EXPLORING DEATH AND LOSS:
A SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONIST

PERSPECTIVE

by

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submitted in part fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS IN CLINICAL

PSYCHOLOGY

in the

DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

at the

RANDSE AFRIKAANSE UNIVERSITEIT

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MARCH 1999
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my sincere thanks to the following people who contributed to this study:

Dr. A. Burke, my supervisor, for his support, friendliness, input, and constant availability.

The participants of this study, for their openness and willingness to become involved.

Liane, for her constant support and patience.

My mother, for her editing skills and involvement.
ABSTRACT

Death and loss accompany us throughout our lives and are experienced in a variety of forms and situations. Numerous researches have been undertaken to gain some perspective on death and loss, however these attempts have proven to be impersonal, incomplete and of limited use, as death tends to evade direct scrutiny. An attempt is made here to observe death and loss from a stance that respects the human element.

The personal experiences of adults who have lost parent/s at a young age are examined.

This paper explores the constructions of death and loss, as well as the meanings that are attributed to these experiences. A social constructionist approach is used to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the participants' relationships with death and loss. One of the primary aims of this paper is to investigate the implications that these constructions of death and loss have for the way people live and make sense of their lives. This study focusses on how death requires the individual to reconstruct a sense of identity and relationship with the world.

Some of the major conceptualisations of death, loss and mourning are reviewed in conjunction with the input of philosophers, poets and creative writers allowing for a richer, fuller perception of these events. The aim of this paper is not to develop a comprehensive understanding of death and loss, but rather to approach these constructs from a more personal perspective.

This paper moves away from modernist thinking and includes the researcher as a participant where personal biases, experiences and understandings are included.
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DEATH AND LOSS: A TOPIC WORTH LOOKING AT

Still with his eyes on the world Christopher Robin put out a hand and felt for Pooh's paw. "Pooh," said Christopher Robin earnestly, "if I - if I'm not quite..." he stopped and tried again... "Pooh, whatever happens, you will understand, won't you?"
"Understand what?"
"Oh, nothing." He laughed and jumped to his feet. "Come on!"
"Where?" said Pooh.
"Anywhere," said Christopher Robin. A. A. Milne (1928).

1.1 Introduction

Death is perhaps man's greatest mystery. Even as a source of fear, death has generated a number of beliefs and superstitions. Man's thoughts about death have influenced his philosophies and even his religions and throughout life the concept of death has evolved and played an essential role in our cultures. Even during the individual life-span our understandings around death take on new forms and meanings.

Epicurus (in Carse, 1980) asserted that the rift between life and death is so absolute that no experience can bridge it. Whatever we do experience must be somewhere on life's continuum. We must be on both sides of any event, anticipating it, recalling it and integrating it. We are participant-observers. But we can only be on one side of death, and on this side death is not yet. If death is a state exclusive of life then it is impossible to experience death. We do not experience death when life is over, we simply have no experience. And yet, even though we cannot experience death, it is nonetheless extremely significant. By no means does this paper attempt or propose to deliver an all-inclusive study of death. The mystery of death will never totally be revealed.
It has been argued that if there was no death then life would have no boundaries, and there could be no experience at all. Whatever has no limits, no resistance, cannot be experienced. We would pass through it unmoved, unchanged; noticing nothing. Many would disagree that if there is no final limit all other limits lose their importance. Many would argue that death is not absolute, that something continues to survive such as the soul, spirit or personality. Whether or not we believe death can be experienced, it is important to experience. So then how do we come to know of death? In what way does it manifest itself to us?

"... I had not realized that the way that people construe death is central to the entire structure of their system. Awareness of death is not merely feeling that chilling shock as one narrowly misses being mown down by a bus. It also informs, however silently, every decision that one makes" (Rowe, 1984, p.107).

1.2 Motivation

A literature survey indicates that much research on death and loss is of an empirical nature and therefore limited in its ability to arrive at a comprehensive understanding of such an inherently personalised issue. Over and above this, most of the literature is based on the psychodynamic perspective where children are studied in terms of their developmental stages. Coping styles, grief and mourning with children who have experience the loss of a parent, have been comprehensively covered. So too, have children's ideas and views about death been extensively investigated. However, relatively little research has been undertaken on the adult's meaning-systems surrounding their childhood parental loss.

Klass and Marwit regard the uniqueness of the parent-child relationship as one that is simply different from any other human relationship (in DeVries, Lana & Falck, 1994). Children have less adequate coping skills, and are continually faced with reprocessing their grief at various developmental stages. Over a number of years of re-evaluating their understanding of the loss, the adult may have a greatly changed story of the events and how he/she relates to those experiences.
The meanings and consequences of a loss are influenced by the particular phase of life-cycle development the family is negotiating at the time. The meaning of the loss as well as the shape of the grief may then change too for the child as he/she grows up and passes through different developmental stages.

What is then required is an approach to death that is both sensitive to personal experience and responsible towards broader currents of thought (Lifton and Olson, 1974). This paper will then in essence focus on adult's narratives of life after childhood parental loss. The aim of this paper is to develop a better understanding of death and loss by combining the meaning-systems that these adults have formed with the existing literature.

As nobody can claim to have knowledge of death itself, I will focus on personal experiences of death and loss. These experiences lie embedded in social situations which continually have an influence on our experiences. Death and loss are experiences that connect us most to each other. They are common denominators that are experienced and constructed by all members of society, present and past. "... the life of a man is not an individual destiny but a link in an unbroken chain, the biological continuation of a family or a line that begins with Adam and includes the whole human race" (Aries in Mckay, 1990, p.603). Each generation forms philosophical meanings that meet its needs and experience, but no formulation is complete or adequate until it composes a meaning of life that is broad enough to encompass the experience of dying and the death event (Bowers, Jackson, Knight & Leshan, 1981).

1.3 A Social Constructionist Approach

In this paper I will follow a social constructionist epistemology with an emphasis on narratives. In order to make sense of our lives and to express ourselves, experiences must be "storied". It is this storying that determines the meaning ascribed to experience. In an attempt to make sense of life, we arrange our experiences of events in sequences
across time in such a way so as to arrive at a coherent account of ourselves and the world around us. Storying provides us with a sense of continuity and meaning, and helps us interpret further experiences.

A person’s ability to adapt to loss may be contextualised in terms of his internal resources as well as resources external to them, particularly social support. Adjustment to loss is a social experience too, a process of social interaction, meaning and the construction of a new reality (Rowe, 1984). The individual’s sense of identity may then be seen in part in terms of definitions given by others, but it is naive to see the individual simply a social construct as he/she is able to reflect on the influences of others and is able to make his/her own impression on society.

The self is discovered in the course of development; the experiences of losses and gains are an important part of the process of growth. Ideas about death set boundaries to the concept of oneself and are central to the individual’s sense of identity. The loss of a significant other deprives the individual of a source of value and meaning, and the bereaved individual can only begin to reconstruct his/her reality and a sense of identity and meaning through social interaction. The process of reconstructing or reorganising the person’s world following loss makes sense only if the individual is seen in the social framework which provides a context for personal identity and meaning.

