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Turner, Sarah; Littlemore, Jeannette; Fuller, Danielle; Kuberska, Karolina; McGuinness, Sheelagh

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# The production of time-related metaphors by people who have experienced pregnancy loss

Sarah Turner<sup>a</sup>, Jeannette Littlemore<sup>b</sup>, Danielle Fuller<sup>c</sup>, Karolina Kuberska<sup>d</sup> and Sheelagh McGuinness<sup>e</sup>

<sup>a</sup> Coventry University

<sup>b</sup> University of Birmingham

<sup>c</sup> University of Alberta

<sup>d</sup> University of Cambridge

<sup>e</sup> University of Bristol

## Abstract

Bereavement following the death of a loved one is something that the vast majority of people will experience at some point during their lives. Grief following bereavement has been shown to be a complex and life-altering experience and people need support to get through it. In order to provide meaningful support, others need to have some insight into the way those affected are feeling. One way in which we can gain insights into the emotional landscape of the recently bereaved is by exploring the metaphors they use when talking about their feelings.

One form of bereavement that people sometimes find difficult to talk about is pregnancy loss. There has been little research to date on the ways in which people who have experienced the loss of a baby through miscarriage, termination, and stillbirth or the agencies who work with them use metaphor to frame the experience. In metaphor studies there is a wealth of research into the use of metaphor to deal with bereavement in general (Beder 2004; Crespo-Fernandez 2013) but there has been no work on the use of metaphor and perinatal death. Capitulo's (2005) study shows that the use of symbols and rituals in perinatal bereavement counselling can help the bereaved, but does not deal explicitly with metaphor.

In this chapter we focus on the ways in which people who have experienced pregnancy loss use metaphor to describe the experience with a particular focus on time because the impact of bereavement in general has been shown to have an effect on people's conceptions of time. The data come from an ESRC-funded<sup>1</sup> study that investigates the ways in which people who have experienced bereavement following miscarriage and stillbirth communicate their experiences, with a focus on metaphor. We use these data to explore the ways in which the bereaved (and those who support them) use time-related metaphors to talk about their experiences and suggest ways in which such an analysis can be used to provide insight into the experiences of the bereaved. We conclude by discussing the implications of our findings for friends, colleagues and relatives.

## 1 Introduction

Bereavement following the death of a loved one is something that the vast majority of people will experience at some point during their lives. Grief following bereavement has been shown to be a complex and life-altering experience and people need support to get through it. In order to provide meaningful support, others need to have some insight into the way those affected are feeling. One way in which we can gain insights into the emotional landscape of the recently bereaved is by exploring the metaphors they use when talking about their

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<sup>1</sup> Economic and Social Research Council, ref: ES/N008359/1

feelings. Studies have shown that when people experience difficult or painful emotions or situations, they often employ metaphor as a tool to help them make sense of and express their experiences (Semino, 2011). More specifically, it has been found that people produce more metaphors when describing intense emotional experiences than when describing actions (Fainsilber and Ortony, 1987) and that they generate more novel metaphors when writing about their *own* emotional experiences than when writing about the feelings of others (Williams-Whitney, Mio and Whitney, 1992). When an experience is not widely shared with the rest of society, metaphor can be one of the few tools that people have to communicate with (Gibbs, 1994). For example, Gibbs (2002) found a particularly high density of powerful metaphors in the narratives produced by women suffering from cancer. He argued that these metaphors helped them to understand and come to terms with their disease. Use of metaphor to come to terms with bereavement has also been attested by Beder (2004), who explored its role in counselling.

One particularly emotionally intense form of bereavement is that which follows the loss of a much-wanted pregnancy. It is estimated that approximately 1 in 6 known pregnancies end in miscarriage, approximately 1 in every 200 births is a stillbirth, and approximately 2000 terminations for reasons of foetal anomaly are performed in the UK each year.<sup>2</sup> Of all forms of bereavement, pregnancy loss may be particularly difficult to deal with as the subject is not widely discussed in British society (NHS Improving Quality, 2014; Peel and Cain, 2012), it is not a situation that is usually planned for and there is a lack of cultural scripts for dealing with perinatal bereavement. Moreover, this form of bereavement engenders complex emotions that are difficult to articulate, and the bereaved often struggle to communicate how they feel to those who are there to support them. Thus, they often resort to metaphor in order to come to terms with and express their feelings.

To date, there has been no research in the metaphor literature on the ways in which people who have experienced the loss of a baby through miscarriage, termination, and stillbirth or the agencies who work with them use metaphor to frame the experience and to come to terms with it. Studying the metaphors used by the bereaved and those who support them when talking about this emotionally-complex, potentially isolating experience and the decision-making processes that accompany it, will help generate insights into their thinking processes and open up additional lines of communication for those around them.

Our aim in this study is to explore how people who have experienced pregnancy loss use metaphor to make sense of what they are experiencing, and the reactions they have received from those around them. Our specific focus is on metaphors of time. This is because the impact of bereavement in general has been shown to have an effect on people's conceptions of time. In their analysis of interviews with older adults about their experiences following the death of a spouse, Chan and Chan (2011) found time to be the major theme in their data. They observed that participants exhibited a strong focus on timing of the death and that they experienced changing perceptions of time, which Chan and Chan labelled 'paradoxical' (ibid.; 147). Participants who could accept the timing of the death were more likely to come to terms with the death itself. In terms of the so-called 'paradoxical' perceptions of time, their participants were found to have developed a truncated experience of time in which the present was experienced as being separate from both the past and the future. They experienced a strong awareness of the here and now, during which days felt longer and emptier and time passed very slowly. Participants also exhibited a heightened awareness of their own approaching death, which was sometimes expressed in metaphorical terms:

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<sup>2</sup>[www.nhs.uk/conditions/Miscarriage/Pages/Introduction.aspx](http://www.nhs.uk/conditions/Miscarriage/Pages/Introduction.aspx)

When I think of this [my own mortality]—sometimes this was discussed in the bereavement center. I cried after the discussion. I don't like ... but I know every passenger has to get off the train. There is no reason to remain on the train till Tung Chung [terminus train station in Hong Kong]. Perhaps you still have to get off when you reach Tung Chung ...I understand this principle, but I have fears. (Participant I) (ibid.; 153)

They concluded that grieving in older adults 'throws them into an intense, existential, time-focused situation' (ibid.; 157).

