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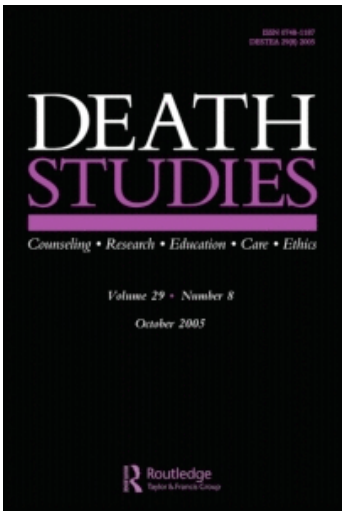

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TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT: ADAPTIVE BEREAVEMENT BY TRANSFORMING MENTAL TIES TO THE DECEASED

Kathrin Boerner [a]; Jutta Heckhausen [b]
[a] Lighthouse International, Arlene R. Gordon Research Institute, New York, USA. [b] University of California, Irvine, California, USA.

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TO HAVE AND HAVE NOT: ADAPTIVE BEREAVEMENT BY TRANSFORMING MENTAL TIES TO THE DECEASED

KATHRIN BOERNER

Lighthouse International, Arlene R. Gordon Research Institute, New York, USA

JUTTA HECKHAUSEN

University of California, Irvine, California, USA

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Over the past decade, there has been a paradigm shift in the field of bereavement: From the traditional view that insists on the necessity of disengagement, toward a position that postulates the need for a continuing connection. The authors propose to move beyond the dichotomy that was created by the two paradigms and conceive of it as a process of transformation that involves both disengagement and connection. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of control and adaptation, the authors suggest that the relationship with the deceased may be transformed to mental representations of this person that carry substitute value.

The death of a loved person is an experience that everybody encounters at some point in life. Coming to terms with this personal loss is part of successful adult development (Baltes, 1984; Baltes & Carstensen, 1996; Baltes & Skrotzki, 1995). Often, the attachment has been so strong that it does not require the physical presence of the other person to be maintained. In fact, most bereaved people seem to stay involved with

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Address correspondence to Kathrin Boerner, Lighthouse International, Arlene R. Gordon Research Institute, 111 East 59th Street, New York, NY 10022-1202. Email: kboerner@lighthouse.org.

the deceased in some way, for example, by using the wishes of the loved one as a guide of action (e.g., Shuchter & Zisook, 1993). In addition, our culture holds rituals and traditions, such as regular visits to the cemetery or anniversaries of people's deaths, that keep the dead as a part of daily life. At the same time, the concept of accepting a loss, putting it behind us, and releasing the dead so that one can go on living is very prevalent (Shuchter, 1986).

Stroebe, Gergen, Gergen, and Stroebe (1992) have pointed out that the maintenance of a continuing bond with the deceased is common in certain non-Western cultures such as Japan (e.g., Yamamoto, 1970). Moreover, they observed that in the Western culture of the 19th century, holding on to the deceased was considered a sign of emotional depth and of the profundity of the lost relationship. From this historical and intercultural perspective, they concluded that the "breaking bonds orientation" is the product of a modernist world view, which holds values such as efficiency and rationality and which emphasizes the necessity to quickly recover from emotional reactions that interfere with these values. Taken together, the breaking and the continuing bonds orientation represent two conflicting paradigms, one that insists on the necessity of disengagement and one that emphasizes the value of a continuing connection to the deceased.

Although current bereavement research appears to have moved away from the breaking bonds orientation, this paradigm continues to be influential among clinicians and some bereavement researchers (e.g., Kim & Jacobs, 1991). Proponents of the new paradigm (e.g., Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996), on the other hand, have advocated the move toward a continuing bonds position "instead of" disengagement. Despite or maybe because of this paradigm shift, however, more attention has been paid to the question of how we maintain a continuing bond with the deceased than to explicating the processes that lead to such a connection. Although few authors have addressed this issue (e.g., Attig, 2000; Rando, 1993; Rubin, 1999; see below), it seems that further research and theoretical development would add to our understanding of how exactly a person manages to disengage from a relationship with a loved one that is based on the person's "living presence" and move to a continuing connection that can exist beyond the person's lifetime.

In this article, we first outline the paradigm shift from the traditional view of the necessity to disengage from the deceased to the new continuing bonds paradigm that has occurred over the past two decades.

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It should be noted that, because a comprehensive review of bereavement theories would go beyond the scope and specific purpose of this article, we will focus on the theoretical formulations that have explicitly addressed the issue of disengagement from or continuing connection to the deceased. Second, we summarize the available empirical research on the continuing tie to the deceased. Then, the life-span theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995) and related concepts (Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990; Lewin, 1932) are discussed with respect to what they contribute to clarifying processes of disengaging from the living person and engaging with the legacy components of the relationship. Finally, a model is proposed that moves beyond the dichotomy of disengagement versus continuing connection, and instead, conceives of this process as one of transformation that involves both elements of disengagement and connection.

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From the Traditional View to a New Paradigm

The traditional view reflects the idea that it is necessary to disengage from the deceased to get on with life (e.g., Dietrich & Shabad, 1989; Volkan, 1981). This position is based on Freud's notion that the major task to be accomplished in the grieving process is to relinquish the tie to the deceased to be able to reinvest in new relationships. In his early paper "Mourning and Melancholia" (Freud, 1917/1957), which is generally referred to as a classic in the field of bereavement, he argued that the psychological function of grief is to withdraw emotional energy (cathexis), and become detached from the loved one (decathexis). Freud came to this conclusion based on the observation of depressive symptomatology among bereaved patients whose relationship to the deceased had been conflictual and who seemed to have internalized the lost relationship in a way that it became a source of depression: "Thus the shadow of the object fell upon the ego" (1917/1957, p. 249). This quote reflects the idea that external conflict between the ego and its object becomes an intrapsychic conflict between the structural agencies (i.e. superego and ego). In this case, the emotional energy is still bound to the now internalized object and detachment has not taken place.