This paper tries to make sense of how people extract meaning from the situations of death and loss in which they find themselves. My interest lies in examining how people apply abstract rules and commonsense understandings in order to make events around death and loss appear less inexplicable and unambiguous. Compton (in McKay, 1990) reminds us that the ways people commonly speak of death reveals their attitudes towards death. Compton also suggests that we take notice of the manner in which people articulate their perspectives on death in ideas.

As Aries (in McKay, 1990) explains, death is such a nebulous intangible phenomenon that it is understandable that it has been regarded as a subject of philosophy. Many theorists have deconstructed death to such a degree that the human being has disappeared. What is required is a movement toward looking at how the individual
thinks about death and what the meanings are that he attaches to death. The lack of a personalised death is highlighted by Doss:

"In confronting the end of life, I am forced to examine the totality of my life. Death is a personal event in life because it is not something which merely happens to me; it is that which I actively experience" (Doss, in Mckay, 1990, p.20).

1.4 Conclusion

This work is an attempt to explore that body of knowledge where scientific disciplines and artistic sensitivities meet in the study of a powerfully human issue.
2.1 Introduction

In spite of the proliferation of clinical and empirical work in the psychology of death and
dying over the last two decades, this literature still lacks a unifying psychological theory
that could help integrate disparate observations (Neimeyer, Epting & Krieger, 1984).

After examining the thanatological literature, Neimeyer et al., (1984) revealed... "not a
systematic, progressive discussion and investigation of a topic area, but rather a chaotic
mosaic cluttered with duplication of effort, unconfirmed opinion, questionable research
methodologies and paradigms, and a striking absence of anything approaching a
coherent unifying base of psychological theory" (p.11).

Clinicians have reflected on their personal experiences of death and loss and have
developed patterns from these observations. Empirical researchers have brought
techniques and methodologies from differing fields to test individual, isolated
hypotheses. However, neither of these approaches have made a significant and
comprehensive contribution to our understanding of human beings' relation to their
deaths. Certainly, much of the scattered literature can be attributed to a variety of
disciplines that legitimately contribute to it.

This chapter reviews some of the major conceptualisations of death, loss and mourning.
The ideas of philosophers, poets and creative writers are included so that their
experiences and understandings of these themes can be added to the more mainstream
and 'scientific' theories. The review is not comprehensive, and the selection of some
theories reflects my personal bias.

To understand what has happened in psychology over the last century or so, and how
theories of death and loss have evolved, an excursion into developments in both philosophy and scientific theory is of value. The theories presented are roughly arranged from the oldest to the most modern (although not necessarily the most original) to give an impression of their development. In this chapter I present a combination of post-modernist and modernist thinking. By no means is my aim to classify theorists under either of the two categories. Rather, I have collected a number of ideas on death and loss and have constructed the two broad distinctions of modernism and post-modernism to highlight their flow through the last century.

Grief is that state of mental and physical pain that is experienced when the loss of a significant object, person or part of the self is perceived (Stephenson, 1994) which means that any loss, whether symbolic or real, can lead to the experience of grief. However, bereavement is regarded to be the state of having suffered a loss (Rando, 1984). So, as seen here and in the literature, the terms used to describe the processes associated with death and loss are overlapping or are used interchangeably.

Therefore, the terms death, loss, bereavement and grieving will not be separated in this paper.

2.2 Death: an age old philosophical question

Although Socrates (470-399 BC) believed that no living person could ever know death, he gave two possible descriptions for death (in Hardt, 1979). He believed death as either a dreamless sleep or a journey of the soul into another world. Socrates favoured the latter and referred to death as a freezing and separation of the soul from the body. He suggested that no philosopher is afraid of death, and that a true philosopher actually desires it.

"To fear death is nothing other than to think oneself wise when one is not; for it is to think one knows what one does not know. No man knows whether death will turn out to be the greatest of blessings for a human being; and yet people fear it as if they knew for certain that it is the greatest of evil" (Socrates in Hardt, 1979, p.29).
Socrates saw the body as a hindrance in his search for the truth as it was dependant on all the senses. These senses manifest themselves through pain or pleasure and can only interfere with the soul's search. So, for Socrates, only in death is the soul free of these senses and capable of finding truth. Socrates is also reported to have said that those who really apply themselves in the right way to philosophy are actually preparing themselves for dying and death. According to Socrates, as we cannot really know what death is, all we are left with are beliefs about death.

There exists a belief that everything humans do in life is finally to be evaluated by testing it against the fact of their mortality. In line with this thinking Corr, Nabe & Corr (1997) regard the surrounding issues of bereavement and dying as originating from more basic questions about the meaning of mortality. This implies that evaluations of death are linked, perhaps in inescapable ways to beliefs about the nature and the meaning of death. It is likely that everybody has such beliefs, although not everybody will explicitly formulate or consciously reflect on them.

Plato (427-347 BC) preaches that death is simply the release of the soul from the body (in Hardt, 1979). This soul is then not destroyed but achieves immortality. In his view, souls are essentially immortal - they are deathless by their very nature. Plato suggested that his society refused to recognise death as a process, refused to believe that every person or creature will die, refused to accept that death can be pleasurable, and finally, refused to admit that they need not fear death as evil. Plato proposed a way of viewing life itself as indefinitely continuous; a life without an opposite to itself.

Conversely, Aristotle (384-322 BC) viewed the death of man as the end of everything except his reason (in Hardt, 1979). Reason, he identified, is something that is learned by every man, is always with him and hence, cannot die. Aristotle argued that for an entity to exist at all it must not only have substance and form, but also an originating agent capable of initiating the change, and an end for which it exists. Aristotle gives a strong sense of continuity.

The idea of death being inextricably linked with life was already being grappled with by
the early philosophers.

You want to know of Death?
Well, I shall save my breath.
When you know Life, why then,
We'll talk of Death again.

Confucius "Death and Life"
(in Hardt, 1979, p 2).

Buddhists (in Carse, 1980) see grief as the impulse to jump off the wheel of ceaseless change in a desperate attempt to find something immovable. This attachment leads to suffering because nothing is exempt from change. To think that something is true, that one is oneself, is to be in profound contradiction of life's relative existence. Buddhists believe that learning to move freely with the wheel of life is the only means one can escape from the pain of grief.

2.3 And then there were the psychoanalysts

Following the writings of philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato came a period of relative quietness around new conceptualisations of death, until the arrival of Freud. Freud's theory (in Lifton, 1979) gave a highly complex description of the death instinct as a construct. Freud traced our first conceptions of death to our earliest feelings of sexuality, and our fears of being punished as a consequence of these feelings surrounding sexuality.

