

Ribbon Culture



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Since its emergence in 1991, the 'awareness' ribbon has achieved the kind of cultural status usually reserved for big brand icons and religious symbols; yet its meaningfulness as a symbol is often questioned by activists and media commentators. Certainly, 'showing awareness' is not as straightforward a social practice as it might at first seem. The ribbon is, for example, both a kitsch fashion accessory as well as an emblem that expresses empathy; it is a symbol that represents awareness, yet requires no knowledge of the cause it represents; it appears to signal concern for others, but in fact prioritises self-expression. Ribbon Culture explores ambiguities surrounding these ribbons, the nature of contemporary mourning practices, the sociology of compassion, the marketing discourses of charities and the relationship between awareness and consumerism.

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