Whilst some of Chan and Chan's participants may have felt that the timing of the death was appropriate, for people who experience pregnancy loss, the timing will never be 'appropriate'. This is due to conventional expectations that there is a 'natural' order in which losses are experienced. This may lead to their experiences of time being even more marked. Therefore in our study, we were interested in identifying the time-related metaphors that people who have experienced pregnancy loss employed when talking about loss itself, the build-up to the loss and its aftermath. Our specific research question is as follows:

*How do people who have experienced pregnancy loss use metaphor to talk about their perceptions of time?*

We looked at the ways in which people in this situation reified time and at the metaphors for time that ensue from this reification. We also looked at their levels of awareness of time, the ways in which was seen to expand and contract at times of heightened emotional experience, and the personal relationships that people have with time in relation to the moving time versus moving ego dichotomy and other models that describe the spatial language of time. Finally, we explored the ways in which people expressed their conceptions of time through the use of mixed metaphor.

The data that we discuss are the result of the *Death before Birth Project*, an ESRC-funded socio-legal, linguistic study of how people in England who have experienced miscarriage, termination, and stillbirth reach decisions concerning the disposal of the remains of pregnancy<sup>3</sup>, how their perceptions of the law impact on their decision-making, and how they communicate their experiences and choices to those who are there to support them (see McGuinness & Kuberska 2017 for more information about the dataset).

In Section 2, we provide an overview of existing work on the ways in which metaphor is used to think and talk about time. We then describe the methodology employed in our study (Section 3) and report its findings (Section 4). We conclude, in Section 5, with a discussion of the implications that our findings have for those who care for people who have experienced pregnancy loss.

## **2 Metaphors of time**

There has been a substantial amount of research on the ways in which people employ metaphor to think and communicate about time. It has been suggested that people often express time in terms of space and that whilst in English-speaking cultures, the future lies in front of us and the past lies behind us, in other cultures it can move from top to bottom or be seen as a cyclical phenomenon. Chinese uses the vertical axis such that earlier time-points are located above and later time-points are located below (Fuhrman et al., 2011) and some languages (e.g. Mian, a Papua New Guinea language) conceptualise time as flowing towards the body or from east to west (Fedden and Boroditsky, 2012). There is evidence to suggest that some space-time metaphors are embodied. For example, it has been shown that if people lean forward they find it easier to talk about the future than the past and that if they lean

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<sup>3</sup> In this chapter, 'remains of pregnancy' is used to cover the range of physical material from the existence of foetal remains to situations where there is heavy bleeding or light clotting.

backwards they find it easier to talk about the past than the future (Lempert and Kinsbourne, 1982). The converse is also true: Miles et al. (2010 a and b) found that thinking about future events makes people lean or move forwards and thinking about past events makes them lean or move backwards. They conclude that spatiotemporal processing appears to be grounded in the same sensory-motor system that regulates human movement. Even within cultures that have a linear conception of time there is scope for viewing time differently, which allows people in the West, for example, to talk about ‘annual cycles’, things taking place ‘all year round’, and so on (see Gell 1992; James and Mills 2005).

As an extension to the linear metaphor for time, the front-back orientation also constitutes a metaphor for success and failure; people often speak of success (e.g., ‘advance’) and failure (e.g., ‘setback’) as if they were forward versus backward movements through space. Robinson and Fetterman (2015) had participants categorize ‘success’ versus ‘failure’ words by moving a joystick forward or backward. They found that participants were faster at categorizing failure when asked to indicate it by moving the joystick backward and that they were faster at categorizing success when asked to indicate it by moving the joystick forward.

One of the most widely-cited pieces of work on the metaphorical relationship between time and space is Boroditsky et al.’s (2002) study of ‘moving time’ versus ‘moving ego’. In English, two contrasting perspectives are implicit in expressions relating to time: the moving time metaphor conceptualizes time as moving forward towards the ego and the moving ego metaphor conceptualizes the ego as moving forward towards the future. When people are asked ‘Next Wednesday’s meeting has been moved forward two days; when is the meeting now that it has been rescheduled?’, individuals employing a ‘moving time’ metaphor will report that it has been moved to Monday, whereas individuals employing a ‘moving ego’ metaphor will report that it has been moved to Friday. According to Boroditsky et al. (2002), these two conceptualizations are equally likely in a “neutral” context; some people reply that it is on Monday, whereas others reply that it is on Friday. However, the manipulation of contextual information can change people’s perspectives. For example, they found that people who have been primed to think about objects traveling towards them are much more likely to think about time moving towards them and are thus likely to adopt a ‘moving time’ perspective. People standing at the front of a queue rather than at the back were found to be more likely to think of themselves moving through time, thus adopting a moving ego perspective, and the same was true of people at an airport who had just flown in (as opposed to those who were waiting to pick up friends) and people at a racecourse who had bet on a number of horses (as opposed to those who had not). These findings suggest a strong interaction between one’s thoughts about the experience of physical movement and the metaphorical construal of time in terms of different types of movement.

The ‘moving time’ versus ‘moving ego’ distinction has been problematised by Moore (2014) who provides a more nuanced analysis of the ways in which time can be represented in terms of space. Rather than viewing time as a unitary entity, he identifies a series of more fine-grained temporal concepts, such as ‘something that happens first’, or ‘a future time’, which are expressed via a number of different metaphors, such as ‘a situation is a mover’ (e.g. ‘the candle burned from dusk till dawn’), ‘time is a mover’ (e.g. time marches on’), and so on (ibid., 303). Moore also points out that metaphorical construals of time are not always linear. As we saw above, they can also involve other types of movement. Alternatively, time can be seen as a physical resource, as a point, as a flexible, moving entity or in other metaphorical ways. We draw on some of Moore’s ideas in our discussion below of the ways in which people who have experienced pregnancy loss talk about temporal concepts, but we complement it with corpus analyses and work with categories of time that emerge from the

data. Therefore in places the categories of time identified in our data diverge from the categories identified by Moore.