Freud's theory of human behaviour (in Carse, 1980) is built on the premise that the actions of individuals are influenced by a life instinct (Eros) and a death instinct (Thanatos). His interest in death led to a major modification of his theory and resulted in his famous statement, "the aim of all life is death" (in Carse, 1980, p.96). This in turn compelled Freud to offer an opposing force - the life instinct. He is less thorough in his discussion of the life instinct but does view it as a drive inherent in organisms whose
goal is growth and ever increasing complexity. Freud proposed the death instinct as an explanation for why the psyche punishes itself without any external need to do so. The form punishment takes is anxiety - which is the remembered injurious separation of birth. Life instincts as persistently breaking the peace and constantly producing tensions whose release is felt as pleasure. Pleasure then has to do with return, union, a distinct loss of individuality while anxiety is the very force of life which is in the direction of isolation and individuation.

Death, the ultimate release of tension, represents the ultimate pleasure for Freud, and is the organism's prevailing desire. Perhaps the most crucial point regarding the role of the death instinct in early development is that aggressive impulses are real and fundamental. They are not just secondary derivatives. According to Carse (1980), in Freud's revised theory he does not see aggression as only and always a response to frustration or deprivation. Aggression is there from the beginning and represents the claims of Thanatos. From the beginning, this aggressive drive threatens the development and survival of the self.

So, the infant and young child must quickly find a way of balancing the powerful and contradictory claims of Eros and Thanatos. The basic strategy is to turn the aggressive impulses outward - including vigorous use of muscles and energies. This will be a challenge during the entire life-span as well. Eros must somehow manage to give Thanatos its opportunities, yet prevent disaster. In more practical terms, whatever interferes with a young child's ability to turn the death instinct outward is likely to generate enduring problems - especially those expressed by the compulsion to repeat painful and frustrating experiences. For the psychoanalyst, life is conflict. Freudian death instinct implies that it is worthless to seek a full resolution of the Eros and Thanatos conflict in the midst of life and it is certainly not a goal of therapy.

Suicide, on the other hand, is seen by Freud as a condition that results when the death instinct (the urge to die) overtakes the life instinct (the urge to live). From this model, Freud maintains that the basis of all religion is an attempt of man to lessen the terror of death. Man invented the concepts of soul and afterlife to be more desirable than earthly existence. In doing this, man's fear and lack of understanding regarding death became
less frightening. In explaining the 'taboo' nature of death conversation, Freud mentioned two types of taboos. He spoke of the sacred or the consecrated, and the uncanny, the dangerous, the forbidden and the unclear. Freud saw death as a subject fitting into both of these categories.

Freud (in Hagglund, 1978) asserted that nobody really believes in their own death. We all think of ourselves as immortal because our unconscious has always existed, and we are unable to imagine the event without becoming a spectator to the event. Freud (in Hagglund, 1978) expresses this dilemma in the following way: "... the man of prehistoric times survives unchanged in our unconscious. Our unconscious, then, does not believe in its own death; it behaves as if it were immortal" (p.9). Even natural death brought about by our own ageing process is almost unacceptable.

Freud (in Hagglund, 1978) presented a theory of a biological trauma, defining the trauma as a result of the child's inability to deal with his own urgent internal needs, which leads him into a state of helplessness. The prototype of such a biotrauma is birth. According to Freud, no one escapes these various biotrauma's such as object loss, loss of love, oedipal trauma etc. The weak, immature and unresisting ego of the small child is unable to deal with these things that in later in life would not cause any difficulties. So, in these circumstances both internal instinctual needs and external stimuli may bring about traumata and thus constitute the real background factors of a neurotic fear of death.

According to his psychoanalytic perspective, Freud (in Stroebe & Stroebe, 1992) proposed that when a loved one dies, the bereaved person is faced with the struggle to sever ties and detach the energies invested in the deceased person. The libido is attached (cathected) to the loved object and everything associated with it. When a person realizes that the object is irretrievably lost, he/she has to bring into consciousness all the thoughts concerning the object in order to detach the libido from them. The psychological function of grief is then to free the individual of his or her bond to the deceased, achieving a gradual detachment by means of reviewing the past and dwelling on memories of the deceased. The bereaved were viewed as needing to 'work through' their loss in order to overcome their grief. This grief is completed when most of the libido is withdrawn from the lost object and transferred to the new one. The main
cause of pathological grief is the existence of ambivalence in the relationship with the
lost object as it prevents normal transference of the libido.

Freud identified four features of normal mourning: profoundly painful dejection, loss of
capacity to adopt new love objects, inhibition of activity or turning away from activity not
connected with the thoughts of the loved person, and a loss of interest in the outside
world insofar as it does not recall the deceased. He also proposed that the mourner
attempts to deny the death of a loved one as long as possible. When reality
necessitates acceptance, some anxiety regarding one's own mortality surfaces which
actually facilitates adjustment to the loss. Freud also questions the child's ability to
comprehend death, and therefore to mourn in an appropriate and useful manner
(Stroebe & Stroebe, 1992).

Loss and the internalisation of lost objects have since remained cornerstones of
psychoanalytic theory. In psychoanalytic theory, the essential work of mourning has
been defined as the acceptance of the irrevocability of the loss, and the progressive
decathexis of the lost object, which frees the mourner to make new relationships and
find new satisfactions. From this perspective, pathological or incomplete mourning
results from an inability to relinquish the object, with consequent denial of the finality of
the loss and unconscious fantasies of undoing and reunion.

According to Stekel (in Hagglund, 1978), every fear is fundamentally fear of death. Yet,
it is the generally held opinion that death is feared and denied because it signifies,
separation, loneliness, destruction, chaos, punishment, etc. (Hinton in Hagglund, 1978).
Our belief that death happens only to others is neatly captured in Freud's anecdote
about a couple discussing the topic, in which the one says to the other: "If one of us

"Both avoidance and embrace of death form the root motivations for much of our
existence. We try to avoid what it would be lethal to embrace, but ultimately sex and
aggression, love and death, become unity and, as to the white light, we are drawn. It is
this 'heretical' knowledge we seek to escape" (Ween Olsen, 1988, p.84).
Ernest Becker (in Hardt, 1979) continued Freud's line of thought and proposed that the fear of death, and not the sexual instinct, is the primary force governing human behaviour. Becker states that the fear of death is a natural fear and is present in all people, which differs markedly from that of Freud, who believed that the fear of death is not a real fear, but rather masks a deeper fear of castration and separation. Becker asserts that we struggle to find meaning in life through heroic efforts, but if we find these heroic efforts to be impossible, we tend to develop elaborate systems to explain the problem away (including neurosis and psychosis).

Becker writes of the paradoxical nature of man's existence:

"Man is literally split into two: He has an awareness of his own splendid uniqueness in that he sticks out of nature with a towering majesty, and yet he goes back into the ground a few feet in order blindly and dumbly to rot and disappear forever. It is a terrifying dilemma to be in and to have to live with" (Hardt, 1979, p.57).

To confront death is to confront total failure which leads to a questioning of the meaning of existence itself. Becker sees this confrontation with death as unbearable and one that will drive a person mad and regards life as a struggle to deal with our mortality. "Mad because," Becker states, "...everything that man does in his symbolic world is an attempt to deny and overcome his grotesque fate" (Firestone, 1994, p.220).

