes the development of Positive Psychology by several years, but you’ll get to enjoy the down-to-earth manner in which Marty conveys, for many aspects of our lives, what we can and cannot change. There is real peace to be gained by discovering an avenue through which a pursuit may be attained. There is also a real peace to be gained by giving up an unattainable pursuit. He includes several questionnaires throughout the book to help identify, in different topic areas, the type of person the reader is – and identify if the reader can or not change. Topics include phobias, everyday anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress, sex, dieting, alcohol, and more. How does this relate to grief? It is important to know what must be accepted both in me as well as in others. With this acceptance I can let go of the constant tension that results from an unsatisfied desire for change.


42. Seligman, M. (2011). Flourish: a visionary new understanding of happiness and well-being. New York: Free Press. This is Seligman’s latest. A quick overview uncovers delights everywhere! (On page 48 he presents Shelly Gable’s research on Cheerleader Partners.) Among many delights, you’ll find several self-assessments, meaningful reference to research, and a description of his government-requested program to reduce the incidence of PTSD among soldiers. A treasure-chest of information!

43. Snyder, C.R., & Lopez, S.J. (2007). Positive psychology: The scientific and practical explorations of human strengths. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, Inc. In my opinion, this is the best textbook on the market to address this new field in psychology. This is a very engaging read – full of assessments and exercises and summaries of empirical research. While this is not the only source of information about the beneficial effects of gratitude, you’ll certainly see gratitude addressed here. You’ll also see a whole taxonomy of human strengths – in addition to gratitude – that may serve as a set of guidelines to help us become psychologically healthier humans, more loving and more lovable.

44. Stephenson, J.S. (1985). Death, grief, and mourning: individual and social realities. New York: Free Press. Do you remember Stephenson’s phases of grief: reaction through recovery? This work is the primary resource for this information, and these three phases take up only 10 of the 290 pages. John
addresses the topics of death, grief and mourning with reference to academic research, diverse theories, literary descriptions, and first person accounts. This is a weighty work, but accessible, and it offers the type of understanding that increases acceptance.

45. Sternberg, R. J. (1988). *The Triangle of love: Intimacy, passion, commitment.* This is the source for information about Sternberg’s Triangle Theory of Love. If this theory is interesting to you, then please take a look at this book. I’ve seen his theory summarized in many books, but as is true with Master’s and Johnson’s work, no summary can do justice to the wealth of information provided here. Robert is a capable writer. He has authored well-regarded theories of love, creativity, and intelligence. I’m confident that his theories are well regarded, not just because they are well supported by research, but also because he writes so clearly that people find it easy to understand what the heck he is saying.

46. Sternberg, R.J., & Barnes, M.L. (1988). *The psychology of love.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. Both this book and the next are edited compilations of submissions by researchers and theorists whose work centers on the topic of love. Each of these books is unique. You won’t find the same article in both, and if you are like me – you’ll find some of the submissions to be terrifically important and easily applicable and some to be confusing, questionable, too esoteric and abstract, or simply nonsense. Still, I think you may find a gem or two if you take a look. Of course, what one person judges to be ‘terrifically important’ another may judge to be ‘nonsense.’

47. Sternberg, R.J., & Weis, K. (2006). *The new psychology of love.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press. This is the latest, edited compilation of love-oriented articles as noted in the description for the book above.


49. Tannen, D. (1991). *You just don’t understand: Women and men in conversation.* New York: Ballantine Books. Deborah is a prolific researcher and author, but more people seem to be aware of John Gray’s works – even though I perceive his work to be no more than an interpretive summary of her work. Check out her other works, too. She has books about communication in the workplace, the argument culture (rather than dialogue culture), and why some people say hurtful things but only say them because they love you. Clever, insightful, and original.

50. Worthington, E.L. (2001). *Five steps to forgiveness: The art and science of forgiving.* New York: Crown Publishers. Our closest relationships offer us the opportunity to be the best lovers, and loving someone well through a period of interpersonal adversity requires that we know how to forgive. Everett addresses this issue in a personally forthright and usably instructive manner. (R.E.A.C.H.) This wonderful gem is actually two books in one. The second
half addresses the important issue of reconciliation, and includes a well-reasoned caution about whether or not you should attempt to reconcile with the person – even after you forgive the person.