### **3 Methodology**

#### **3.1 Data collection**

In order to answer our research question, we conducted a combined qualitative and quantitative analysis of interview data. The data were gathered through semi-structured 60-90-minute interviews with 31 women who had experienced miscarriage, termination due to foetal anomaly, and stillbirth; and with 16 people who provide support for the bereaved, and who work for the Miscarriage Association (MA), Antenatal Results and Choices (ARC) and the Stillbirth and Neonatal Death Society (SANDS). The majority of the support workers we interviewed had themselves been through pregnancy loss, and therefore had first-hand insights into the experience. The interviews explored themes in the experience of pregnancy loss, focusing on choices surrounding the disposal of the remains of pregnancy, and how these decisions may be reached.

The interviews were conducted face to face or by Skype and were audio-recorded and transcribed, and the interviewer noted down salient uses of gesture and critical observations. Access to the participants was provided by advertisements publicised by our partner organisations (the MA, ARC and SANDS).

#### **3.2 Data analysis**

The data analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) a Wmatrix analysis of the key semantic fields; (2) an analysis of uses of the word ‘time’; and (3) a qualitative analysis of the metaphors used to talk about people’s experiences of time. These three approaches allowed us to look at the ways in which time was referred to from different perspectives in our dataset.

##### *3.2.1 A Wmatrix analysis of the key semantic fields*

In order to get a broad sense of the key semantic fields in the data, a Wmatrix analysis was conducted. Using this tool, we identified key semantic fields in our data in comparison with the 982,712-word spoken component of the BNC Sampler corpus used by the Wmatrix system. This analysis revealed semantic fields which appeared significantly more often in our participants’ responses than in the BNC Spoken Sampler comparison corpus. We use the results to investigate the extent to which our data is different from spoken data more generally<sup>4</sup>. We were interested to see how time featured within this analysis.

##### *3.2.2 An analysis of uses of the word ‘time’*

In order to investigate the ways in which *time* was construed in our 387,300-word corpus, regardless of whether it was being referred to metaphorically, we conducted a concordance search for the word *time* (N=937) and then coded the concordance lines into five categories:

1. Time as an event or point (e.g. ‘there was a time when we did that’)
2. Time as a resource (e.g. ‘they’ve got time to think about what to say’)
3. Time as a period (e.g. ‘there has to be a time frame’)
4. Time on a clock (e.g. ‘7 o’clock local time, people will light a candle’)
5. Time as an experience that is evaluated (e.g. ‘it was a really, really grim time’)

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<sup>4</sup> Wmatrix (Rayson, 2009) is a tool that can identify words and semantic fields occurring significantly more frequently in the language used in a sample of language than in language more generally.

These five categories had been previously compiled using definitions of the word *time* in WordNet (Princeton University 2010) (a lexical database originally derived from the Brown corpus), and the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English. We collapsed the definitions provided by these sources into five broad categories which subsumed all the sub-senses. Some examples were coded as occupying more than one category. There were 9 instances of this in our data (out of a total of number of 937 examples) so caution needs to be exercised as this procedure inflated our numbers slightly. One example is as follows:

*In twelve months' time, they may have moved on, had a baby or whatever*

This was categorised as both an event and as a period because although it does refer to a particular point in time in the future, the actions that are being discussed are expected to occur within the period leading up to that point. Another example is as follows, which was categorised as both an event and as an experience that was evaluated:

*It's not a good time to be making life-changing decisions*

It should be noted here that our coding of uses of the word *time* into these categories is purely quantitative and involved no investigation into polarity or valence.

We used this procedure to identify patterns in the way in which the participants in our dataset talked about time, and to provide a backdrop against which our metaphor analysis can be interpreted.

### *3.2.3 A qualitative analysis of the metaphors used to talk about people's experiences of time*

As mentioned above, this study forms part of a larger project that was designed to explore the experience of pregnancy loss more generally. To this end, we began by conducting a full metaphor analysis of the data with no specific focus on time, although we will be focusing on time-related metaphors in the current study. However, the main focus of the study described in this paper is not simply on expressions that contained the word *time* but on metaphorical expressions that referred to time more generally, and on the ways in which time related to other concepts. We therefore conducted a qualitative analysis of the metaphors that were related to time, in order to assess how they were being used and what they revealed about the speakers' metaphorical conceptions of time.

We first uploaded the transcripts of the interviews into the NVivo qualitative annotation software package and coded them according to the types of metaphor used and the themes that the metaphors were used to talk about. In order to decide whether an utterance was metaphorical or not, we employed an adapted version of the PRAGGLEJAZ Group (2007) Metaphor Identification Procedure, which we combined with Cameron's (2003) vehicle identification procedure to identify metaphors at the level of the phrase. We then classified the metaphors into broad categories. Each metaphorical chunk of language was assigned to at least one metaphorical theme and at least one topic. The coding scheme was developed by three coders through joint analyses of the first five transcripts. Subsequent transcripts were then coded individually. Each transcript was checked by a second coder and marginal cases were discussed until agreement was reached.

Sixty-seven categories of metaphor were identified, including metaphors involving space, darkness and light, movement, growth, ascent and descent, and containment. The focus of this chapter is on metaphors of time. We identified 81 themes that included: coming to terms with the pregnancy loss; communicating with others about the loss; reflecting on the future; and memory-making. More details on the metaphors that we identified are provided below.

## 4 Findings

### 4.1 Identification of the key semantic fields in Wmatrix

References to time constituted two of the 20 most statistically significant key semantic themes in the dataset (number 1 and 20 in Table 1 below). In other words, semantic domains involving time appeared significantly more frequently in our data than in a comparison corpus. The fact that time featured in two of the key semantic fields in our data is not surprising given that the participants were talking about ages of children (in number 1) and time-sensitive procedures (in number 20). As stated above, the focus of this chapter is on the different ways in which they discussed time metaphorically.