With regards to the reactions to death, Lindemann (in Cleiren, 1994) proposes that in the case of acute grief, bereavement reactions consist of a syndrome of five components: somatic disturbance, preoccupation with the image of the bereaved, guilt, hostility and disorganised behaviour. He saw two abnormal grief syndromes: a delayed grief reaction, which could last for years, and what he called 'distorted grief', which consists of social withdrawal, hypochondriacal development of the dead person's symptoms, psychosomatic illness and manic over-activity.

Recovery from bereavement in his view is the emancipation from the relationship with the deceased, readjustment to the environment and formation of new relationships. To achieve this, analytic 'grief work' needs to be done. This comprises coping with the
feelings of hostility and fear, the expression of a sense of loss and the verbalisation of guilt feelings.

Lindemann (in Cleiren, 1994) provided an important reference point for conceptualising normal and morbid forms of grief by defining the symptomology of normal acute grief from a psychosomatic perspective. However, his samples seem to have contained a number of individuals who today might be diagnosed as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Lindemann used analytic concepts in characterising grief and adopted a fairly narrow view regarding normality. In addition to chronically delayed grief, Lindemann described a number of distorted grief reactions ranging from psychosomatic illness to self-punitive behaviour. Although most of Lindemann's classifications have not retained their status in recent formulations, they were important as they integrated multiple parameters in describing morbid grief i.e. duration, intensity of particular symptoms, physical and psychiatric illness, and changes in social functioning.

Otto Rank (in Maddi, 1989) proposed a new understanding of death as he believed that all functioning is a manifestation of the tendency to minimize the fear of life while at the same time minimizing the fear of death. For Rank, life symbolizes the process of separation and individualization whereas death is union, fusion and dependency. The fears of either being unique and alone or being fused and undifferentiated from others, fuels our existence. So, to be alive is to be faced with a continual series of separations through which one becomes an unique psychological, social and biological person. Living is a fearsome process because it inevitably involves separations. This precipitates uncertainty, requires greater responsibility to be assumed for oneself, and renders us ever more alone and lonely. To avoid separation and individuation means avoiding life itself, as life is an inevitable process of separation. As anything done to reduce the fear of living will increase the fear of dying (vice versa), one needs to strike a compromise that will balance these opposing forces. (The existentialist view takes this even further and advocates achieving individuation regardless of the cost.)

According to psychoanalyst Zilboorg (in Schulz, 1992), the behaviours and psychological energies invested in self preservation are products of death anxiety. While for the most of the time these anxieties are repressed and must remain repressed
if we are to function normally, but they exist and exert their pressures on man's behaviour. When the pressures become too great the anxieties manifest themselves in neurotic and psychotic behaviours.

As a neurotic phenomenon, the fear of death is not actually associated with physical death; instead it has symbolic significance and therefore covers other unconscious thoughts. According to Fenichel (in Hagglund, 1978), such symbolic reflections of death may sometimes have a libidinal character. However, the fear of death mostly veils some childhood sources of anxiety, which later manifest themselves as fear of death. These sources of anxiety include the fear of losing an object that satisfies important needs, of losing the love and care provided by this important object, the fear of castration, the fear of the superego in the form of a strict, punishing, and forsaking conscience, the fear of one's own masochism which implies the fear of the superiority of one's own instinctual impulses and the consequent risk of losing control over the ego (Waelder, in Hagglund, 1978). All these fears may be identified with death and thus, may clinically manifest themselves as the fear of death.

A further psychoanalytical construct applied to grief and loss was Klein's (in Miles & Demi, 1994) concept of the depressive position. This position involved the infantile developmental stage associated with the infant's ability to recognise and relate to a whole object. Satisfactory negotiation of this stage were to provide protection against subsequent depression in the event of loss as the establishment of a good internal object relationship would allow them to feel secure within their inner world. A similar claim was made by Vaillant (in Cleiren, 1994).

The Freudian and Neo-Freudian approaches are that of defense mechanisms used by the ego to guard against anxiety provoked by internal or external stimuli. It therefore follows that the natural next step would be to invoke these defenses as protection against unacceptable personal death. This step was taken by Rank and Brown and described by Becker (in Neimeyer, 1994). Continuing on this line of thought, high levels of conscious death anxiety may be interpreted as a breakdown of protective mechanisms - mainly of the mechanism of denial. Conversely, Becker considers the ability to deny death without being much bothered by one's "lies", to be "the essence of
normality" (in Neimeyer, 1994, p.11).

"Of all things that move man, one of the principle ones is his terror of death" (Becker in Schulz, 1992, p.67).

Until recently, fear of death has been excluded from psychoanalytic theory or has been equated in a reductionistic way with castration and other fears. Regarding this omission, Stern (in Neimeyer, 1994) wrote, "It is surprising that psychoanalytic psychology, despite its characteristic tendency to uncover the hidden truth behind all denials and repressions, nevertheless, in its studies up to this day has rather neglected the fear of death, our steady companion" (pp.218-219).

Becker understands the idea of death to be the mainspring of human activity where people's behaviour is largely designed to overcome or deny death. Whereas Meyer (in Schulz, 1992) sees man's fear of death as the cause of neurosis, Becker believes that death fear can lead to psychosis. The fearful aspects of death and dying include the following interactive aspects: the fear of physical suffering, the fear of humiliation, the interruption of goal achievement and the fear of punishment. The fear of not being, is paramount for Coleman (in Schultz, 1992) who sees man as the only creature who is constantly faced with the awareness of inevitability of non-being. We may also fear the death of those around us as we become anxious at the thought of having to experience vicariously the psychological and physical suffering of those close to us. In addition, we fear the loss of an important relationship. (Existentialists regard this awareness of inevitable death to be the cause of existential anxiety.)

Klein (in Hagglund, 1978) on the other hand, believes that man unconsciously knows or understands that death means a total ending while Jacques is of the opinion that our unconscious mind in itself does not have an impression of death, but that nevertheless, there are a number of unconscious experiences that later on may correspond to a conscious understanding of death. To illustrate this, Jacques (in Hagglund, 1978) presents a claustrophobic patient who dreamed that he was lying mutilated in a coffin. This fantasy of death does not correspond to our customary idea of death, because in this dream the patient still maintained his ability to observe what was happening to him.
Jacques regards the patient's fantasies as merely approaching the definitive conscious image of death.

Ego psychologists assign humans with greater ability to manage the stresses and problems of life. They also believe that we raise a whole set of defences against the idea of death. As children and adults, we distort perception according to our needs, in this way denying painful or harsh thoughts. Alfred Adler, who himself had a life threatening disease as a child, also focused on the importance of a person's early years. He attributed our need to strive and overcome to our early sensitivities to weakness and death (Maddi, 1989).

