
Broken Hearts or Broken Bonds

Love and Death in Historical Perspective

Margaret Stroebe
Mary M. Gergen

*University of Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands
Pennsylvania State University, Delaware County
Campus*

Kenneth J. Gergen
Wolfgang Stroebe

*Swarthmore College
University of Utrecht, Utrecht, The Netherlands*

Psychological theories and practices frequently neglect the extent to which their subject matter is historically and culturally defined. This issue is explored in the context of theories and therapies related to bereavement. Contemporary orientations emphasize the importance of breaking bonds with the deceased and the return of survivors to autonomous lifestyles. Placing this orientation in cultural and historical context reveals that it is largely a product of a modernist worldview. Within the romanticist ethos of the preceding century, such breaking of bonds would destroy one's identity and the meaning of life. In light of contemporary variations in subcultural meanings and values, a postmodern view is suggested in which reflexive responsibility is focal.

Have I forgot, my Only Love, to love thee,
Severed at last by Time's all-wearing wave?
—Emily Bronte

One of the chief characteristics of psychological inquiry in the present century has been the search for robust laws of human nature. In their attempts to emulate natural scientists' claims to broad covering laws, psychological researchers have aimed at formulating general principles of human functioning. This universalizing tendency is strongly evident in all domains of psychology, including the mental health professions. Both researchers and practitioners have used their observations to support claims of the broadest scope, hoping to generate insight into the "basic" processes of depression, drug dependency, stress disorders, and the like, and to establish optimal treatment programs for various forms of dysfunction.

Although such a universalizing approach is highly optimistic in its promise of incremental knowledge and reliable programs of counseling or treatment, there has been recurrent doubt about its basic assumptions (Foucault, 1965; Rose, 1985). Specialists in community mental health, family therapy, and social work, in particular, have drawn increasing attention to the ways in which various problems, including the very definition of the problematic, are generated in particular social milieus or conditions (see McNamee & Gergen, 1992). These conclusions strongly suggest that patterns of action, including their meanings and significance, are, at least in part, socially

constituted, and thus subject to historical and cultural change. Similar conclusions have been reached in many investigations across the social sciences (Badinter, 1980; Carrithers, Collins, & Lukes, 1985; Corbin, 1986; Shweder & Miller, 1985). For example, on the basis of her review of the cross-cultural literature on depression, Lutz (1988) proposed that the disorder is not universally recognized and in some cultures does not appear to exist.

Although sensitivity to culturally constructed components of dysfunctional behavior and ameliorative action is increasing, the relevance to specific mental health practices is far less apparent. What implications does viewing dysfunctional behavior as culturally and historically contingent have for matters of daily practice and policy development within the mental health professions? Are caregiving strategies and therapeutic practices subject to historical and cultural limitations? Does each new generation require new forms of support and treatment? If people of one subculture or generation consider a given form of action appropriate and acceptable, are those who fail to share their views justified in viewing such action as a problem in need of attention? All such questions gain focal significance in this context.

These issues are complex and multifaceted. In the present article we explore the dimensions of one particular area of central concern to many health care researchers and therapists—reactions to the loss of a loved one, and the associated processes of grieving. In so doing we both demonstrate the concrete significance of a cultural constructionist view and suggest a possible alternative to currently prevailing practices.

We first consider the predominant Western view of grief and grief intervention strategies that are embedded in what we view as *modernist* practices. This view is contrasted with evidence from other cultures and then with

Stanley L. Brodsky served as action editor for this article

This article marks 15 years of collaborative inquiry among the four authors. The three junior authors want to thank Margaret Stroebe, especially, for inspiring the present integration of concerns.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed either to Margaret Stroebe, Department of Clinical and Health Psychology, University of Utrecht, Heidelberglaan 1, P.O. Box 80, 140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands, or to Kenneth Gergen, Department of Psychology, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA 19081.

the *romantic* conception of grief, which was most popular in the previous century but is still a mainstay of cultural life. As we argue, the romantic view is threatened by modernist practices. At the same time, theory and results from recent research and analysis challenge the modernist orientation, and are used to demonstrate ways in which the romantic view can be sustained. Finally, we consider this conflict in a postmodern context.