	Observed frequency in participant responses	Relative frequency in participant responses	Observed frequency in the spoken sampler corpus	Relative frequency in the spoken sampler corpus	Log likelihood	Log ratio	Semantic field	Examples
1	2053	0.47	171	0.02	3744.24	4.75	Time: new and young	<i>Younger, smaller, babies</i>
2	2886	0.66	1024	0.1	3040.89	2.66	Medicines and medical treatment	<i>Medical, abortion, screening, caesarean</i>
3	5984	1.36	5481	0.56	2238.1	1.29	Knowledgeable	<i>Know, remember, experience, information</i>
4	924	0.21	12	0	2051.5	7.43	Mental actions and processes	<i>Memories, mental health, dream, intuitive</i>
5	5455	1.24	5457	0.56	1721.97	1.16	Degree: boosters	<i>Desperately, extremely, profoundly, terribly</i>
6	1148	0.26	400	0.04	1223.93	2.68	Sad	<i>Grief, upset, pain, traumatic</i>
7	3043	0.69	2728	0.28	1182.44	1.32	People	<i>Sex, identity, human beings, people</i>
8	1220	0.28	501	0.05	1160.69	2.45	Dead	<i>Died, loss, bereavement, remains</i>
9	2220	0.51	2020	0.21	840.23	1.3	Helping	<i>Support, help, counselling, charity</i>



10	1382	0.31	959	0.1	787.29	1.69	Disease	<i>Miscarriage, abnormality, problem, syndrome</i>
11	6871	1.56	10107	1.03	696.12	0.61	Speech: communicative	<i>Say, talk, story, conversation</i>
12	5130	1.17	7031	0.72	688.24	0.71	Thought, belief	<i>Think, feel, reason, trust</i>
13	3143	0.72	3703	0.38	676.2	0.93	Anatomy and physiology	<i>Pregnant, birth, labour, heartbeat</i>
14	3997	0.91	5480	0.56	535.58	0.71	Exclusivizers/particularizers	<i>Actually, especially, particularly, strictly</i>
15	506	0.12	207	0.02	482.77	2.45	Failure	<i>Lost, failed, missed, disaster</i>
16	1766	0.4	1891	0.19	481.24	1.06	Cause and Effect / Connection	<i>have, make, cause, reason</i>
17	246	0.06	22	0	442.12	4.64	Personality traits	<i>Pragmatic, personality, character, type</i>
18	1773	0.4	2031	0.21	410.58	0.97	Change	<i>Happened, getting, change, moving</i>
19	263	0.06	51	0.01	377.01	3.53	Alive	<i>Alive, survive, living, life expectancy</i>
20	234	0.05	35	0	367.68	3.9	Time: general	<i>Appointment, late, rhythm, late sixties</i>

Table 1 Key semantic fields in participant data, ranked by log-likelihood

As Table 1 above shows, many of the key semantic fields are to be expected given the topics under discussion (for example *medicines, dead, sad*). Two were related to time, but when we look at the examples contributing to the keyness we can see that they provide little insight into the psychological ramifications of the loss. They relate more to procedural concerns, such as: the amount of time that people needed to wait between stages of treatment; the delay before receiving post-mortem results; and the time between diagnosis of foetal death and delivery, all of which reflect the particular nature of this bereavement. In order to gain insights into the psychological effects of the loss, more detailed approaches are needed which focus specifically on time. In the two approaches that follow we look at time as a word (Section 4.2) and time as a concept (Section 4.3).

#### **4.2 Analysis of the uses of the word ‘time’**

As mentioned above, time constituted two of the key (i.e. statistically over-represented) semantic field in our data, as revealed by the Wmatrix analysis. In order to investigate in more detail how time was being referred to, we conducted a concordance analysis of the word

‘time’. This analysis revealed the following distribution of the five categories discussed above:

No.	Category of time	Example	Number	Percentage
1	Time as an event or point	...at a time when they are completely distressed	480	50.74%
2	Time as a resource	I hadn't had time to think 'I could do this' or 'could do that'	195	20.61%
3	Time as a period	You could be with them for a very long time	224	23.68%
4	Time on a clock	They give us the time and date of the funeral	11	1.16%
5	Time as an experience that is evaluated	It's a very significant time for a lot of our members	36	3.81%

Table 2 Categories of time identified in our dataset

As Table 2 shows, the first sense of time, ‘time as an event or point’, was the most frequently used in our data, followed by ‘time as a period’ and ‘time as a resource. ‘Time on a clock’ and ‘time as an experience that is evaluated’ do not seem to be particularly salient senses of time in our data.

As we will see below, some of these categories were exploited metaphorically by our participants, others less so. We will also see how that the general patterns alluded to in this table were also attested in the metaphors used, with some senses of time seeming to be more relevant to our participants than others.

#### 4.3 Qualitative analysis of the metaphors used to talk about time

Having identified the senses of *time* present in the dataset, we can now move to a discussion of the ways in which time was talked about metaphorically. We will be demonstrating how metaphor can provide insights into participants’ conceptualisations of time, and the role of time in these metaphors as a source, a target, or the context in which the metaphor functions.

In order to do this, we undertook a full metaphor analysis on the dataset, identifying areas where participants were using metaphor to conceptualise their experiences.

We identified a total of 67 metaphor categories in our dataset, of which we present the ten most common in Table 3 below.

Rank	Metaphor category	Example	No. of instances (out of a total of 2691 annotated instances)
1	Reification	Be as kind to yourself as you can (.) <i><b>giving yourself time and space</b></i> <sup>5</sup>	839

<sup>5</sup> In this paper, relevant metaphorical phrases in each example are italicised and emboldened. It should be noted that not all metaphors in each example are identified or discussed. This is not restricted to the level of the word;

2	Moving ego	it feels impossible to <i>shift and move forward</i> and imagine that they'll ever <i>get beyond</i> (.) this moment	673
3	Journey	people will I suppose (.) <i>move forward</i> on it in a way that I s'pose is congruent with their conceptualisation of their experience I'm <i>veering one way or the other</i>	461
4	Physical location	they don't quite grasp <i>where a bereaved person is</i> it's meeting parents <i>where they are in their grief</i> as well	397
5	Body-related or embodied metaphors	what is your <i>gut feeling</i> , what's your, what's your <i>heart saying</i> , are you gonna remain <i>broken</i> forever like this	207
6	Animacy	time would <i>heal</i> for her	194
7	Container	when you're grieving you can sort of <i>enter sort of a grief world</i> where you start to push, push people away	177
8	Divided self	<i>My brain</i> was obviously still in shock mode I tend to go off on tangents and <i>lose where I am myself</i>	141
9	Seeing	sort of be there, available to them with u- utter kindness, patience, tolerance, understanding, non-assumptive presence and just <i>witness</i> their struggle	127
10	Agency, lack of agency	<i>it's like a rollercoaster</i> that's, like, throughout the day, throughout weeks, days, weeks, like that - sometimes in an hour in those first, you know, months	106

Table 3 The ten most heavily-populated categories of metaphor in the dataset with examples

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words from the surrounding context may be included for clarity where this is necessary for understanding of the metaphor.