2.4 Life after Freud: Jung and Bowlby

Carl Jung (in Hinton, 1972) stressed the acceptance of death as a maturation task as he saw death rather as the goal of life and the fulfilment of life's meaning. Although he remarked that everything that he had written was about the interplay between the "here" and the "hereafter", he surprisingly writes very little about death. While his mention of the "hereafter" seems to suggest the continuation of a separable soul, Jung denies any belief in such a theory. He clearly indicates that the body which houses the psyche, will die. The psyche is however timeless and seemingly immortal, but must experience death before it will reach its fulfilment.

Jung felt that the dead should not be pitied. He would rather give his compassion the living who:

"in the darkness of the world, hemmed in by a narrow horizon and the blindness of ignorance, must follow the river of their days, fulfilling life's task, only to see their whole existence, which once was the present brimming over with power and vitality, crumbling bit by bit and crashing into the abyss" (Hinton, 1972, p.85).

Jung likens the passage of life to a parabola, an arc of 180°, that is divided into four quite distinct sections. The arc begins with birth and childhood which is the first quarter. The child is carried upward, toward adulthood and the zenith of the arc, by the natural
flow of energy, what Jung calls 'instinct'. The dynamic advance of life is not perfectly coincidental with the rise of consciousness, because during the period of childhood consciousness lags behind physical development and does not catch up until early adulthood. Then, at the beginning of the second quarter, a person begins to focus on the zenith and strives upward, driven not by the physical energy of instinct, but by psychic energy. At life's midpoint the zenith is met and passed, and the parabola is reversed. "Death is born" when the descent begins. At this moment there is very often a crisis in one's life that arises from the unwillingness to accept the geometry of the curve. Jung explains that what started with birth must end with death: "Waxing and waning make one curve." The fourth stage is similar to the first, as the person becomes childlike and is no longer in conflict with instinct. On being questioned on what death is, Jung replies,

"...suddenly to pull out of my pocket and invite my reader to do what nobody can, that is, believe something. I must confess that I myself could never do it either. Therefore, I shall certainly not assert now that one must believe death to be a second birth leading to a survival beyond the grave" (Hinton, 1972, p.87).

Jung speaks then of the consensus gentium, or the universal agreement among cultures and religions on the issue of death. He maintains that the consensus of traditions is that life "actually has no significance except as a preparation for the ultimate goal of death. In both the greatest living religions, Christianity and Buddhism, the meaning of existence is consummated in it's end" (p 90). Jung (in Hinton, 1972) regards that people become alienated from their human instincts when they regard death merely as a meaningless end and not as the fulfilment of life's goals. Jung believes that dying begins long before actual death. "From the middle of life onward," Jung wrote, "only he remains vitally alive who is ready to die with life" (p 93). Jung's theory becomes confusing as he connects physical death with psychic death, but speaks of the timelessness of the psyche. To better understand Jung's theory around death, we need to understand his conception of freedom. Jung sees freedom as the ability to keep the imagination alive in the face of instinct. This implies that the instinct does not threaten the death of the body, but rather the death of the imagination.
On studying Jung's work, Carse (1980) postulates that Jung's theory describes the fear of death to be the fear one's own unconscious. Jung regards the confusion of organic with psychic death to be the reason one identifies death with the increasing demise of the physical body. The fear of death causes one to look back and to ignore that which is within and timeless. The experience of death that Jung declared to be necessary for the psyche's fulfilment, is the conscious sacrifice of the ego to the self (which forms the core of the unconscious). The true discontinuity threatened by death is that of an elevation to a higher mode of existence. The ego first strongly resists this natural instinct and engages in conflict with it. The conflict is won only when the ego sees that it is itself that comprises both sides of the conflict. Doing so the ego moves closer to the self and more consciously acknowledges its own nonspatiality and nontemporality. For Jung, to cross the threshold from life to death is to cross from the conscious mind to the world of the hidden psyche.

Death is then the sacrifice of the ego to the unconscious. The transformation that comes from this sacrifice releases enormous quantities of psychic energy that visits consciousness in the form of imagination. Here we may recognise imagination to be the creator of the soul. To die is to return to the impersonal, immortal origins of the psyche.

A refreshingly different view on death is put forward by Bowlby. His theory of attachment emphasises the biological rather than psychological function of grieving (in Cleiren, 1994). The biological function of grief is to regain proximity to the attachment figure; separation from which has caused anxiety. Bowlby postulates that attachment behaviour in human beings has a function of committing them to each other. The young child is extremely dependent on his environment. In order to survive, it has to make certain that it is cared for. This it does by showing attachment behaviour: behaviour that serves to "... maintain certain degrees of proximity to, or of communication with, the discriminated attachment figure(s)" (in Cleiren, 1994, p.16). Examples of such behaviour are smiling when the attachment figure is present, crying or calling, to make the attachment figure appear, and searching behaviour. Attachment is thus goal-directed, and has a function in survival.

According to Bowlby (1980), grief is essentially 'separation anxiety'. He views
bereavement as an unwanted separation from an attachment figure which gives rise to 'attachment behaviours' similar to those observed in animals and children. This concept of an attachment instinct explained why distress was so universal in response to separation from an attachment object. Attachment theory also linked the manifestations of pathological grief to the subject's childhood experiences and to the pattern of parental attachment behaviour.

According to Stroebe and Stroebe (1992), Bowlby also argues for an active working through of loss, referring to the cognitive act of redefining self and situation, and the process of realisation and of shaping internal representational models to align them with changes that have occurred. Studies by Bowlby suggest that children are more vulnerable to the impact of bereavement than adults. They tend to have limited experiences with regards to loss and can be overwhelmed when one of the central persons to offer them comfort is the victim of death.

Bowlby (in Weenolsen, 1988) regards the first attachment bond that an infant makes in life to be the prototype for all the other attachments he or she will make. If the infant does not form such an attachment, there may be autism, schizophrenia etc. according to our Western thinking. Even as our attachment behaviours of crying, clinging and smiling promote our very survival, they consequently are the source of our loss. A cause of childhood grief, according to Bowlby, is childhood experience with attachment figures which have a lasting influence on later relationships. For example, frequent separation from parental figures in childhood can lead to anxious attachment in later relationships, whereas a child who is prematurely forced into the role of caregiver may become a compulsive caregiver in later relationships.

Like adults, children resist the death of the loved one through anger, rage, sadness and intense anxiety at being separated. Based on his study of institutionalised children's reactions to maternal separation, Bowlby (in Gray, 1993) identified three phases that follow separation and loss: (1) protest and denial, progressing to (2) despair and personal disorganisation, and finally, (3) reorganisation (detachment), which involves the transfer of affective attachment to new relationships. During the protest phase, boisterous weeping and rageful behaviour occur as an insistence on reunion with the
absent parent. Acute pain and unhappiness characterise the second phase of despair. During the final phase, the child begins to act as if the loss no longer mattered.

In contrast to Freud, Bowlby asserts that in a healthy bereavement process, the relationship with the deceased is often not broken. The bereaved may have a feeling of 'inner presence' of the deceased that is comforting and supportive in restructuring their lives. Bowlby singled out anxious, insecure, compulsive care-givers and ambivalent persons as being most prone to pathological grief whereas Parkes (in Miles & Demi, 1994) sees the "grief prone personality" as one characterised by excessive grief and depression, intense clinging behaviour, or excessive pining for the deceased person.