The underlying idea of this formulation is that people have a limited amount of energy at their disposal. Consequently, only by freeing up bounded energy will the person be able to reinvest in new relationships

and activities. Freud believed that the mourner has to work through the grief by carefully reviewing thoughts and memories of the deceased (hypercathexis). He maintained that although the process of working through causes intense distress, it is necessary to achieve detachment from the loved one.

Interestingly though, even Freud (1929/1960) himself, in a letter to his friend Ludwig Binswanger, who had lost a son, expressed a conviction quite contradictory of his theoretical notion on the necessity to decathect: "Although we know that after such a loss the acute state of mourning will subside, we also know we shall remain inconsolable and will never find a substitute. No matter what may fill the gap, even if it be filled completely, it nevertheless remains something else. And actually, this is how it should be, it is the only way of perpetuating that love which we do not want to relinquish" (p. 386). Thus, being confronted with his friend's major loss, Freud could see the value of and the need for a continuing connection to a deceased loved one. Nevertheless, as Bowlby (1979) pointed out, within the psychodynamic framework, not breaking the tie tended to be labeled as symptomatic response requiring treatment. As a result, "working through one's grief" and giving up the attachment became a major goal in grief therapy (e.g., Worden, 1982).

Other theorists have also stressed the importance of "working through," but their focus has been on the idea of disengaging from certain internal working models that involve the deceased rather than on the necessity of detachment. For example, Parkes (1993), in the context of his psychosocial transition model, conceptualized grief work as the process of reviewing one's internal working models, which are defined as a set of assumptions about the world that have become habitual, and referred to it as "a job of work that must be done if a person is to adapt to the requirements of the real world" (p. 94). Similarly, Horowitz (1997), in his model of stress response syndromes, described this process as integrating the fact of death by repeatedly confronting the discrepancy between the reality of loss and pre-existing working models, until a new enduring internal model develops in which the bereaved is related to the deceased in the past, but not in the present and future.

The notion of a continuing connection has found more explicit recognition in recent theorizing on bereavement. For example, in a review of the psychoanalytic model of mourning, Hagman (1995) urged to see beyond the concepts of cathexis and relinquishment and instead move toward continuity in mourning. He even defined the

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transformation of the psychical relationship with the lost object as one of the tasks of mourning and suggested that the nature and duration of this process will vary depending on factors such as developmental needs of and societal expectations surrounding the bereaved (Hagman, 2001). Finally, Hagman (1995) advocated the possibility of a broad range of outcomes from complete disengagement to a restructuring of memories and representations that allow for a continuing connection with the lost person.

An emphasis on continuity can also be found in a model advanced by Fleming and Robinson (1991), who conceptualized the grief process as navigating the transition from losing what you have to having what you lost. The search for meaning in the experience of the loss and the deceased's legacy is thought to facilitate this transition. Furthermore, the appreciation for legacy is seen as a consequence of confronting questions regarding what one has learned from the deceased, and how one has become different as a result of knowing this person. Thus, in this model, the deceased's legacy allows for an ongoing connection that is reflected in the bereaved person's transformed sense of self.

Another model that includes the possibility of a continuing connection has been advanced by Stroebe and colleagues (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Following up on the idea that coping with loss requires more than confronting one's grief, they suggested that coping with loss involves active efforts to structure memories and thoughts as well as to regain mastery over one's life. In this spirit, they proposed a dual-track model that includes two modes of coping: Loss-oriented coping involves an effort to confront feelings of grief and loss itself, whereas restoration-oriented coping is an attempt to appease pain in some way or distance oneself from one's grief to focus on the demands of daily life. This may enable a person to deal with grief in smaller dosages and, at the same time, create some space and save energy to attend to aspects of restructuring life. The idea is that usually both modes are needed and used at some point in the grieving process, and that a certain oscillation (and balance) between them is most likely to constitute an adaptive coping style.

Stroebe and Schut (1999) argued that the concepts of grief work and continuing bonds both fall into the dimension loss-orientation because this orientation focuses on the nature of the bond and the attachment itself. Loss-orientation could involve rumination about or yearning for the deceased, looking at old photos, imagining the deceased's

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responses, as well as crying for the deceased. Thus, this mode includes thoughts, behaviors, and feelings ranging from pleasurable reminiscing to painful longing. The argument that the bereaved needs to relocate the deceased emotionally (loss-oriented) and move on with life (restoration-oriented) suggests that the authors endorse the idea of disengagement and connection as interrelated aspects of the grieving process. However, although the model is very comprehensive on a more general level, it does not clarify how the different dynamics within the loss-oriented mode might play out. Moreover, similar to Hagman and Fleming, the authors do not elaborate on the process through which a continuing connection may be reached. Finally, neither of them make proposals with regard to the kind of continuing connection that may be more or less adaptive.

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Developing an Adaptive Tie to the Deceased

Several authors have made an attempt to specify what kind of tie to the deceased may be adaptive and how it may be developed. Bowlby (1980), in his writings on permanent losses, expressed the belief that a continuing attachment to the deceased is rather normative. However, he asserted that a bereaved person needs to learn how to distinguish between behavior or thinking patterns that are inappropriate following the loss and those that are adaptive for a life without the deceased. The first group of behaviors includes everything that only is meaningful as long as the living person is present, for example, structuring daily life according to the loved one's needs. The second group consists of thoughts or behaviors that are not necessarily bound to the loved one's physical presence, such as keeping up values or goals that had been developed together. Thus, Bowlby maintained that only certain ways of relating to the deceased (such as organizing one's day according to the deceased's preferences) should be considered as a form of disordered grief. They should be distinguished from other forms of continuing involvement to a deceased that appear to be normal features of grief and that do not seem to impair recovery.