Many of the examples in the four most heavily-populated categories (categories 1-4 in Table 3) were closely related to time, as we can see in the examples shown in Table 3. Time was also involved to varying extents with the other metaphors. We found that time operated as a target domain for some of the metaphors, and in other cases time was implicated in a complex network of interrelated metaphorical underpinnings; it may function as a source, a target, an entailment, or simply as the context in which the source and target exist.

For example, take the idea of '*entering a grief world*'. This metaphor involves *moving ego* where the individual sees themselves as moving through time, enabling them also to draw on metaphors relating to *journeys* and *physical location*. To take another metaphor from Table 3, when the participant says 'they don't quite grasp *where a bereaved person is*', they are in effect talking about where that person is on a temporal trajectory as they move through the grieving process. In this example, although time is not foregrounded, an awareness of the temporal perspective contributes to the overall meaning of the utterance. In contrast, in the example, 'are you gonna remain *broken* forever like this' time is being discussed in more literal terms ('forever') and against this temporal backdrop we have the embodied metaphor of a person being 'broken'. The same can be said for the example of metaphor provided within the 'agency and lack of agency' category ('it's like a *rollercoaster*'); again, this metaphor involves a temporal backdrop in which the participant was talking about bereavement as a *process* and not as a static entity.

Because of the complex nature of relationship between time and the metaphors and the complex relationships between the metaphors themselves, it does not make sense to discuss the above categories one-by-one, which meant we needed to find an alternative way of structuring our analysis. In order to do this, we looked at the overlapping metaphors in the examples and identified a set of over-arching themes around which they appeared to cluster. These were: (1) reification, (2) the displacement, expansion and heightened awareness of time, and (3) personal relationships with time, with respect to the moving time versus moving ego perspective. We also found a number of instances in which the participants combined the use of different metaphors to convey their message. We also found that the participants' metaphorical references to time were complemented in places by relatively non-metaphorical references to time.

#### 4.3.1 *The reification of time and its entailments*

As with other abstract concepts, people often reify time, and talk about it as if it were a tangible object that can be manipulated, exchanged and at times, ascribed animacy. This was also true of the ways in which the participants in our study talked about time. In these examples, time is mainly being considered as a resource (category 2 in Table 2 above).

The reification of time allowed for scenarios in which time could be given and received, either by the bereaved themselves as in Example (1), or by their supporters as in Example (2).

- (1) being as kind to yourself as you can[.] *giving yourself time* and space not expecting to be okay perhaps really quickly. If you are, great, but you know, if you're not that's fine too
- (2) I think you need to *give them time* for it to sink in

However, the reification of time as an object which could be given and received could also lead to more negative conceptualisations in which time was considered to be a finite resource, as shown in Example (3).

- (3) I think I felt like I was only *allowed to have a certain amount of time* feeling the way I did about it?

Thus, the reification of time in this way opens up the possibility for the ‘allocation’ of time to be the responsibility of someone else; the idea that the woman was ‘only allowed to have a certain amount of time’ in the example above implies a lack of agency on the part of the bereaved, as she is not in control of the amount of time she considers herself to have.

In the examples discussed so far in this section, time is seen as a ‘gift’ or a (sometimes limited) resource that can be used to aid healing. In contrast to these relatively positive conceptions of reified time however, there were other examples in which time, and specifically individuals’ experiences of it, became a hindrance. Example (4) below relates to a family’s decision to have a termination following a diagnosis of foetal abnormality at 21 weeks of gestation. In it, the concept of time is experienced as being ‘pressed’, causing the bereaved family to feel ‘under quite a bit of pressure’, perhaps due to the fact that after 24 weeks, the process for accessing a termination becomes more complex. In Example (5), which was produced by a supporter, however, the idea of having a finite amount of time is seen as a positive, while being able to access support at any time may be detrimental to an individual’s recovery.

- (4) I arranged a meeting for the next week pretty much (.) because (.) you know (.) *time felt pressed at that point*, you know, the consultant was very keen for (.) things to sort of be brought to a close quite (.) quite quickly so they felt (.) you know (.) under quite a bit of pressure
- (5) having support twenty four hours might not be such a good thing. You might need: *time you know the classic counselling format which, your hour’s up I’ll see you next week*, gives you the message you can find that coping mechanism in your own space, in your own skin

Here, we see that the reification of time can constitute a source of conflict, with a finite amount of time being seen as a source of pressure for the bereaved but a positive tool in the recovery process by their supporters. We will see further examples of this later on, where it will be shown that conceptualisations of time as a ‘resource’, as here, may not be as useful or relevant for the bereaved.

Reification of time in this way was not particular to our corpus; it is common in English to reify time in this way, although it is slightly more frequent in our data than in the BNC spoken subcorpus: instances of verbs taking time as an object (e.g. *take time*, *spend time*, *have time*) account for 636.91 per million words in our data, versus 406.70 per million in the BNC spoken subcorpus. However, despite the fact that the reification of time is a conventional phenomenon, the way different people talk about this reified time provides insights into the different ways in which they conceptualise their relationship with it.

We can see an example of this in Example (6) where one of the support workers accords reified time the status of an animate object that has an ability to effect changes in an individual’s emotional state. In this example, time is seen as an entity that had the power to ‘heal’, as shown here:

- (6) acknowledging that maybe that was just a season and that *time would heal for her* and (.) that things would get better for her as time went on

However, in our dataset, there was an imbalance in the use of this sense of time between individuals who had gone through pregnancy loss, and those who were there to support them. The bereaved themselves did not tend to engage with this metaphor, suggesting a disjunction between their own conceptualisations of their experiences and those of supporters.