Marris (in Cleiren, 1994) replaces Bowlby's notions of attachment-behaviour and instinct by 'structures of meaning'. These represent internal schemata in which the emotional attachment of others is represented, and by which involvement and interaction are defined. With the loss of a significant other, the life of the bereaved becomes less predictable as the loss of the familiar necessitates new structures of meaning to be established. Marris states that this predictability is central to our survival: "Without it we cannot interpret the meaning of things that happen to us" (in Cleiren, 1994, p.18). The bereaved can attempt to resolve this uncertainty in two ways. He can return in imagination to the time before death (yearning for the bereaved, reliving certain episodes, hallucinations, thoughts of the past) or he can forget or deny the issue. For Marris, successful resolution of grief depends on working out these conflicting tendencies. This is done partly by externalising the ambivalence, which implies a catharsis of the conflicting tendencies, to facilitate the process of reestablishing meaning and to make the world predictable again. Marris stresses the importance of mourning rituals as they authorise the conflicting tendencies in the bereaved individual.

Campbell (in Weenolsen, 1988) expounds an Eastern concept of attachment which proposes that we are attached to the forms of all things, but because all things change form, we are continuously experiencing a sense of loss. Attachment to form is attachment not only to shape, colour and movement of physical things but also to the forms of relationships, concepts, meanings and illusions. Non-attachment to forms will protect us against their loss. The problem with non-attachment is that it takes away the
joys of passion and desire as much as it removes heartache.

The turn of the century is characterised by a dedicated attempt to understand life by the use of powerful instruments and methodologies and little post-modern thinking was encouraged. The modernist's work did, however, give theorists a number of models from which to work. Campbell took attachment theory and post-modernised it.

Campbell (in Weenolsen, 1988) states that all attachments in an individual's life, can be viewed as transferences from previous people, situations and ideas. The self is always working out the past to create a meaningful myth of itself. Transference to other relationships represents a transformation from one form to another, but because these forms are metaphors of one another, the attachment remains. These transferences and attachments can be seen in art, charity, or even one's work. The infant learns that the fulfilment of needs necessary for survival is in the hands of the omnipotent other. However, this same caretaker that can provide relief, can withhold it or even inflict pain. As the infant grows, he or she transfers power over life and death metaphors from parents to the peer group, then the community, the state, the nation - even acts of God. The transference of the metaphors and meanings of death are then carried with us throughout our lives in many guises, many unknown even to us.

2.5 Death: The final developmental stage

Erik Erikson's psychosocial theory (in Neimeyer, 1994) of development provides a view of human development with important implications regarding the struggle with the death threat. He divides life in eight stages with each stage presenting a developmental crisis that needs to be resolved successfully. Erikson argues that a person must have successful to some degree in solving the seven crises that came before in order to resolve the eighth crisis of senescence. The task of this stage is to achieve ego integrity - a conviction that one's life has meaning and purpose and that having lived has made a difference. The person who sees his life in this stage as wasted, will show a high fear of death. An important antecedent to the development of ego integrity is the resolution of the generativity vs. stagnation stage. It is the awareness of mortality and closeness to death that precipitates the crisis of this stage (Neugarten in Neimeyer, 1994). A
response to this challenge is the development of generativity in the form of care to children, society etc. This response is of an interpersonal nature as it involves construing or extending the self to include significant others.

Erikson emphasises the issue of basic trust as the earliest developmental crisis, and he sees the legacy of this earliest time as having vital importance for adulthood. "Basic trust" is regarded as being similar to a sense of immortality, says R. J. Lifton (in Feifel, 1977, p.283) and a response to a violation of this basic trust can lead to psychic numbing or deadness to experience. This numbed or dead self is similar to what Laing calls the "false self". From his interactions with schizophrenics Laing describes the "desire to be dead, the desire for non-being" as perhaps being the most dangerous desire that can be pursued. He sees the "state of death-in-life" as both:

- a response to "the primary guilt of having no right to life in the first place, and hence of being entitled at most only to a dead life"
- "probably the most extreme defensive posture that can be adopted" in which "being dead, one cannot die, and one cannot kill" (Laing, in Lifton, 1977, p 286f).

This establishment of trust involves confidence in the integrity, connection and movement of life, which are prerequisites for a viable form of symbolic mortality. Where this confidence collapses, psychological impairment ensues.

Around this time period, developmental theorists began to become quite prominent thinkers in psychology. People were regarded as undergoing similar processes that could demarcated in various stages.

The Book of Ecclesiastes (3, 1-8) in The Holy Bible, highlights the crux of developmental theory with the following:
"For everything there is a season,
and a time for every matter under heaven:
a time to be born, a time to die;
..."

A proponent of the developmental view is Jean Piaget (in DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983) who, among others things, looked at cognitive abilities and thought processes. Surprisingly, Piaget included exposure to and threats of death to a list of factors influencing cognitive development. Piaget believes that small children can only grieve over the loss of something once they can gained an appreciation that things and people are not permanent i.e. that object constancy be incorporated before any sense of loss can occur.

Stem (in Hagglund, 1978) claimed that adaptation to death and thinking of death is indispensable for human maturation. Any deficiency in these areas may constitute grounds for the manifestation of neurosis. While working through the thoughts and fear of death naturally proceeds through the entire life, there may be certain crisis periods in this respect. Jacques (in Hagglund, 1978) has described the mid-life crisis as a crisis period in which the adult gains insight into his own death and own destructive impulses or instinctual stimuli. Jacques refers to this crisis as a depressive one, in contrast to the paranoid-schizoid crisis in adolescence, which involves manic opposition to one's own death and strong unconscious denial of one's own destructive instinctual stimuli. A person's conception of death and the fear involved as well as one's attitude toward life and work are considerably moulded by the result of this working through.

As a person gets older his attitude changes. As physical strength declines and illnesses debilitate one, death may be experienced as a relief (Eissler, 1955; Swenson, 1965, in Hagglund, 1978), or the fear of death is denied even more strongly, which may lead to a paranoid attitude (Christ in Hagglund, 1978). According to Eissler though, the senile dementia in far progressed aging is an easy event comparable to the death of a newborn. He thinks this is associated with the fact that in the beginning of life the death instinct and the life instinct have not yet fused and that in old age life instincts have perhaps discharged all their powers and the death instinct has regained its original
dominant position. The attempt to obliterate death seems to have a curiously deadening effect on our lives. Kubler-Ross regards the denial of death as being partially responsible for people living empty, purposeless lives (in Kastenbaum, 1981).