Bowlby (1980) further posited that bereaved individuals who fail to make such a distinction most likely have a disposition to form anxious—ambivalent relationships characterized by high levels of conflict and dependency or a disposition to avoid forming affectional

bonds altogether. These dispositions resulting from early attachment-related experiences of insecure bonding are thought of as risk factors for subsequent difficulties. According to Bowlby, individuals with such dispositions will tend to make insecure bonds suffused with more or less overt ambivalence throughout life. On the basis of this proposition, attachment theorists argue that an anxious attachment style enhances the likelihood that a bereaved person stays inappropriately attached to the deceased and acts as if he or she was still alive. Individuals with an avoidant attachment style, on the other hand, are assumed to be less invested in close relationships in the first place and may therefore appear as easily detaching from a relationship in the case of a loss (e.g., Fraley & Shaver, 1999).

Consistent with Bowlby's perspective, Attig (2000) noted that the tie to the deceased can be healthy if the bereaved relinquishes the concrete love of a person who is physically present, and replaces it with an abstract love for an absent loved one. Attig conceptualized grief as a process of relearning our worlds in general and, specifically, of relearning the relationship to the deceased. A particularly interesting idea in this framework is that a give and take between us and our deceased loved ones is still possible, just that this reciprocity needs to change. For example, the deceased can continue to give us their legacies, we can sense that they witness or support what we do, and we can continue to further their interests.

Attig (2000) also provided examples for the strategies that he believed to be helpful in maintaining a healthy connection to a deceased loved one. First, a central strategy is holding the deceased in memory, with the consideration that memories tend to be incomplete and can be extended and modified through researching his or her life (e.g., by exploring records, letters, or diaries), as well as through exchanging and exploring memories with others to complement one's own memories or come to new perspectives on the deceased's life. Second, giving the deceased a place in practical life includes strategies such as using material goods they left, using their advice, keeping promises, or carrying forward projects that were important to both the bereaved and the deceased. Third, keeping the deceased in one's soul includes the attempt to uphold individual or family traditions and explore their histories. Finally, Attig suggested that holding the deceased in one's spirits can illuminate ways of finding joy, meaning, and approaches to dealing with adversity in life.

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To date, the most elaborate proposal on what kind of connection to the deceased may be more or less adaptive has been advanced by Rubin (1985, 1999). He characterized an adaptive connection as follows: The tie to the deceased should not serve as a substitute for relationships with other living persons. The perception of the deceased should be as open to change, and as flexible as the perception of somebody who is alive. This means, for example, that a permanent idealization of the deceased would be considered as indicative of a less adaptive connection. Memories of the deceased should neither occupy the bereaved obsessively nor need to be avoided. Thinking of the deceased should facilitate the coping process. This presupposes that memories of the deceased no longer trigger immense distress. In sum, Rubin (1985) suggested that an adaptive connection is developed "when the relationship to the deceased is assimilated alongside a continuing commitment to life's roles and duties, to other persons and values" (p. 351).

This position is reflected in Rubin's (1992/1999) Two-Track Model, which conceptualizes coping with loss as occuring along two interrelated tracks: one concerned with biopsychosocial functioning (Track 1), the other with the ongoing emotional attachment to the deceased (Track 2). An important point in this model is that the bereavement response must be understood as it relates to both dimensions. However, the way in which the bereaved maintains a connection to the deceased is considered especially crucial to adaptational outcome. Thus, the model is meant to be beneficial for clinicians in helping them identify problematic responses to loss according to variables of both functioning and attachment to the deceased.

With a similar purpose, Rando (1993) formulated multiple processes of mourning that serve to evaluate the status of a mourner and to provide target points for intervention. Of particular relevance in this context are recollecting and reexperiencing the deceased, relinquishing the old attachments to the deceased, and readjusting to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old (which includes the task to develop a new relationship with the deceased). As criteria for a healthy continuing relationship, Rando noted that the bereaved needs to fully recognize the implications of the death, and, at the same time, continue to move forward into new life. She further pointed out that ways of relating to the deceased need to be suited to the bereaved's current developmental stage, so that this connection does not keep the mourner from growing. This could mean that, as the bereaved gets

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older, certain things the deceased used to say are reinterpreted, or the appreciation for the deceased may change alongside developmental changes within the bereaved. In this way, the mourner can develop and maintain an image of the deceased that is not stagnant and remains realistic. According to Rando, the processes through which this occurs are reviewing the relationship, reconciling all different aspects of the person, and integrating these aspects into a composite image of the deceased.

Rando (1993) also suggested detailed intervention steps designed to help a bereaved person at any step of the mourning process where complications occur. These include explaining the process of relinquishment and subsequent reformation, identifying what has been lost, processing the feelings involved, and exploring ways to keep memories alive. In a similar vein, Neimeyer (2001) proposed a number of narrative methods for developing an ongoing connection, such as encouraging the bereaved to explore the deceased's influence on his or her life, to write a biographical sketch of the deceased, or to create an imaginary level of correspondence by writing to the deceased and then writing back to him or herself from the deceased's perspective.

Taken together, there is consensus in the current literature that an adaptive connection with the deceased is established when the relationship is reorganized in a way that the bereaved is no longer preoccupied with or severely distressed by thinking about the loved one's physical absence. Furthermore, the perspectives summarized above converge in the belief that a newly constructed connection can only be adaptive if it is based on levels of relatedness that do not require the loved one's physical presence, and do not keep the bereaved from being fully engaged in a life among the "living". The reviewed propositions also provide important ideas on how such a relationship may be developed, with some concrete suggestions for factors, such as a secure attachment style (Bowlby, 1980) or intervention steps (Neimeyer, 2001; Rando, 1993) that may promote it. However, a more detailed and comprehensive theoretical account would enable us to integrate the available suggestions and specify more clearly how this process can be activated or what exactly it should entail. To our knowledge, there are few empirical studies that explicitly focus on the processes involved in such a transition, and on the question of adaptiveness in this context. However, a number of studies have addressed the issue of a continuing tie to the deceased in more general terms. This evidence is reviewed in the following section.