The idea that time can ‘heal’ resonates with the classic 5-stage linear grief model (denial – anger – bargaining – depression – acceptance) (Bowlby, 1961) that implies a change of feelings accompanying the sequence of stages, and, more importantly, suggests that while the event is unchangeable (e.g. death), one’s attitude to it will alter with the passage of time. While this grief model has been widely criticised in psychology (e.g. Bonanno 2009), its underpinning logic, which appears to relate to the idea that “time heals all wounds”, remains a key factor in cultural understandings of bereavement and grief. Although the passage of time has indeed been found to blur the details of remembered past events in general terms (e.g. Schacter 1997, 2002), memories of *traumatic* events have been found to be qualitatively different; they are more likely to be stored ‘as physical sensations that are experienced as immediate life threats – *right now*’ rather than as past narratives (e.g. Levine 2015, n.p). Since pregnancy losses have been viewed as a cause of post-traumatic stress disorder (e.g. Farren et al. 2016), it is more likely that the grief will be of this non-linear nature, and therefore concepts of time as a healing resource may not be the most relevant. The fact that the bereaved tended not to see time in this way may explain why ‘time as a resource’ only constituted 20.61% uses of the word time in the dataset.

#### 4.3.2 Time displacement, expansion of time, and altered levels of awareness of time

We noted at the outset that bereavement often causes its sufferers to experience time differently (a phenomenon described as ‘paradoxical perceptions of time’ by Chan and Chan (2011: 147)). Two manifestations of paradoxical perceptions of time in our dataset involved cases where it was displaced or expanded.

##### **Time displacement**

First, we saw that time could be displaced, and that hypothetical ‘future’ events were enacted in the present to help deal with the grieving process, which could result in a blurring of the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical. Consider, for example, Example (7); an extract from a discussion between two midwives about a father’s wishes following the stillbirth of his son:

- (7) A: Before the funeral, it’s your time to do the things that you wanted to do, so I understand that many dreams you had aren’t achievable, but if there are some, our job is to help you dream the dream basically, and lots of them are to do with dad, but we’ve had dad who always wanted beer, and he said I want a can of beer, dad and lad, we’ve facilitated that

B: Yeah he wanted a can of beer with his da- his son and sadly his son was stillborn, so we let him have some beer in the family room with his baby

In this extract, the father metaphorically ‘shared a beer’ with his son, an activity that he might normally have engaged in on his son’s eighteenth birthday. Because of the circumstances, he has metaphorically ‘jumped forward’ eighteen years in his attempt to reconcile two incompatible realities. There is thus a conflation of a real and an imagined world, which makes sense in the eyes of the father but which may appear paradoxical to an outsider. This scenario may also be reminiscent of the tradition of ‘wetting the baby’s head’, in which new fathers go out for a celebratory drink with their friends after the birth of a baby. It could be that because the father in this scenario could not ‘wet the baby’s head’, he wanted to combine elements of this with the idea of going for a first drink with his son, in recognition that he would not be able to do either. This is typical of the fuzzy nature of the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical in situations where what was ‘real’ has become ‘unreal’ and what was ‘unreal’ has become ‘real’. This experience appears to contribute to the experiential displacement of time.

Whereas in the example we have just seen, a *future* event is displaced to the present, in other cases, *past* events were experienced as if they were in the present, as can be seen in Example (8) below:

- (8) I saw everywhere pregnant woman, pregnant woman with pushchairs which was just, every single time when I saw them I was just crying? Cause I knew that <tearfully>especially when I saw twins, when I saw twins</tearfully> (..) I still have this, when I see twins it’s just unbelievable, *past two and a half year since, since this moment and it, it’s still alive, it’s still so painful*

In this example, the length of time since the bereavement period has been compressed into a much shorter time period. The past has become very present/real and the traumatic event is experienced as ‘now.’ Her use of the word ‘alive’ emphasises the continued presence of the experience; the experience is ‘alive’ because it is always ‘now.’

### **The expansion of time**

As well as being displaced, time could also be expanded. Example (9) shows how this expansion can take place in an individual’s own perception of time.

- (9) so the doctor did say before he scanned me, look, I’m going to scan you, I’m not going to say anything, and my silence is not an indication either way, because you know I have to see what I have to see first, and it might be that, you know, it’s complicated and I don’t want to interrupt my scanning by talking to you about it so please don’t think that silence is bad. But I think what got me was it, was the, the length of the silence, so obviously I’d had two children before and, and I’d had two, well, four scans, two early dating scans and two anomaly scans and I think like that felt like the longest <quietly>it probably wasn’t that long to be honest</quietly> *but it FELT like the LONGEST time EVER. I mean it was S:O long*, and then eventually he said I’m sorry...

This is very much in line with work on people’s perceptions of time more generally. It is a well contested fact that the perceived duration of a time interval can seem longer or shorter relative to real time depending on the nature of the experience that fills that interval, with

more intense periods being remembered as having lasted longer. This phenomenon has been attributed to changes in state of the stimulus environment (Fraisse, 1984) and the fact that more memory space is allocated to major events (Ornstein, 1969). The experience of pregnancy loss diagnosis can be such a tumultuous event that time feels like it has come to a virtual standstill. These examples demonstrate that time, when viewed in terms of space, can be a malleable concept in the context of bereavement following pregnancy loss. It is important for friends, colleagues and relatives to acknowledge this, recognising that during and following a bereavement, an individual may have a very different experience of the passage of time to them.

### **Increased and reduced levels of awareness of time**

In the last section, we saw that bereaved individuals can experience time in subjective and sometimes unexpected ways, with time being displaced and short time periods feeling longer. This is a reflection of a more general phenomenon in which participants in our study demonstrated either increased or reduced levels of awareness of the passing of time, according to the context. Although these instances do not involve specifically metaphorical representations of time, we believe that they are of interest as they further exemplify the importance of one's awareness of time during this difficult period.

An example of a woman's heightened awareness of time can be seen in Example (10):

- (10) *you know the time* (.) you know, I could tell you what happened on the day baby [NAME] died on the Sunday like it was yesterday (.) *I know what time* (.) *what time we came back*

Similarly, the bereaved seem able to envisage a point in the future where they will want memories of the bereavement and its immediate aftermath, as shown in their desire to 'extract... goodness and happy memories' to look back on:

- (11) the grief process starts as soon as the bad news arrives on that twenty-week scan ... but you know they were *really desperate to extract as much* (.) *goodness and happy memories* (.) *you know things that they could look back on in five years' time* (.) *ten years' time* (.) and maybe the warmth would match the grief (.) or even overshadow the grief that they (.) they remember

The fact that individuals appeared to have a heightened awareness of time as an event or point chimes with our earlier findings in Section 4.2, which showed that time as an event or point constituted 50.74% of the uses of the word time.