2.6 Dying in stages

After spending considerable time with dying patients, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (in Kastenbaum, 1981) formulated a series of stages in the dying process. A dying person passes through five stages which may partly overlap and may occur in a different sequence. These stages of dying are denial and isolation, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Denial and isolation may be an essential buffer against a reality too harsh to face. Denial, or at least partial denial, is used by almost all persons hearing about their own impending deaths. However, this denial is not only used during the first stages of illness, but also later on from time to time. "Neither the sun nor death can be looked at steadily" (La Rochefoucauld, in Handley, 1991, p.249). Kübler-Ross regards this as a healthy way of dealing with the uncomfortableness of facing one's own death. Denial functions as a buffer allowing the person to collect himself and, with time, mobilise less radical defenses. Denial is then usually a temporary defense which may be replaced by partial acceptance. The stage of anger is often manifested as an outcry against death: "Why me?" When the first stage of denial can no longer be maintained, it is replaced by feelings of anger, rage, envy and resentment. Kübler-Ross highlights the difficulty to cope with this stage of anger from the point of view of family and staff. In the following stage the person attempts to bargain for time in the hope that death be postponed. Most bargains are made with God and are usually kept in secret. Two forms of depression are highlighted. Reactive depression is a reaction to a loss that has already occurred, while preparatory depression relates to the anticipation of loss. Kübler-Ross focuses on the silence of preparatory depression as there is little need for words. The final stage of acceptance is more likely to be achieved if the person was able to work through the previous stages. If the person has enough time, he or she may reach a stage during which he is neither depressed nor angry about his fate. Kübler-Ross warns us not to mistake acceptance for a happy stage as it is mostly void of feelings. It is as if the pain has gone, the struggle is over, and there is time for the final rest before a long journey.
Kübler-Ross (in Kastenbaum, 1981) maintains that a person reaches a point when death comes as a great relief, and they die easier if they are allowed and helped to detach themselves slowly from all the responsibilities and meaningful relationships in their lives. However, some patients fight to the end. Kübler-Ross sees this hope as preventing these patients from reaching the final stage of acceptance. Kübler Ross also notes that some people accept death as a natural part of life - the final stage of growth.

"Death is not the ultimate tragedy of life. The ultimate tragedy is depersonalization - dying in an alien and sterile area, separated from the spiritual nourishment that comes from being able to reach out to a loving hand, separate from the desire to experience the things that make life worth living, separated from hope" (Cousins in Despelder & Strickland, 1983, p.416).

Kübler-Ross believes that it is the denial of death that is partially responsible for people living empty, purposeless lives. She felt that people who prepared for tomorrow and remembered yesterday would lose the present moment.

Parkes (1972) first broadly defined world views and defined them as the "assumptive world" and Bowlby (1980) referred to them as world models. These terms refer to internal systems that enable the individual to function by providing expectations and assumptions about the world. Having particular expectations about the world allows the individual to develop goals, plan for the future, and function daily. World view represent an internally consistent and systematic means for organizing and interpreting experiences. Early childhood experiences of loss that are not readily explained by one's existing world view may produce distress because it implies that the world model is incorrect and inadequate.

Hannelore Wass (1979) expounds on a concept called the life review. This life review is triggered by the realization that one is reaching the end of one's life and that death is near. This review serves to prepare a person for dying; a preparation that may decrease the fear of death. The concept of life review and the similar concept of biography construction represent efforts at achieving cohesiveness and integrity in creating a
readiness for death. On the other hand these processes include biases, reflected in selective recall. Specific self-serving processes such as denial and positive illusions are discussed earlier in this paper.

Kastenbaum (in Morgan 1995, p.25) used the term death system to describe how people manifest their dying. "A death system is cognitive, affective, and behavioural as it teaches us what to think about death, how to feel about it, and what to do with regard to it (Corr in Morgan, 1995, p.25). The death system is the sum total of the persons, places, ideas, traditions, acts, omissions, emotions, and statements that we think or make about death.

So, it is then the total picture of death, dying, and bereavement that we have at any given time. Our hesitation at discussing death with children and our awkwardness at funerals are part of our death system. Sending flowers, arranging religious remembrances, and donating money to charity in the name of the deceased are all traditions that shape our consciousness of death. As death systems are cultural, they change as key factors of the culture change.

The first factor that influences our understanding of death is our experience of death and bereavement. Persons who have not experienced the loss of a significant other or who have not been exposed to death will have limited death attitudes (Morgan, 1995). The person's experience now allows a fuller participation in the death system. A person's life expectancy is related to his exposure to death. The vast majority of our ancestors were intimately acquainted with death and the fragility of life. At the time of Plato (5th century BC), the average life expectancy was 20 years. Morgan explains that our attitudes to death are shaped by our view of the world and our place in it. He proposes that those who believe that they are impotently subject to the laws of nature will have death attitudes that vary widely from those who believe they have significant control over the forces of nature. Those who believe that they will be protected from the forces of nature will have less respect for nature's power over human life. The perception of what it is to be a human also affects our understanding of death. Persons who emphasise the uniqueness of the individual and individual rights have a different orientation toward death than do people in a culture that emphasises that the individual
is a part of a whole or that people do not having any meaning at all.

2.7 Death as a personal construct

According to Kelly's theory of personal constructs (in Engler, 1995), a person construes events in order to be able to anticipate thematically similar events in the future. In formulating constructs, an individual abstracts some important ways in which 'elements' (things, persons, events, etc.) are similar and different, gradually developing a belief system that is hierarchically organised. Core constructs are high on the hierarchy and their revision implies radical changes in the person's outlook.

Kelly (Neimeyer, 1994) uses death several times as the paradigmatic example for "threat", which he defines as "the awareness of imminent change in one's core structures" (p.9). Kelly considers death as an alternative core structure, one which is incompatible with the present structure. With regards to death anxiety, Kelly considers death as an element that is difficult to make sense of. Assuming that this element cannot be subsumed under the existing structure, the result should be anxiety—death anxiety in this case. The more difficulty one has in conceiving one's own death should be accompanied by higher levels of anxiety.

From within the personal construct theory, individuals take reality which they never can truly know and impose their system of constructs on it, which they then assume to be reality. This system of constructs that they have created has a continuity that links them to others and guides their lives. Death, or a loss, that disrupts this continuity will reveal the construct system to be a fiction and not reality. Through grief this is denied. First, we assert that the death has not occurred and, second, that the construct system is not a fiction but rather a reality that does not change. Carse continues this thinking by proposing that the end to grief is only found when there is acceptance that the continuity of the system has been disrupted, and, that because this fiction is destroyed a new system can be created to establish another continuity. Dorothy Rowe (1984) realized, while studying the construct systems of people who were depressed, that the way people construe death is central to the entire structure of their system. Rowe says that grief can be understood as the attempt to maintain the continuity of the construct system.
that death has interrupted, and the end of grief as reconstruing to form a new continuity. She believes that how death is construed is central to the construct system because it determines how the purpose of life is construed. Personal construct theory has an overarching goal regarding death which is to stimulate elaboration and integration of a person’s death-related constructs. The goal is to enrich the network of pathways along which a person can move in thought and action as death-related events are encountered. Awareness of death, according to Rowe, informs every decision that one makes.