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Empirical Research Addressing the Continuing Tie to a Deceased Person

The "breaking bonds" position as well as the beginnings of the "continuing bonds" paradigm were mainly based on case studies and clinical observations. The latter view, however, has been supported by increasing evidence from several well-controlled, prospective, longitudinal studies that were based on nationally representative samples and data from questionnaires and interviews. These studies provide evidence demonstrating that a continuing tie to the deceased is rather common.[1]

Shuchter and Zisook (1993) found that a majority of the widows and widowers who completed a questionnaire measuring several dimensions of widowhood at three time points (2, 7, and 13 months postloss) endorsed items indicating a continuing relationship with their spouses. Even 13 months postloss, 63% reported feeling that their spouse is with them at times, 47% felt that their spouse is watching out for them, and 34% indicated talking with their spouse regularly. When asked about their spouse's living legacy, 65% reported being interested in carrying out their loved one's wishes. Similar results have been reported by Stroebe and Stroebe (1987, 1991). In the Tübingen Longitudinal Study of Bereavement, they found that, 2 years postloss, one third of the bereaved still sensed their spouses' presence. Furthermore, half of the bereaved respondents consulted the deceased when having to make a decision (see also Parkes & Weiss, 1983). In another study on spousal bereavement, Bonanno, Mihalecz, and LeJeune (1998) coded core emotion themes from the bereaved participants' verbal descriptions of their lost relationship. They found that, 6 months postloss, over 80% of the participants described themes that indicated a positive continuing connection. These themes were related to reduced somatic complaints 25 months postloss, and this association remained significant even after controlling for initial somatic symptoms and other outcome measures of adjustment to the loss.

[1]There are a number of less systematic studies that will not be discussed here for two reasons: First, they are all to a certain extent methodologically flawed, and second, the overall gist of their findings is consistent with the findings reported from the better controlled studies reviewed in this section. However, it should be noted that these smaller, more explorative studies, as well as the insights from clinical observations, have made an important contribution by providing the body of ideas and information based on which systematic studies could be designed. For a more detailed review, the reader is referred to Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996).

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A similar picture emerged from research addressing the loss of a parent. Silverman and Worden (1992) found in the Harvard Child Bereavement Study that a majority of children who lost a parent developed memories, feelings, and behaviors that kept them connected to the lost parent. One year after the loss, 74% of the children located their deceased parent in heaven and felt that he or she was watching out for them. Forty-three percent indicated that they still think about the deceased everyday, and 39% reported talking to the deceased. In a follow-up analysis of the parent's contribution to their children's ability to form an inner representation of the deceased parent, Nickman, Silverman, and Normand (1998) found that children's construction of a connection to the deceased critically depended on the extent to which the surviving parent's attitudes and behaviors in this regard were supportive and encouraging.

On the basis of the aforementioned findings, the investigators of the Harvard Child Bereavement Study concluded that a relinquishment of the tie does not occur and that most of the children perceive their connection to the deceased parent as comforting and helpful. Nickman et al. (1998) even suggested that this continuing bond can be such a strengthening resource that interventions should explicitly encourage finding ways of promoting a connection with the deceased. However, as Fraley and Shaver (1999) pointed out, the same authors also found that 57% of the children in their sample reported being scared by the idea that their parent was watching them from heaven (Silverman & Worden, 1992). Furthermore, Normand, Silverman, and Nickman (1996), based on the same sample, identified a cluster of children who regarded their deceased parent as a visiting ghost whose presence felt frightening and unpredictable. It seems that the authors did not include these findings into their overall conclusion regarding the adaptiveness of a continuing connection to the deceased.

As Wortman and Silver (2001) concluded in a recent revision of their influential paper, "Myths of coping with Loss", the literature clearly suggests that it is quite common for bereaved individuals to maintain some sort of connection to the deceased, and that there are different types of connections that can be perceived as either comforting or frightening. Wortman and Silver also pointed out that little is known about the relationship between certain types of connections to a deceased and a person's adaptation to the loss.

This question was addressed in a study by Rubin (1992), based on a sample of parents who had lost a son to war in Israel 4 or 13 years ago.

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He found that parents differed in their preoccupation with the loss and in their attachment to memories of their sons. Consistent with the predictions of Rubin's Two-Track Model of Grief (see above), only those who were preoccupied with the deceased child (Track 2) in a way that it occurred at the expense of their surviving children also showed difficulties in general functioning (Track 1).

From a different perspective, the link between bereaved parents' connection to their deceased child and aspects of their social context and general functioning was investigated in Klass's qualitative research (e.g., Klass, 2001), based on a long-term ethnographic study of a self-help group of parents who had lost a child. Klass found that the transformation of inner representations of the child occured in both the parents' inner and social world. He further observed that different types of representations were helpful to the parents depending on where they were in the grieving process. For example, early on in the process, being able to validate the need for interactions with the child and the related pain in the context of the self-help group seemed most important. Later on, the parents' focus shifted to the continuing bond as guidance toward a better self (e.g., finding peace in what the child wished or would have wished for them), and to make the bond with the deceased child a natural part of their social world, even outside the self-help group context.