Breaking Bonds in the 20th Century

Scholars frequently have used the term *modernist* to characterize the cultural zeitgeist of contemporary Western society, in contrast with that of the preceding century, which has often been described as *romanticist*. Among the chief attributes of cultural modernism are an emphasis on reason and observation and a faith in continuous progress (K. J. Gergen, 1991). The modernist approach to life is one that emphasizes goal directedness, efficiency, and rationality. In psychology, modernism has given rise to the machine metaphor of human functionality. When applied to grief, this view suggests that people need to recover from their state of intense emotionality and return to normal functioning and effectiveness as quickly and efficiently as possible. Modernist theories of grief and related therapeutic interventions encourage people who have experienced loss to respond in just this way. Grieving, a debilitating emotional response, is seen as a troublesome interference with daily routines, and should be "worked through." Such *grief work* typically consists of a number of tasks that have to be confronted and systematically attended to before normality is reinstated (for more detailed discussions of the grief work hypothesis, see M. Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991; M. Stroebe, in press). Reducing attention to the loss is critical, and good adjustment is often viewed as a breaking of ties between the bereaved and the dead.

The belief in the importance of severing ties from a deceased loved one found early and important expression in Freud's (1917) work. Freud conceptualized love as the attachment (cathexis) of libidinal energy to the mental representation of the loved person (the object). When the loved person dies, the libidinal energy remains attached to thoughts and memories of the deceased. Because the pool of energy is limited, the cathexis to the lost object has to be withdrawn in order for the person to regain these energy resources. The ties to the loved object are severed by a process of energy detachment that Freud termed *hypercathexis*. Freud saw the psychological function of grief as freeing the individual of his or her ties to the deceased, achieving gradual detachment by means of reviewing the past and dwelling on memories of the deceased. This process is complete when most of the energy is withdrawn from the lost object and transferred to a new one. Those who fail to hypercathect remain emotionally stunted.

A more fully developed modernist view was offered by John Bowlby. Consider his reaction to C. S. Lewis's (1961) classic case study, *A Grief Observed*. Lewis described his overwhelming feelings of grief and frustration

as he attempted to make sense of the death of his wife. Just two years after the book's publication, Lewis also died. By contemporary standards of mental health, Lewis's reactions seem excessive; his preoccupation with the loss of his wife may have even hastened his own demise. As Bowlby (1980) wrote, Lewis's account

suggests a man whose feeling life had become . . . inhibited and suppressed during childhood and who had grown up, as a result, to be intensely introspective. . . . His frustration [was] . . . due to the systems mediating his attachment behavior having become deactivated after his mother died when he was nine. (pp. 241-242)

In Bowlby's view, grief is conceptualized as a form of separation anxiety, the motivation for which is to restore proximity to the lost object. In the case of death, a permanent separation, the attempt to restore proximity is inappropriate or nonfunctional. The dysfunctionality does not prevent the attempts from occurring, and only gradually do they become extinguished. This takes place through a sequence of phases, sometimes alternating from protest and anger through to despair when hope that the lost person will return is gradually abandoned (Bowlby, 1971, 1975, 1980).

Like psychoanalytic theory, which focuses on the importance of relinquishing ties, Bowlby's work suggests that bonds with the deceased need to be broken for the bereaved to adjust and recover. Relevant counseling or therapy programs are designed to help achieve this process of withdrawal. Those who retain ties are considered maladjusted. This general assumption that ties with the deceased need to be severed is referred to in this article as the *breaking bonds* hypothesis.

Other modernists have written of the need for a grieving person to gain a new identity; again, the theme is one of achieving independence from the deceased. The title of an article by Golan (1975), "Wife to Widow to Woman," expressed this succinctly. More elaborate is the title of Judith Viorst's (1986) volume, *Necessary Losses: The Loves, Illusions, Dependencies and Impossible Expectations That All of Us Have to Give Up in Order to Grow*. Parkes (1972/1986) has written at length on processes of identification in bereaved people, particularly widows, pointing out how the old identity that relies heavily on the deceased person gradually dissolves and is replaced by a new and different one. Sanders (1989) described the task of "letting go" the tie to the loved one as a necessity for the resolution of grief work, and for the "rebuilding of a life with new rewards and reinforcements" (p. 94). Sociologist Helena Lopata (1975, 1979, 1988) has written extensively on the need for widows to develop new identities.

The breaking bonds hypothesis receives further support from the literature on counseling and therapy for the bereaved (for a recent review, see Raphael & Nunn, 1988). Principles of grief counseling and therapy follow the view that, in the course of time, bereaved persons need to break their ties with the deceased, give up their attachments, form a new identity of which the departed

person has no part, and reinvest in other relationships. People who persist in retaining a bond with their deceased loved one are in need of counseling or therapy. Worden (1982), a leading authority on grief intervention, maintained that the bereaved may need counseling or therapy to achieve emotional withdrawal from the deceased and reinvest in other relationships. In his view, one of the major hindrances to the completion of grief is holding on to the past attachment rather than letting go and forming new ones. Even more extreme are two syndromes described by Gorer (1965)—*mummification* and *despair*—wherein grief remains intense and sometimes permanent. Cases of mummification are characterized by an incessant dwelling on the deceased and retention of the life routine as it was before that person's death. Despairing grief is said to be accompanied by "flat" emotion and social isolation; the tie to the deceased may be clung to in the absence of alternative social relationships.