- (12) it did feel a bit weird being off sick but not actually sick, kinda *filling up time during the day was a little bit strange*

This also relates to Chan & Chan's (2011) findings that were discussed in the literature review, specifically that their participants found it difficult to use their time on a day-to-day basis. Crucially, this may not be the case for those around the bereaved, who may hold very different views of time. This was suggested in Section 4.3.1 above, when we saw that one individual felt that she was only 'allowed' a certain amount of time. Similarly, in Example



(13), acquaintances of the bereaved are represented as having an ‘invisible watch’, marking off the period of time considered to be socially acceptable to grieve for a lost child - to not be ‘over it’. For the bereaved, however, there is no such structure or timeline to their recovery, with time seeming ‘irrelevant’. Here are the words of one of the bereavement midwives in our study:

(13) I would say it’s us as a society that puts pressure on parents to get over it, you know, because people will see you out and about, you know, (.) a week after you’ve had your baby and they’ll see you in Sainsburys and they’ll go, oh you’re over it then. (.) It’s as if there’s this *invisible watch* that says, you know what I mean, (.) and it doesn’t mean they’re over it, it just means that they’re trying to engage in the world (.)

[...]

as time goes on (.) erm (.) yeah (.) your baby lives on in your heart and *time seems irrelevant you know*

We can see a reduced awareness of time in this account, where a bereaved woman is describing her feelings in the immediate aftermath to being told her twins had not survived:

(14) to be honest *I don’t remember how long I was there. I seriously don’t remember.* It needed to be some time cause I remember that my sister came and then before my husband came cause he, he is working like ten miles away (...) so he needed to drive as well so I think I was around one hour at least there. And to be honest I- though I was there and I had this time *I wasn’t thinking about things like that*

Shortly after this, however, she talks about how important she felt it was to have an induction as soon as possible, showing that her perception of time has changed again: now, time has become a compressed resource of which she is highly aware. Similarly, she describes the process of arranging the funeral as ‘so many different things uh which to think (*sic*) in a really short time’, suggesting that the idea of time as a resource is incompatible with the experience of the bereavement. This ties in with theories of time’s role in the experience of grief as discussed in Section 4.1 above. Acknowledging this incompatibility is therefore likely to be an important part of a support relationship. The tension between competing conceptualisations of time further suggests that some conventional understandings of grief might be unproductive for those who have actually experienced pregnancy loss, such as the idea that people can ‘get over it’ or that time is all that is needed to heal.

#### 4.3.3 Personal relationships with time, with respect to the moving time versus moving ego perspective

We saw in Section 2 above that moving forwards in time is frequently conceptualised as moving forwards in space but that in some cases time can be perceived as moving towards the protagonist. Both conceptualisations were found in our data, however there were many more ‘moving ego’ conceptualisations (673) than ‘moving time’ conceptualisations (30). Examples (15) - (20) below show some of the ‘moving ego’ conceptualisations that we found in our data:

(15) *I’m six years down the line* now so I can sort of- I know to expect it

- (16) people (.) you know (.) are told to **move on** [...] they're just so (.) insensitive (.) expressions (.) because **move on** from what? (.) You know, (.) your baby's died and that's it, it's final, it's irreversible (.)
- (17) I'm still **going through it**
- (18) I've still been able to **get past the hardest point**
- (19) I was no longer pregnant and just sort of **on with it you go?**
- (20) it feels impossible to **shift and move forward and imagine that they'll ever get beyond (.) this moment**

While moving ego conceptualisations of time are often thought to facilitate agency, the examples produced by our participants were characterised by an apparent lack of agency, as we can see in Examples (21) and (22) below:

- (21) it wasn't my decision when the babies were gonna be born. I was now **in their hands**
- (22) you know I felt very much that **my hands were almost tied**, that, you know, they were sort of **pushing me to go down the medical route**

Similarly, when we look more closely at the ways in which the moving ego metaphor was used, we can see that even though agency is allowed, the types of verbs that were used tended not to be associated with agency. For example, the string 'going through' was a key bi-gram in our corpus, and although it reflects a moving ego orientation the verb 'going' has less agency than other more 'manner of movement' type verbs. Similarly, 'go through' tends to carry negative connotations, as evidenced by a collocation analysis in the BNC. Of the top 100 collocates (by logdice) in the BNC, 12 were found to be negative (e.g. *pain, hell, agony, trauma*), while the rest were neutral or literal. There were no positive collocations. The string 'been through it' was a key trigram when compared with the spoken subcorpus of the British National Corpus. It was significantly more common in our data (31 instances; 94.9 per million words) than in the BNC (10 instances; 0.8 per million words).

We encountered some cases of the 'moving ego' conceptualisations that went beyond the boundaries of what is normally covered by this description:

- (23) then the [grief](.) **it catches up with you** (.) a little bit later

At times, participants stepped completely outside the moving time/moving ego dichotomy and experienced time as something separate from them; they experienced themselves as being outside the world and its 'timeline'. This is shown in Example (24) below:

- (24) It's so hard because you come out of hospital and **the world is still carrying on but your world has stopped**

The support workers were highly sensitive to this phenomenon; it appeared frequently in their descriptions of the losses experienced by their clients, and may have been informed by their own experiences of pregnancy loss:

- (25) this is what I describe to parents (.) if the world is **going round** that's the world you know (.) and then when you have a baby that's died **you get off** (.) you know, the world is still **going around** (.) and then **as time goes on**, you know (.) you might **go round** a couple of times and then **get off** again and **get on** again (.) do

- you know what I mean, and then gradually you'll get back on but you have to do it *at your own pace* so it's kind of *dipping in and out* you know
- (26) they're *stuck in a spiral* of negativity[.]
- (27) it is a sort of your *transition back out of raw grief* to, to, er, to where the world you're rebuilding life again

This experience is very different from the experiences of time that are often often discussed in the context of the moving time/moving ego distinction, nor is it mentioned in Moore's (2014) more comprehensive account of time-space metaphors. It appears to be an experience that is peculiar to people who have experienced some kind of traumatic event or serious depression, and is not limited to pregnancy loss per se. In many ways, it parallels the themes of Irving's ethnographic work with people living with HIV/AIDS that considers how "the temporality... of people's bodies becomes radically destabilised during and after illness" (2005: 317). For Irving's participants, this was literal; their illnesses rendered them bed-ridden, removed from their everyday world. For our participants, this is more metaphorical; while they are not literally removed from society, the taboo and silence around their loss may make them feel that the world is carrying on without them. This alienated sense of temporality is both created and exacerbated by their subjective conceptions of time, which may make it difficult for others to relate to them. It may be productive for friends and relatives to be aware of, and sensitive to, this sense of temporal alienation.