Another interesting analysis touching on the nature and adaptiveness of continuing ties was conducted by Bonanno, Notarius, Gunzerath, Keltner, and Horowitz (1998) with data from their Conjugal Loss Study. Participants completed questionnaires assessing the level of their grief and of ambivalence toward the deceased. An exploratory secondary analysis of the data revealed that the level of grief 6 months postloss was positively related to the level of ambivalence 14 months postloss, even after controlling for initial levels of ambivalence and grief. Bonanno et al. concluded from these findings that at extreme levels of grief individuals may try to reduce their pain by downgrading the lost relationship. Yet, the reported findings point to the need to further differentiate between continuing connections that seem to provide comfort for the bereaved and those bonds that are related to severe levels of grief and distress.

An innovative contribution in this direction was made by Field, Nichols, Holen, and Horowitz (1999), who examined the relationship between different types of connections and grief symptomatology. Interviewers rated the bereaved participants in terms of the extent to which

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they manifested four different types of connections. These included sensing the loved one's presence, keeping the deceased's possessions, as well as seeking comfort through contact with the deceased's belongings and through memories of the deceased. Those participants who tried to gain comfort through keeping and being in contact with the deceased's possessions perceived this as comforting. Yet, they showed higher levels of grief symptoms at all time points (6, 14, and 25 months postloss) than individuals who did not engage in these behaviors. They also showed less of a decrease in symptoms over time. Connecting strategies that involved sensing the deceased's presence and using memories were not related to the intensity of grief.

These findings support the position that different types of connections may be more or less adaptive (e.g., Bowlby, 1980; Rubin, 1999). It remains unclear, however, whether a particular outcome is the cause or the effect of a certain type of continuing connection with the deceased. Thus, research that helps further clarifying this issue would provide an important contribution. It seems that to define the adaptiveness of a continuing connection, we still need to better understand the process through which individuals move from a relationship with a "living and breathing" person to a continuing connection that can exist beyond death.

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Delineating the Process of Transformation

Although the new paradigm that proposes that a continuing connection to a deceased person is rather common has been supported by strong empirical evidence (see the previous section), the issue of disengagement still has great relevance. Because after a death the relationship cannot be continued in the same way as before, there must be certain transformative processes involved that lead to the kind of relationship that can exist beyond death (Attig, 2000; Bowlby, 1980; Klass, 2001; Rando, 1993; Rubin, 1999). Transformations, defined as "changes in composition and structure" (*Merriam Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, 1997, p. 1253) logically involve processes of disengagement because the old configuration of elements needs to be left behind to be able to restructure the image and move to a new level of connection. The following sections are an attempt to delineate this process by taking into account the insights gained from previous work in the field of bereavement, in order to then add predictions about the nature of this transformation that are derived from the

more general theoretical framework of control and adaptation over the life-span.

To begin with, we want to clarify and elaborate the concept of continuing connections. We then outline the life-span theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995) and draw on this theoretical framework to examine which mechanisms may be involved in the transformation of a relationship to a deceased loved one. Finally, we formulate situation and person factors, as well as their interaction that may cause variation in this process.

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Mental Representations as Continuing Connections

How can we characterize a continuing connection with the deceased? This connection can only be based on a mental representation of this person, because the loved one is no longer physically present (e.g., Klass, 2001; Rubin, 1999). The concept of mental representations of others refers to the ability to form representations of an attachment figure that can exist beyond the actual presence of that person (see Baldwin, 1992, for a discussion of representational processes). Because there are a number of different concepts and theoretical frameworks that address representational processes, it seems important to define what we mean by a continuing connection based on mental representations of the deceased and to distinguish this from related concepts, such as internal objects, internal working models, and internalized relationships.

Clarifying Terminology

For conceptual clarification, Knox (1999) suggested to characterize the concepts of mental representations, internalized relationships, and internal working models on three dimensions: (a) stored in explicit versus implicit memory, (b) conscious versus unconscious, and (c) representations of events, images, or episodes versus generalized experiences. He distinguished between representations of events, images, and experiences that are stored in declarative memory (and thus can be consciously retrieved) and internalized relationships and internal working models that are stored in implicit memory, reflecting generalized experiences of which a person is usually not aware.

On the basis of this distinction, we suggest that a continuing relationship with the deceased is based on representations of events, episodes, images, and interactions that involve the deceased. These are stored in

explicit memory, which means that they can be retrieved by recall (e.g., "remember when Dad used to do this . . . ") and recognition (e.g.,"I saw something that reminded me of . . . "). During the process of internalizing representations, on the other hand, repeated single experiences are turned into one generalized script, that is, a general set of expectations, attitudes, or ways of perceiving and interpreting experiences (e.g., attachment styles, value/belief systems, or internal working models of daily life situations). These cannot be activated by simple recall or recognition (Knox, 1999; Meissner, 1980).

The following examples illustrate the distinction between mental representations of a person and the internalization of representations: Mental representations of the deceased's values may be reflected in a bereaved person saying, "My mother always said it's important to help others. I kind of find that a good principle, and it reminds me of her. So I often think to myself that I want to live by that value". Internalized values, on the other hand, may be reflected in a statement such as "I think it's important to help others. I am always trying to help others". Internal working models of daily life situations could be reflected in thoughts such as "My mother will take care of this" or "She'll make sure everybody is okay". In the first example, the bereaved person remembers situations in which the deceased expressed this value and now finds it comforting to live by it. In the latter two cases, the person has internalized a value or expectation and no longer remembers the specific situations that may have led to these conclusions or assumptions.

Clarifying this terminology adds to our discussion because internalized experiences can constitute personal characteristics, such as an attachment style or a particular value system, that are thought to affect the way relationships, separations, and losses are experienced and dealt with (Bowlby, 1980). These personal characteristics may also influence the extent and kind of continuing connection to the deceased that we seek to maintain (see the *Variation in the Process* section).

Preexisting and Newly Constructed Representations

Some mental representations that constitute the continuing connection to the deceased may simply reflect experiences that are retrieved from memory (e.g., remembering what the deceased said in a particular situation). Others may be newly constructed by drawing on existing representations of the deceased and by adding new aspects to this preexisting image (e.g., imagine what the deceased would say).