In line with both theoretical formulations and counseling practices, researchers consistently identify "relationship to the spouse" as one of the major risk factors for poor bereavement outcomes. Parkes and Weiss (1983) described two major causes of pathological grief, which stem from problematic marital bonds. One of these, following Freud, is called the *ambivalent grief syndrome*. This refers to a relationship in which elements of love and hate coexisted, conflicts were frequent, and divorce or separation may have been contemplated. After loss the bereaved may still be attached to the deceased, but insecurely so. Another syndrome, called the *chronic grief syndrome*, follows the termination of a relationship characterized as highly dependent or clinging.

It is noteworthy that aspects of a closely bonded marital relationship have been identified not only as a cause of pathology, but as a major contributor to poor adjustment among the bereaved in general. Lopata (1973, 1979) found disorganization in widowhood to be related to previous marital roles. Those widows who had been intensely involved in their husband's lives and who were psychologically as well as socially dependent on them had greater problems in adjustment than those who were more autonomous.

As we see, the prevailing view of grief within the professions emphasizes the importance of breaking bonds and the problematic implications of deeply dependent relationships.¹ Proper bereavement requires that ties with the deceased be relinquished, and counseling and therapy programs are designed to further this breaking of ties. From this it follows that those persons who are independent and autonomous in marriage will encounter less difficulty in breaking their bonds and thus will have a less problematic experience of grief.

Grief in Other Cultures

Although the breaking bonds orientation appears from a modernist perspective to have implications of universal scope, its spatiotemporal limitations become apparent when it is viewed in cultural contrast. A brief survey of non-Western cultures reveals that beliefs about the value

of continuing bonds with the deceased vary widely. In sharp contrast with Western conventions, the maintenance of ties with the deceased is accepted and sustained by the religious rituals of Japan. Yamamoto, Okonoji, Iwasaki, and Yoshimura (1969) compared the courses of grief among a small sample of Japanese widows with those of British counterparts. Adjustment among the Japanese widows was comparatively better. The authors attributed this to the belief in both the Shinto and Buddhist religions (to which most of the Japanese widows belonged) that contact should be maintained with the deceased. In both religions the deceased join the ranks of one's ancestors. As Yamamoto (1970) explained, "The ancestor remains accessible, the mourner can talk to the ancestor, he can offer goodies such as food or even cigars. Altogether the ancestor . . . remains with the bereaved" (p. 181). This cultivation of continued contact with the deceased is facilitated by the presence in nearly all homes of an altar dedicated to the family ancestors. Offering food at the altar of a loved one would be classified as pathological by most Westerners, who would fear that the bereaved was fixated in the grief process and had failed to relinquish the tie to the deceased. However, in the Japanese case, such practices are fully normal.

In sharp contrast with both the Japanese and the Western patterns of grief are those of certain Native American tribes. Among the Hopi of Arizona, for example, the deceased are forgotten as quickly as possible, and life is carried on much as usual. As Mandelbaum (1959) explained, the bereaved may well feel the pain of loss, but "they give themselves over to no overt transport of grief" (p. 201). This habit is congenial with their beliefs about the afterworld: The Hopi believe that contact with death brings pollution, and they are afraid of death and of the dead person, whose spirit becomes a depersonalized entity. Supernatural spirits are not Hopi and do not have the characteristics of deceased relatives or friends. They are greatly to be feared. As Mandelbaum described, "The Hopi go to great lengths to make sure that the dichotomy of quick and dead is sharp and clear. Many rites having to do with spirits conclude with a ritual device which breaks off contact between mortals and spirits" (p. 202). Mandelbaum gave a vivid illustration of Hopi attitudes toward the deceased. He had taken a photo of a young girl, whom he later learned had died. On a subsequent visit to the village he presented her mother with an enlarged copy, and was surprised to have his gift returned. As he later learned, the reason for the return was that the photo reminded the woman too much of her daughter. As Mandelbaum (1959) described it, "The sovereign desire is to dismiss the body and the event" (p. 203).