In Examples (28) - (30) below, we see instantiations of the *moving time* metaphor, which can have the effect of removing agency from the individual.

- (28) As time *goes on*
- (29) Or it could be that they have decided to have a termination and it's in the days *leading up* to that
- (30) We've got a funeral *coming up*

Of these examples, only the third fits with the classic moving time/moving ego distinction where events 'approach' the protagonist from the future. The other two reflect a more general, ego-less sort of moving-time metaphor, which is more in line with Moore's (2014) idea of time as a 'mover' in which the direction of travel is the same as the ego.

#### 4.3.4 Mixed metaphors

Finally, people's attempts to describe their experience of time sometimes involved the combination of several different metaphors. Although for many people, the idea of 'mixing one's metaphors' is seen as an instance of poor language use, researchers in the field of metaphor studies have shown that mixing one's metaphors is rather common and that it can serve as a powerful and effective form of communication. Indeed, a whole edited volume has been dedicated to the topic of mixed metaphor (Gibbs, 2016).

Example (31) below is taken from an interview with a woman whose twin pregnancy ended in the stillbirth of one of the twins. In it, we see metaphors of space, moving ego, reification, size, journey, and physical pain.

- (31) we will see a set of twins that are around the same age as [TWIN1] and [TWIN2] were and we will- it will be like, can't really be around here. *Need some space*. But they don't *see* it every day. To them, you know, we had the funeral, it was all very sad, it's still all very sad but *life goes on* and (.) they don't get (.) what we're still *going through* and what we will always still *go through* ... They are really

supportive in their own way. But they don't *go through* it every day? Um *small things* to them aren't as significant as they are to [HUSBAND] and I. um (.) so you know [TWIN1] *achieving a milestone* is, is a *knife in the heart* every time because you should be having two of them *receiving a milestone* or *going through that milestone*.

Mixed metaphors were also employed by the support workers when describing the grief and recovery processes. In Example (32), we see metaphors of place (linked to moving ego), fighting, lightness and darkness.

- (32) Erm: because everyone that she's attended a meeting with has either gone on to have more children or: just seem to be *in a better place* anyway erm: so she feels very negative and very let down about that because she's *battling* with herself as well as to, why isn't she better now, why can't she *move on* a little bit and (.) why is she still *in such a dark place two years on*

The use of mixed metaphors in these interviews resonates with Charteris-Black's (2016) research into the use of mixed metaphors in descriptions of pain. He argued that mixing metaphor in descriptions of pain was a purposeful decision on the part of the speaker, used to emphasise the fact that their pain was 'out of control' and therefore more intense. It could be, therefore, that the use of mixed metaphors in these accounts serves a similar purpose, highlighting the intensity of the experiences of the bereaved. It also provides further evidence that time metaphors form part of a complex network of metaphorical ideas, and should not be looked at in isolation.

## 5 Conclusion

The aim of this paper has been to use metaphor analysis to gain insights into the emotional landscape of people who are experiencing bereavement following pregnancy loss. The focus of the paper was on time because (a) bereavement in general has been found to have an impact on people's experience of time and (b) references to time were salient in our dataset.

We identified a set of over-arching themes around which references to time appeared to cluster. These were: (1) reification, (2) the displacement, expansion and heightened awareness of time, and (3) personal relationships with time, with respect to the moving time versus moving ego perspective. Although the reification of time was not peculiar to our corpus, we found that it could constitute a source of conflict, with a finite amount of time being seen as a source of pressure for the bereaved but a positive tool in the recovery process by their supporters. It therefore seems that different conceptualisations of time may be more or less relevant or helpful to the bereaved, and that supporters need to be sensitive to this.

As for the more 'paradoxical' construals of time, we found that time could be displaced, and that hypothetical 'future' events were enacted in the present to help deal with the grieving process. We also saw that time could be expanded, which could result in a blurring of the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical. Some of the participants in our study also appear to have developed increased or reduced levels of awareness of time, which although not metaphorical per se, underpin the salience of time as a feature of the experience of pregnancy loss, and provide added poignancy to some of the metaphorical perceptions discussed above.

Turning to the personal relationships that our participants had with time, we found that moving ego perspectives greatly outnumbered moving time perspectives but that they involved a marked lack of agency. Many of the ways in which our participants described their relationships with time bore no relationship to the moving time/moving ego perspective, although some appeared to reflect Moore's (2014) idea of time as a mover, following the same direction of travel as the participant. For some individuals, their experiences appear to have taken them outside linear time completely; they report experiences of occupying a space outside the world and its timeline, of watching their world 'spiralling out of control'. Support workers also made use of this metaphor, which may underscore its importance to the bereaved. Our participants' metaphorical conceptualisations of time often interacted with other metaphors, such as those whose source domains involve space, darkness and light, and physical pain. These findings suggest that friends, colleagues and relatives should tread carefully when discussing time in the context of grief, recognising that the bereaved may have different configurations of time and that these need to be respected.

Theoretically-speaking, we found that references to time in our dataset had a complex relationship with metaphor, which went somewhat beyond the moving time/moving ego distinction and the conceptualisations of time proposed by Moore (2014). While time operated as a target domain for some of the metaphors, in other cases it was implicated in a complex network of interrelated metaphorical underpinnings. Our findings suggest that time exists in a complex web of meanings, some metaphorical, some not, and that conceptions of time seem to bridge the gap between the metaphorical and the literal. The interaction between metaphorical and non-metaphorical language in discussions about time, and the interaction between different metaphors, could prove fruitful avenues of further study, both from a theoretical perspective and in order to help us gain deeper insights into experiences of loss.

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