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The content of mental representations depends on the events, episodes, images, and interactions involving the loved one that are remembered, as well as on the life domains in which the living person was represented for the survivor (Klass, 2001). For example, mental representations of the deceased could reflect a supportive relationship (e.g., the deceased is someone to turn to for guidance), as well as features reflecting a working relationship (e.g., finishing the loved one's or collaborative projects because he or she would appreciate this). If a relationship included different levels of relatedness (e.g., a marriage and professional collaboration), it may be important for the bereaved individual to retrieve representations that cover both the private and the professional features representing the deceased.

The construction of new representations, however, may be most likely in situations that cannot be associated with a memory because the bereaved has never experienced this particular situation with the loved one in real life. This may be the case in particular for children who lost their parent when they were young, and, as a result, do not have many actual memories that can be used to relate to the deceased parent. The need for newly constructed representations may also arise if there were important aspects of the deceased's life that the bereaved had little connection to during the loved one's lifetime (e.g., the work life of a widow(er)'s deceased spouse). As Attig (2000) pointed out, in such a case, he or she may actively seek out information about this part of the deceased's life (e.g., asking former coworkers what kind of person the deceased spouse had been at work). Finally, the construction of representations on a more abstract level may be needed if the bereaved wants to base a continuing connection on representations that reflect more general or fundamental features of the deceased, as opposed to (or in addition to) representations that reflect episodical events such as particular daily life situations.

Taken together, drawing on the empirical research reviewed above as well as on the conceptual discussion in this section, we suggest that a continuing connection with the deceased is based on two types of explicit mental representations: Representations of the loved one that have existed prior to the loss and that can be retrieved either by recall or by recognition, as well as newly constructed representations that are formed by drawing on existing representations, and/or by seeking out additional information about the deceased. Furthermore, as shown above, there is some evidence suggesting that mental representations

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can constitute a continuing connection with the deceased in different life domains. In the following sections we try to clarify the process through which bereaved individuals may be able to move to this type of relatedness.

Goal Striving and Adjustment: Two Basic Modes of Adaptation

Life-span researchers have been concerned with the issue of disengagement from blocked goals or developmental options and the processes involved in the compensation of experiences of loss (e.g., Brandtstädter & Rothermund, 1994; Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995). To date, these models have predominantly been applied to the domain of life goals. Of course, being confronted with blocked goals is somewhat different from experiencing the death of a loved person. At least, there seem to be unique characteristics inherent in human attachment such as the giving and receiving of emotional security and support. However, both types of life events imply that something wanted, in the worst case a very central aspect of life, appears to be irrevocably out of reach. Therefore, this article is an attempt to formulate a specific application of this theoretical framework to the topic of bereavement.

The life-span theory of control (Heckhausen & Schulz, 1995) distinguishes between two basic modes of adaptation, primary and secondary control. Heckhausen and Schulz define the two dimensions as follows: "Primary control refers to behaviors directed at the external environment and involves attempts to change the world to fit the needs and desires of the individual. Secondary control is targeted at internal processes and serves to minimize losses in, maintain, and expand existing levels of primary control" (p. 284). Whereas primary and secondary control are directed at both achieving new goals and dealing with losses, specific secondary control processes play a prominent role when the individual is dealing with irrevocable loss. In this case, the individual needs to disengage from the futile goal (e.g., extending the life of a loved one) and protect his/her motivational and emotional system from the negative impact of the loss. The secondary control processes involved in this are compensatory in nature and may involve generating mental representations that form a mental substitute for the person lost.

Primary control strategies are seen as being adaptive as long as the individual has an influence on the situation. However, when a person is confronted with irreversible loss of control, secondary control strategies

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such as goal disengagement or self-protective attributions become more adaptive (Wrosch, Schulz, & Heckhausen, 2002). For example, a newly bereaved person may go through many instances of frustrated impulses of action toward the deceased person, which reflects a primary control mode (e.g., intention to call the loved one or ask her to go for a walk). At this point, the process of disengaging from the living person and instead engaging with the legacy components of the deceased (e.g., imagined interactions) would constitute a special case of secondary control in the context of the developmental challenge of bereavement.

The task of disengaging from a loved one and at the same time constructing a new level of relatedness seems difficult or maybe even impossible to achieve by intentional or rational means alone. It appears to require a process of cognitive and affective restructuring that occurs subintentionally. A focus on subintentional processes is the hallmark of Brandtstädter's dual process of coping (Brandtstädter & Renner, 1990). According to this model, assimilation is intentional and directed at goal achievement, whereas accommodation is subintentional and involves the restructuring of goal hierarchies and mental representations of goals. In the framework of Brandtstädter's model, the argument for the nonintentional nature of the accommodative mode is that any intentional decision to disengage from an attachment presupposes mechanisms (e.g., construction of palliative meanings) that enable a person to form such an intention. This means that the decision itself is seen as a result rather than the cause of accommodative processes.

In the context of both concepts, secondary control and accommodation, the mechanisms through which disengagement is assumed to occur are goal substitution and devaluation of the blocked goal. The first principle follows the ideas of Kurt Lewin, who was the first to initiate the experimental analysis of the aftereffects of unfinished tasks (Lewin, 1932). Two major findings that emerged from this research program became known as the Zeigarnik and the Ovsiankina effect. The first refers to the finding that individuals remember information related to an unfinished task better in comparison to a completed task. The latter reflects the phenomenon that people tend to resume unfinished tasks. A variation of the Ovsiankina paradigm showed that unfinished tasks lost their effects by completion of another intervening task if this activity had a substitute value for the original task. Further experiments demonstrated that the substitute value of an intervening activity increases as a function of the similarity of the unfinished and the intervening task

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(e.g., Lissner, 1933). This means that the substitute task has to be a functional equivalent on some level (e.g., difficulty or attractiveness of an activity).