Detailed descriptions of differing cultural prescriptions and their effects on grief are found in the recent work of the Norwegian anthropologist Unni Wikan (1988,

¹ It should be noted that seldom do the writings of a single author remain consistently tied to a period of paradigm. Thus, within the works of Parkes, Gorer, Worden, and Raphael, for example, romanticist concepts and opinions are sometimes voiced as well.

1991). In an insightful analysis, Wikan has explored the experiences and expressions of grief in two Muslim societies, in Bali and in Egypt. That grief is debilitating is clearly accepted in both societies, but Wikan described entirely different ways by which the two come to terms with loss. In Egypt, the bereaved are encouraged to dwell profusely on their grief, surrounded by others who relate similarly tragic accounts and express their own sorrow. They show their compassion and love for the bereaved by ceaseless mournful tirades and emotional outpourings. Wikan pointed to the "cathartic significance" of such recurrent tales. One can conclude that, among Egyptian Muslims, little attempt is made to block memories or to break ties with the deceased. In Bali, the pattern of grieving is entirely different. The bereaved are enjoined to contain their sorrow, even to laugh and be joyful. They may be made to feel that they are doing others an injustice if they do not do so. Generally speaking, no overt signs of retained bonds with the deceased are evidenced, but should they be, they are harshly judged. One Balinese man who expressed his grief in an "excessive" manner was stigmatized as mad (*gila*) and was ridiculed each time the incident was discussed.

The picture that emerges from these cultural descriptions is far different from prevailing 20th-century Western culture. In none of the cases described above (and there are many more) do we find evidence of Western forms of "proper grieving." In some cultures people hold tight to those who are dead; in others they try quickly to relinquish all ties. In all cases the result, in general, is normal adjustment within the culture.

Grief in the Romantic Age

Given broad cultural differences in patterns of grieving and adjustment, further questioning of our own patterns is appropriate. Is it possible that the breaking bonds orientation, naturalized and universalized by Western practices of research and therapy, is largely a product of contemporary times? And if the prevailing view is the product of the modern age, what is being overshadowed? If alternative views of death and mourning have previously proved rich resources in the culture, does not the hegemony of the present view threaten their existence? To the extent that the professional view of proper mourning becomes accepted as normal, then previous orientations become irrelevant—if not deviant.

This possibility gains significant credibility when one begins to survey cultural reactions to death even a century ago. In bold contrast with the modernist modes, the romantic view of life held sway. Whereas modernists hold scientific rationality as the critical ingredient of successful human functioning, romanticists believed in the centrality of "the deep interior"—mysterious forces or processes, beyond consciousness, somewhere toward the center of one's being and one's life (K. J. Gergen, 1991). Many felt that the deep interior was occupied by the human spirit or soul, the source of love, creative inspiration, and the powers of genius. Romanticists placed love at the forefront of human endeavors, and praised those who would aban-

don the "useful" and the "functional" for the sake of a loved one. Romanticists saw marriage as a communion of souls, a family as bonded in eternal love, and friendship as a lifetime commitment.

Within the romanticist context the concept of grief was far different from the modern one. Because close relationships were matters of bonding in depth, the death of an intimate other constituted a critical point of life definition. To grieve was to signal the significance of the relationship, and the depth of one's own spirit. Dissolving bonds with the deceased would not only define the relationship as superficial, but would deny as well one's own sense of profundity and self-worth. It would make a sham of a spiritual commitment and undermine one's sense of living a meaningful life. In contrast with the breaking bonds orientation of modernism, romanticism valor was found in sustaining these bonds, despite a "broken heart."

Some of the most expressive indicators of the broken heart mentality are found in 19th-century poetry. For William Barnes, the memory of his deceased wife was constantly present:

In every moaning wind I hear thee say
sweet words of consolation . . .
I live, I talk with thee where'er I stray.
(Stallworthy, 1973, pp. 361-362)

And echoing a common theme in romanticist writings, he concluded,

Few be my days of loneliness and pain
Until I meet in love with thee again.

For Emily Dickinson, these impassioned memories were born out in actions. As she wrote,

The grave my little cottage is,
where "Keeping house" for thee
I make my parlour orderly
And lay the marble tea.

Then, echoing again the belief in a spiritual reuniting, we find,

For two divided, briefly,
A cycle, it may be,
Till everlasting life unite
In strong society.
(Johnson, 1970, pp. 706-707)

Poetic writings of the time provide some of the most dramatic expressions of the broken heart mentality; another glimpse of its manifestations in daily life is given in Paul Rosenblatt's (1983) volume, *Bitter, Bitter Tears: Nineteenth Century Diarists and Twentieth Century Grief Theories*. Rosenblatt examined accounts of grief as revealed in 56 diaries from the 19th century. As these diaries indicated, not only was there little evidence of breaking bonds, but the prevailing attempt was to hold fast to the departed loved one. This holding fast was accomplished in numerous ways. There are many instances in the diaries of striving to sense the presence of the deceased; some dreamed of the lost person, whereas others had compelling impressions of the deceased actually being present, as of

old, in habitual settings. As Rosenblatt noted, the "sense of presence, like sorrow and other aspects of grief, can return repeatedly" (p. 126). Praying for someone dead maintained the same caring relationship that was present before the loss. Similarly, prevalent references to a reunion in heaven reflected a continuing aspiration to resume, rather than break, contact with the deceased. Some families used child naming as a way of bringing back the presence of the deceased. Rosenblatt also found evidence of a phenomenon that we report on later in the context of 20th-century bonds with the deceased, namely, using the wishes of the lost one as a guide to action. Finally, a common recourse for the grieving was to try to retain ties through spiritualism. The belief that one could communicate with the spirits of the dead through seances and spirit mediums became popular in the mid-19th century, and many diarists recorded taking part in these rituals.

It should also be noted that these attempts to maintain the relationship with the deceased were not merely the expressions of an appropriately delimited period of mourning. Rather, they continued for long durations. As Rosenblatt (1983) concluded from this study of diaries, grief was felt "quite possibly as long as one lives" (p. 59).

Unrelinquished Relationships in Contemporary Society

Do inhabitants of 20th-century Western culture, although dominated by modernist views, continue a romance with romanticism? Surely there is much in popular culture—in film, television, music, and the like—to suggest that this is so. And do those who retain ties to romanticism confront more severe problems of adjusting to grief, as might be suggested by the breaking bonds orientation? The Tubingen Longitudinal Study of Bereavement (see M. Stroebe & Stroebe, 1989, 1991; W. Stroebe & Stroebe, in press; W. Stroebe, Stroebe, & Domittner, 1988) has provided evidence relevant to these questions. Among this sample of young widows and widowers, it was evident that many demonstrated romanticist tendencies to maintain their ties, despite the modernist emphasis on breaking bonds. Even after two years, more than two thirds of the sample planned to continue in their previous (prebereavement) life-styles as much as possible, and only a handful of respondents reported looking ahead to changes in their lives. Likewise, only a small minority (17%) said they were seeking a new partner. These results indicate that many of the widowed persons were not planning a major break with their pasts, rather that they were integrating the loss experience into their life-styles and trying to carry on much as before.

More specific information about the persistence of ties with the deceased was also available. When asked about the perceived presence of the deceased, nearly one third of the sample agreed that they still sensed their spouses' presence, and searched for them even after two years. The extent to which the deceased partner was used as a model for decision making and other behaviors was assessed. These results indicated that the deceased continued to have strong psychological influences over the

way the widowed organized and planned their lives. For example, well over half "consulted" the deceased when having to make a decision. One widow said, "I gain great comfort knowing that this is exactly what Paul would have wanted me to do."

Very similar results have recently been reported by Shuchter and Zisook (in press) for an American sample. These authors detailed a number of ways in which the relationship to a deceased spouse is cherished and even nurtured. Just as was found in the Tubingen Longitudinal Study, these authors concluded that ties are not broken, but strongly held.

The empirical reality is that people do not relinquish their ties to the deceased, withdraw their cathexis, or "let them go." What occurs for survivors is a transformation from what had been a relationship operating on several levels of actual, symbolic, internalized and imagined relatedness to one in which the actual ("living and breathing") relationship has been lost, but the other forms remain or may even develop in more elaborate forms. (p. 14)

Silverman and Worden (in press) noted similar attempts by children who have lost a parent to maintain a sense of the deceased in their current life, and to connect with the parent by talking to him or her, keeping mementos, visiting the grave, and thinking about the parent.

These observations suggest that romanticist styles of attachment remain robust in significant sectors of the adult population and that the broken heart orientation to loss seems no more or less conducive to poor adjustment than are dispositions more congenial to breaking bonds. One may argue, of course, that these results are specific to a population in a specific culture—that is, that they are both historically and culturally limited. But to argue this is simply to underscore our central thesis: The grieving process is indeed embedded within cultural traditions, and to approach the therapeutic or counseling setting with a universalist (and more specifically a modernist) preference for breaking bonds is not only to undermine existing patterns of culture, but to throw into question the normalcy or emotional adequacy of an otherwise unproblematic segment of the population.