According to this research, disengagement through substitution can only be successful if the substitute represents a functional equivalent of at least some relevant features of the blocked goal. In the case of bereavement, this would mean that the lost relationship would have to be substituted either by a person similar to the deceased or by mental representations reflecting certain features of the deceased.[2] The second mechanism, devaluation of a blocked goal, has been regarded as facilitating goal adjustment. In the context of bereavement, devaluation may occur as part of a reevaluation of the lost relationship or of certain now unavailable aspects of the life that was shared with the deceased.

Both processes, substitution and devaluation, critically depend on the availability of alternative options or resources (e.g., Brandtstädter & Renner, 1992). In addition, there are interindividual differences with regard to preferences for primary control or secondary control, and also in terms of the ability to switch from primary to secondary control in a way that is adapted to the situational constraints (Heckhausen, 1999).

What does the theoretical framework outlined in this section explain over and above the grief models? To begin with, a number of hypotheses can be formulated:

1. The process of disengaging from the "living and breathing" person is brought about by an adjustment of the relationship needs to the constraints set by the death.
2. The core mechanisms in this process are substitution and/or devaluation. Substitution could involve the replacement of the deceased with a new relationship, or a substitution of the lost relationship with mental representations of the deceased. Devaluation could involve a reevaluation of the lost relationship as a whole or of particular unavailable features (being in face-to-face contact with a living person) of this relationship.

[2]It should be noted that Horowitz (1997) also cites the Zeigarnik effect. However, he uses the concept of the tendency to complete interrupted tasks to explain why a person who is confronted with a traumatic experience needs to resolve the discrepancy in internal working models that was created by this experience. Horowitz does not draw on the idea of functional equivalents and their substitute value.

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3. Interindividual differences can be predicted based on dispositional preferences to rigidly keep up primary control or to adjust unattainable goals. Transforming the relationship to a new level of relatedness is expected to be more difficult for individuals who habitually and rigidly strive for primary control or who have trouble switching between primary control goal engagement and secondary control goal disengagement.
4. The availability of alternatives that have substitute value is likely to facilitate the adjustment process.
5. If this transformation does not occur, the motivational and emotional resources required for the individual's future primary control will be reduced.

These hypotheses will be scrutinized and refined in the following sections.

Beyond the Dichotomy: Transforming the Relationship

As pointed out earlier, the process of transforming the relationship to the deceased involves elements of both disengagement and continuing connection. Empirical evidence demonstrates that the deceased remains represented in the bereaved's mind (see above). However, it seems that certain aspects of the overall representation need to be deconstructed while others are maintained or newly constructed. Thus, our proposition is to conceive of this transformation of the relationship as a process of deconstruction and construction at the same time. The parts that need to be deconstructed are the representations that require the loved one's physical presence in order to be maintained. This idea is reminiscent of the notion of disengagement. In our framework, however, deconstruction is only one component of a transformational process in which, step by step, components are deconstructed, maintained, or constructed. We argue that the frustration and distress caused by the repeated experience of unmet expectations not only leads to the deconstruction of certain representations of the deceased, but also triggers the need to find new ways of relating to the deceased. The hypotheses formulated above offer a new approach to thinking about this process of transformation. However, because coping with bereavement constitutes a special case of accommodation or compensatory secondary control, the mechanisms that are thought to bring about disengagement in the context of goal

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adjustment, the substitution and devaluation of goals, need to be specified in ways that take into account the particular characteristics of dealing with the loss of a loved one.

As the evidence reviewed above shows, bereaved individuals do not typically devalue the deceased loved one. On the contrary, a majority of bereaved individuals idealize their lost spouse, up to the point of sanctification (Lopata, 1981). However, there is also some preliminary evidence that when the level of grief becomes unmanageable, there may be a need to minimize or devalue the lost relationship (Bonanno et al., 1998). Thus, in the case of extreme levels of grief that are manifested in intense emotional reactions, devaluation may serve as a mechanism to break a too-painful bond.

Although research evidence shows that people do not just cut their ties to a loved one after a loss and that they usually do not simply replace the deceased by someone else (see above), this does not rule out substitution as a mechanism to explain how bereaved individuals manage to disengage from the primary control goal "survival and presence of the loved one". Hobfoll (1989) suggested that when direct replacement of important resources after a major loss is not possible, indirect substitution is likely to occur. Therefore, we propose that, in the case of less than excessive levels of grief, the deconstruction and construction of mental representations of the deceased occurs through a specific process of "substitution". In this process of substitution, the individual recurrently experiences failure in her or his primary control attempts to regain the here-and-now presence of the lost person. At the same time, there is the repeated experience of rewarding attempts to resurrect the lost person in terms of mentally represented legacy components (e.g., what would he have said, how would he have responded). In this way, the original goal of maintaining the relationship with the living person is transformed to the goal of elaborating and enriching those mental representations of the lost person's legacy that carry substitute value. Parts of these mental representations of the lost person's legacy may have existed before the person died, others may have been implicit before and are now activated, modified, or expanded.

Thus, in contrast to the psychodynamic idea of disengaging from a person in order to free up energy for other relationships, and to then replace this person through another person, we suggest that mental representations of the lost person can serve as a substitute as long as they carry personally essential aspects of the relationship. In extreme cases of

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grief, substitution may be more difficult to achieve. However, in the long run, it would appear to be the prime road to maintaining ties while disengaging from the living person. Devaluation, on the other hand, would appear particularly unlikely for close and highly valued relationships. The following section addresses the person and situation factors that may shape the process of transforming the relationship to the deceased.