Additional support for the pervasiveness of the romantic or broken heart reaction of maintaining ties, and its relationship to adjustment to loss, comes from a different culture. Consider recent findings from a study of parents of sons who died during two Israeli wars, 4 or 13 years previously (Rubin, in press). Although adverse effects characterized the bereaved for many years following loss, difficulties associated with functioning and overt areas of behavior subsided over time; the bereaved parents went about their daily activities much as usual, somatic complaints were no longer excessive, and their psychological adjustment seemed normal. However, on a deeper level, the parents remained very involved with their sons. The picture Rubin painted is one of intense involvement and strong valuation of the bereaved parents with this private relationship, often to the detriment of relationships they had with living children, relatives and friends.

For example, the parents idealized the lost son in ways that were not apparent among a control group of parents whose sons were still alive but had recently left home. Thus, despite apparent adjustment, the effect of loss on the inner lives of the parents did not subside. Rather, there was a persisting preoccupation and retention of very close ties even when there was a reduction in the more overt signs of grieving and problems of functioning. As Rubin concluded, bereaved parents of adult sons show virtually no change in their preoccupation with the deceased over the years.

By current standards, these parents failed to break their bonds properly, and the result appears to be a life preoccupied with the dead, at the expense of the living. From the modernist perspective, the tragedy of death is compounded: Not only are the sons lost to them, but in significant ways, their families are as well. However, for those who retain a romanticist worldview, the breaking of bonds would approximate sacrilege. It would be to degrade the significance of their son, the cause for which he died (their cause as well), and the significance of their relationship with him. To be sure, it is a suffering, but it is a suffering that validates the very significance of their lives. Is this pathology or purpose? It depends on the sociocultural setting.

Bereavement in Postmodern Perspective

To return to the more general issue, inquiry into grieving suggests that diverse groups of people engage in different patterns of action and share different meaning systems within which their actions are understood. Thus, actions deemed aberrant, maladjusted, or pathological in one cultural milieu may be fully acceptable in another. We have seen how the repetitious reciting of mournful stories, weeping, and wailing are normal reactions in one culture, whereas smiling and making jokes in the face of a loss are acceptable reactions in another. Treatment designed in one culture to "correct" or "repair" the actions of the other would at best appear to be insensitive, and at worst a form of cultural (or historical) imperialism. What are the implications of this line of reasoning for research and therapy concerned with grief? Are there forms of therapy that are more sensitive to cultural and social variations? Are there means by which attention can be focused on the better strategies for helping someone in distress?

The present account grows out of a newly developing consciousness, which may be termed *postmodern*. That is, when the relativity of the modernist perspective is recognized (here against the backdrop of romanticism), modernism loses its power of persuasion. In effect, we thus move beyond the modernist commitment and recognize the possibility of multiplicity in perspective. This shift toward multiplicity of voice is hardly unique to the present analysis, and by most standards would be considered a constituent feature of postmodern consciousness more generally (see analyses by Connor, 1989; K. J. Gergen, 1991).

However, recognition of the possibility of variations in perspectives does not itself lead to unequivocal con-

clusions concerning the future of grief research and therapy. At the outset we find that any evaluation of research and therapeutic outcomes can only be made from within some cultural framework. Thus, the negative functions of holding on to a relationship with the dead are fully compelling as long as one remains in the modernist perspective. Within this tradition, retaining ties may be symptomatic of emotional problems and mental illness, and may even lead to premature death: Building a life around a broken heart is contraindicated. Yet, from within the romanticist framework, there is much to be said on behalf of retaining ties. Parents of the Israeli war dead reveal the ennobling aspects of keeping strong ties to the dead, even if difficulties are incurred in their relations with the living. Each perspective yields its own outcomes, and suffers its own limitations. Therapeutic outcomes would be similarly affected.

If definitive resolution is beyond our grasp, what alternatives then lie before us? Let us consider three possibilities. First, attention may be given to means of *conceptual integration*. That is, rather than sustaining the disparate conceptions of grief—along with their accompanying theories and practices—we might seek means of integrating or combining them in some fashion. There are good precedents for such syntheses. Psychoanalytic theory borrowed heavily from romanticism in its conception of unconscious forces, and combined it with a theory of ego functioning, a mainstay of subsequent modernism. The result was a more enriched and compelling theoretical edifice. It is not our attempt, in the present context, to offer an integrative theory of bereavement. However, for purposes of illustration, consider the implications of Mary Gergen's (1987) conceptual analysis of "social ghosts." Social ghosts are defined as real or fictitious persons with whom individuals conduct imaginal interactions over time; they are the cast of characters with whom we engage in imaginal dialogues. Gergen detailed a variety of positive functions that these relationships play in people's lives. For example, social ghosts provide models for action, offer attitudinal perspectives, and lend esteem and emotional support to those who engage with them.

Romanticists may favor the concept of social ghosts, which suggests that it is both normal and emotionally sustaining to retain and nurture images of the deceased. Similarly, in their concern with social efficacy, modernists may also find the view sustaining. In this case the concept of social ghosts expands the range of significant others with whom relations should be effective, adding an internal dimension of the social world. In addition, the existence of social ghosts may have useful outcomes for ongoing interaction. Also supportive of this conclusion is Rosenblatt and Meyer's (1986) discussion of internal dialogues with a deceased person. As they argued, such dialogue serves the positive function of helping the bereaved clarify thoughts, deal with unfinished and emergent relationships, and prepare for the future.

A second outcome of postmodern consciousness for theory and therapy is an invitation toward *culturally*

embedded practices. That is, rather than attempting conceptual integration, one may approach the culture with an appreciation for its rich texture of possibilities. Thus, researchers would not attempt to generate conclusions of universal proportion; even the attempt to characterize a culture as a whole may be considered too generalized. Rather, researchers might profitably be concerned with the enormous variations in forms of bereavement. Rather than attempting to generalize, they would search for an appreciative understanding of grief in all its varieties. On the therapeutic level, this would mean curtailing the search for ideal therapeutic procedures and focusing instead on tailor-made treatments. This would require a highly sensitive receptivity—an open listening to the client voice, for the reality and values of its sustaining subculture. At the same time, this option would invite educating for alternatives. It might prove desirable to teach clients that there are many goals that can be set, many ways to feel, and no set series of stages that they must pass through—that many forms of expression and behavioral patterns are acceptable reactions to loss. The stoic widower may need to learn to cry out over his loss at times, and the weeping widow to put her husband's wishes aside as she becomes the financial manager of her estate. The key concepts are growth, flexibility, and appropriateness within a cultural context. Awareness of a need for such multiplicity is just beginning to penetrate the field of bereavement research (cf. M. Stroebe, Stroebe, & Hansson, in press). We support this endeavor.