Variation in the Process: Situation and Person Factors, and Their Interaction

Drawing on the theoretical frameworks outlined above, situation factors that mediate the described processes of compensatory secondary control and accommodation may be related to the social context surrounding the bereaved individual. It may be easier to develop and keep alive mental representations of the deceased if a person is surrounded by other people with whom she can share these thoughts in order to elaborate or validate them (Attig, 2000; Klass, 2001). For example, recalling or newly constructing representations that reflect the deceased's professional life may require a context that acknowledges the bereaved individual's attempts to finish or build on the deceased's work. In contrast, a social context that does not encourage or even discourages a person's attempt to share these mental representations will most likely make the transformation from a relationship with a living person to a new level of relatedness more difficult. This would be the case if one family member wants to share memories about the deceased and the other does not, or if different family members hold mental representations of the same person that seem incompatible. This conflict has been shown especially in the context of the loss of a child, stillbirth, or miscarriage (e.g., Dijkstra & Stroebe, 1998; Gilbert, 1996). Furthermore, young children seem to need their surviving parent's help to be able to construct a connection to the deceased parent if they do not have enough experiences with the deceased on the basis of which the mental representation can be formed (see Nickman, Silverman, & Normand, 1998).

Another situation factor that is expected to play a crucial role in the transformation process is the expectedness of the loss. Sudden death has been shown to have a debilitating impact on the survivor that has been attributed to the shock related to the unexpected nature of the loss (e.g., Sanders, 1993). Research findings regarding the effect of sudden death have been inconsistent across studies (Bonanno & Kaltman, 1999). There is consensus in the literature, however, that the great tragedy of a sudden

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death lies in the abruptness with which the loved one is taken out of the bereaved individual's life, and in the complete lack of any sort of inner preparation for this loss (e.g., Wortman & Silver, 2001). An expected loss, on the other hand, may allow for certain steps of inner preparation such as the gathering of "materials" (e.g., collecting letters of the deceased, or discussing the possible completion of unfinished work) that can later provide a source for the construction of mental representations.

Person factors that mediate this process of transformation could be a disposition to rigidly try to keep up one's primary control striving for prolonging the loved person's life or to adjust goals to what is feasible (compensatory secondary control). In the first case, an individual with a higher disposition for rigid primary control striving is likely to try to hold on to the survival goal. This person will most likely not engage in preparation activities that may gradually introduce the availability of mental representations. In contrast, a person with an excessive disposition for accommodative processes (compensatory secondary control) might fail to build mental representations and disengage and cut ties to the deceased altogether. The most adaptive pattern of dispositions in control tendencies should be one of balance between primary and secondary control. A balanced disposition would enable the person to maintain ties by using opportunities for transforming the relationship into one carried by mental representations that can serve as substitutes for the actual presence of the loved one. In addition to these predictions, assumptions about mediating person factors can be derived from attachment theory. Drawing on this framework, it can be predicted that individuals with a secure attachment style tend to be able to transform their connection to the deceased, whereas individuals with an anxious style are more likely to develop a pattern of holding on to the old connection.

When the contextual conditions are not conducive to transforming mental representations of the deceased (e.g., nobody available to share them with), and the person has a disposition for rigid primary control striving, the transformation of the relationship to a new level is the least likely to occur. In the case of such an interaction of situation and person factors, what would be the consequences according to the theoretical framework outlined above? Drawing on Lewin's work on the aftereffects of unfinished tasks, one could argue that rigidly sticking to a blocked goal means ending up ruminating about the commitment. Indeed, there are findings suggesting that a ruminative coping style is linked to greater long-term difficulties for bereaved individuals (e.g., Nolen-Hoeksema,

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Parker, & Larson, 1994). However, it should be noted that ruminative thinking has distinct qualities that distinguish it from the kind of continued thinking of a deceased loved one that most people engage in (Tait & Silver, 1989). Furthermore, early in the grieving process, thoughts with ruminative features can serve the adaptive function of helping to integrate the reality of the loss into the bereaved individual's life (Stroebe & Stroebe, 1991). Thus, the content and timing of rumination needs to be taken into consideration in order to assess its effect. But when ruminative thinking occurs in a fashion that it causes constant distress over a long period of time, this seems to be a central factor in distinguishing bereaved individuals who stay preoccupied with qualities of a relationship that cannot exist beyond death to a point of maintaining a state of chronic grieving from those who are able to move on with their lives while maintaining a continuing connection through mental representations of the deceased.

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Outlook

Bereavement research seems to have narrowed its scope to a rejection of the concept of disengagement and a favoring of a continuing bonds orientation. However, as discussed above, changes that occur in the attachment to a loved one after his or her death most likely involve features of both disengagement and continuing connection. Although the more recent available literature provides insights in what kind of connection to the deceased may be adaptive and how it may be developed, it seems that there is still much to be learned about the process through which individuals move from a relationship with the living person to a connection that goes beyond death. At this point, our theoretically guided attempt to explain this process as a transformation of the relationship that involves deconstructing certain mentally represented components while maintaining or actively constructing others is merely conceptual in nature. Future research is needed to examine the hypotheses we formulated above. This includes testing the hypotheses that the transformation occurs through the substitution of the lost relationship with recalled or newly constructed mental representations of the deceased. Moreover, one may expect that this process is mediated by dispositional coping tendencies and by a social context that promotes or impairs the construction of mental representations.

In the context of investigating these issues, a new look at the intriguing phenomenon of coping with personal loss without extensive grieving (e.g., Bonanno, Keltner, Holen, & Horowitz, 1995; Wortman & Silver, 2001) may well be possible. Another critical question to address is how bereaved individuals deal with representations that are frightening and destructive in nature. In a way, the case of maladaptive mental representations brings home the point that adaptive coping with loss may require disengagement from certain positive as well as negative aspects of the lost relationship. We need to understand the process through which individuals resolve the tension between the two opposing tendencies of disengagement and connection to a deceased loved one, which is after all one of the most taxing challenges in our lives.

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