Finally, a postmodern orientation toward grief theory and therapy invites an *expansion of responsibility*. A psychologist committed to either the romantic or the modernist view has a sense of moral or social responsibility that is constrained by a particular set of practices. The sense of choice is muted. A therapist committed to a Rogerian interpretation need not worry about the morality of not choosing to practice as a Freudian or behaviorist. In this sense, as the psychologist develops a postmodern consciousness, the range of viable perspectives is vastly increased (Anderson & Goolishian, 1992). One becomes aware that assumptions of health and adjustment are by-products of cultural and historical processes. Similarly, one realizes that theories of personal deficit harbor implicit systems of value, favoring certain ideals over others. More generally, theories and therapeutic practices favor certain forms of cultural patterns over others. For good or ill, they move the society toward or away from certain ends. Effectively, this is to urge a substantial broadening of self-reflective dialogue within the field.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, H., & Goolishian, H. (1992). The client is the expert: A not knowing approach to therapy. In S. McNamee & K. J. Gergen (Eds.), *Social construction and the therapeutic process* (pp. 117-136). London: Sage.
- Badinter, E. (1980). *Motherlove, myth and reality*. New York: Macmillan.
- Bowlby, J. (1971). *Attachment and loss: Vol 1. Attachment*. Harmondsworth, England: Pelican Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1975). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 2. Separation: Anxiety and anger*. Harmondsworth, England: Pelican Books.
- Bowlby, J. (1980). *Attachment and loss: Vol. 3. Loss: Sadness and depression*. London: Hogarth.
- Carrithers, M., Collins, S., & Lukes, S. (Eds.). (1985). *The category of the person*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
- Connor, S. (1989). *Postmodernist culture: An introduction to theories of the contemporary*. New York: Basil Blackwell.
- Corbin, A. (1986). *The foul and the fragrant*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Foucault, M. (1965). *Madness & civilization* (R. Howard, Trans.). New York: Vintage Books.
- Freud, S. (1917). Trauer und Melancholie [Grief and melancholy]. *Internationale Zeitschrift für Ärztliche Psychoanalyse*, 4, 288-301.
- Gergen, K. J. (1991). *The saturated self: Dilemmas of identity in contemporary life*. New York: Basic Books.
- Gergen, M. M. (1987, August). *Social ghosts: Opening inquiry on imaginal relationships*. Paper presented at the 95th Annual Convention of the American Psychological Association, New York.
- Golan, N. (1975). Wife to widow to woman. *Social Work*, 20, 369-374.
- Gorer, G. D. (1965). *Death, grief and mourning in contemporary Britain*. New York: Doubleday.
- Hochschild, A. R. (1979). Emotion work, feeling rules, and social structure. *American Journal of Sociology*, 85, 551-75.
- Johnson, T. J. (Ed.). (1970). *Emily Dickinson: The complete poems*. London: Faber & Faber.
- Lewis, C. S. (1961). *A grief observed*. London: Faber.
- Lopata, H. (1973). *Widowhood in an American city*. Morristown, NJ: General Learning Press.
- Lopata, H. (1975). On widowhood: Grief work and identity reconstruction. *Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry*, 8, 41-55.
- Lopata, H. (1979). *Women as widows: Support systems*. New York: Elsevier.
- Lopata, H. (1988). Support systems of American urban widowhood. *Journal of Social Issues*, 44, 113-128.
- Lutz, C. A. (1988). *Unnatural emotions*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- McNamee, S., & Gergen, K. J. (1992). *Social construction and the therapeutic process*. London: Sage.
- Mandelbaum, D. G. (1959). Social uses of funeral rites. In H. Feifel (Ed.), *The meaning of death*. New York: McGraw-Hill.
- Parke, C. M. (1986). *Bereavement: Studies of grief in adult life*. London: Penguin. (Original work published 1972)
- Parke, C. M., & Weiss, R. (1983). *Recovery from bereavement*. New York: Basic Books.
- Raphael, B., & Nunn, K. (1988). Counseling the bereaved. *Journal of Social Issues*, 44, 191-206.
- Rochlin, G. (1965). *Griefs and discontents: The forces of change*. Boston: Little, Brown.
- Rose, N. (1985). *The psychological complex: Politics and society in England 1869-1939*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Rosenblatt, P. (1983). *Bitter, bitter tears: Nineteenth century diarists and twentieth century grief theories*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Rosenblatt, P., & Meyer, M. (1986). Imagined interactions and the family. *Family Relations*, 35, 319-324.
- Rubin, S. (in press). The death of a child is forever: The life course impact of child loss. In M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe, & R. O. Hansson (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Sanders, C. (1989). *Grief: The mourning after*. New York: Wiley.
- Shuchter, S., & Zisook, S. (in press). The course of normal grief. In M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe, & R. O. Hansson (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Shweder, R. A., & Miller, J. G. (1985). The social construction of the person: How is it possible? In K. J. Gergen & K. E. Davis (Eds.), *The social construction of the person* (pp. 42-72). New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Silverman, P., & Worden, W. (in press). Children's reactions to the death of a parent. In M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe, & R. O. Hansson (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

- Stallworthy, J. (Ed.). (1973). *Penguin book of love poetry*. New York: Penguin Books.
- Stroebe, M. (in press). Coping with bereavement: A review of the grief work hypothesis. *Omega*.
- Stroebe, M., & Stroebe, W. (1989). Who participates in bereavement research? A review and empirical study. *Omega*, 20, 1-29.
- Stroebe, M., & Stroebe, W. (1991). Does "grief work" work? *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology*, 59, 57-65.
- Stroebe, M., Stroebe, W., & Hansson, R. O. (Eds.). (In press). *Handbook of bereavement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stroebe, W., & Stroebe, M. (in press). Determinants of adjustment to bereavement in young widows and widowers. In M. Stroebe, W. Stroebe, & R. O. Hansson (Eds.), *Handbook of bereavement*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stroebe, W., Stroebe, M., & Domittner, G. (1988). Individual and situational differences in recovery from bereavement: A risk-group identified. *Journal of Social Issues*, 44, 143-158.
- Viorst, J. (1986). *Necessary losses: The loves, illusions, dependencies and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow*. London: Simon & Schuster.
- Wikan, U. (1988). Bereavement and loss in two Muslim communities: Egypt and Bali compared. *Social Science and Medicine*, 27, 451-460.
- Wikan, U. (1991). *Managing turbulent hearts*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Worden, W. (1982). *Grief counseling and grief therapy: A handbook for the mental health practitioner*. New York: Springer-Verlag.
- Yamamoto, J. (1970). Cultural factors in loneliness, death, and separation. *Medical Times*, 98, 177-83.
- Yamamoto, J., Okonoji, K., Iwasaki, T., & Yoshimura, S. (1969). Mourning in Japan. *American Journal of Psychiatry*, 126, 74-182.