Parkes (1972) also applied a variation of the attachment model to his observation of the course of grief. He identified three principle forms of pathological grief namely chronic, inhibited and delayed grief. In his later work he related grief outcome to attachment styles in relationships.

A number of theoretical models or approaches followed, that assume that persons need to protect themselves against the spectre of death using repressions or illusions and/or that symbolic systems are effective means in creating and maintaining an illusion of mortality.

Parkes’ theory emphasises the process of cognitive restructuring and employs elements of different models to explain the nature of the bereavement process (Parkes, 1972). On the one hand he views grief in terms of medical diagnosis, while on the other hand he sees grief in terms of separation anxiety where the bereavement reaction is an instinctive response to separation. Parkes assumes that in bringing the bereaved to fully experience his feelings of guilt or anger clears the path for alternate ways of thinking. Parkes considers the normal reaction to bereavement to be a period of grieving, marked by distress and impaired functioning, followed by recovery. With recovery, Parkes implies a replanning of the life situation and the attainment of a new, independent level of functioning. In cases where recovery does not occur, Parkes regards the grieving reaction as abnormal.

For Parkes (1972), the grieving process consists of four stages similar to those of Bowlby. The first is centered around searching behaviour and is marked by high
arousal, illusions and dreaming of the dead person, and anxiety. In the second stage, the loss becomes more and more real to the person where he/she realises that the loss is definitive. The intellectual knowledge, emotional acceptance, and behaviour become congruent. The full recognition of loss leads to the third stage which involves disorganisation and despair. The world as it was understood by the person before the death, now becomes unpredictable. As a result of this the person becomes depressed and withdrawn. In the final stage the bereaved constructs a new model of the world with which he rests predictability and control over his life. Parkes thus emphasises restructuring with regards to coming to terms with this new situation. According to Parkes, the road to recovery requires that the person pass through the pain of the loss, and requires that he/she brings into consciousness and expresses the feelings connected to it. Suppression of the pain may prolong or pathologise the grief process.

Haeres (in Cleiren, 1994, p.27) proposed that the individual needs to integrate new information with existing information. According to this tendency, the new information (loss of a loved one) will be repeatedly represented until the cognitive schemata are in accordance or are congruent with it. This tendency is regulated by enabling or inhibiting 'control' processes i.e. they may initiate inhibiting intrusive thoughts or change the asserted meaning of the information.

Adaptation after a loss of a significant other would involve regaining optimal control. New information would be processed optimally wherein information would be processed unless it would interfere with immediate needs for functioning. An imbalance between permitting the stressful information to be represented and inhibition can result in problems with adaptation. Too much control obstructs repeated representation in active memory, and invokes denial or a numbing which blocks further processing which limits adaptation. Too low a level of control causes excessive emotions and the continual reappearance of the traumatic loss experience.

To grasp Kierkegaard's (in Carse, 1980) understanding of death would require an dedicated immersion in his works. However, one story told by Climacus (Kierkegaard's pseudonymous author) seems to portray his view on death. This story concerns physical beauty which the immediate aesthetic would consider the highest perfection.
Kierkegaard tells of a young girl who for a brief time prides herself on her beauty, but is later deceived by it as time takes its toll. Each of us is living toward that moment in which all beauty fades, in which we are subject to the physical laws that are quite indifferent to all the sources of immediate pleasure. However, the person who is still taking delight in his or her own beauty does not have the conscious distance from it to appreciate this danger, until possibly years later. Kierkegaard then compares this to the phase where the young beauty is carried into such contemplation, which is a more reflective aesthetic enjoyment. This reflective aesthetic, knowing the fragility of beauty and the fleeting quality of all immediate pleasure, forestalls immediate possession of that desired object and takes pleasure instead in approaching that moment. Kierkegaard expresses the importance of acknowledging the uncertainty of death which is with us in every moment of our lives.

Speech, for Kierkegaard, is the very way our mortality makes itself evident. He proposes that we overcome despair by taking death into our personal history in the act of turning the meaning of our lives over to others. He sees death as something that we freely suffer for the sake of communicating to others. Only in so dying can we live at all.

Death, for Climacus, is something we cannot escape. For this reason it is not a cruel trick of nature or fate. Kierkegaard sees death as only an event in the "incessant becoming" of existence, as he writes:

"death is the last thing of all; and, humanly speaking, there is hope only so long as there is life. But Christianly understood, death is by no means the last thing of all, hence it is only a little event within that which is all, an eternal life; and Christianly understood there is in death infinitely much more hope than merely humanly speaking there is when there not only is life but this life exhibits the fullest health and vigor" (Carse, 1980, pp.452-453).

Kierkegaard's elaborate writings on existence and death are an attempt to invite us to go beyond our own death not by denying it, but by being free to use it as a token which shows that we chose truly to live (Carse, 1980).
Heidegger (in Handley, 1991) proposes that for the most part, we live and die in an unauthentic mode of existence (the forgetfulness of being) in which we suppress the reality of death. Heidegger claims that when death is honestly accepted and anticipated, it can be an integrating factor in an authentic existence. It is only in the realisation of our existence, as essentially "being unto death" that we can rise above the petty everyday life and be truly free.

Heidegger (in Carse, 1980) regarded the realisation of the inability to become a full being as bringing about the state of mind called anxiety. Death shows that there is no hope in being what we are and is a threat of non-existence. On the other hand, Heidegger maintains that the realisation of our future non-existence is a precondition of a fuller understanding of our life. This understanding will then free ourselves from anxiety. Heidegger's phenomenological/existential analysis of death as an anticipated possibility at every moment of life teaches one to cherish the present as it contains the past and looks forward to the future. Heidegger is not interested in the physical death but rather how a person, as a being-towards-death in an existential context, grows and develops throughout his life.

While Heidegger views death as the foundation of one's freedom, Sartre considers death as preventing an individual from realising his or her possibilities. Sartre (in Neimeyer, 1994, p.5) proposes that death reduces one's existence to what this existence really is: a "useless passion", nothing. He sees reflection on death as a reflection on the meaninglessness of existence. Death, for Sartre, is outside the living person and never gives life meaning; in fact, death removes all meaning from life. From Sartre's writings it may be interpreted that once a person has realised his or her central life projects, that person should experience very little death anxiety. Both Heidegger and Sartre argued that the ultimate encounter with Nothingness for humans is their personal death, which is inescapable.

Frankl (in Neimeyer, 1994) asserts that humans have the capacity to transcend tragic aspects of the human condition. He states:

"I speak of tragic optimism, that is, an optimism in the face of tragedy and in view
of the human potential which at its best always allows for: (1) turning suffering into a human achievement and accomplishment; (2) deriving from guilt the opportunity to change oneself for the better; and (3) deriving from life's transitoriness an incentive to take responsible action (p.219).

It is when one is confronted with an inescapable, unavoidable situation that one is given a last chance to find the deepest meaning of suffering. At the moment we find some meaning in suffering, it ceases to be suffering (Frankl in Barnes, 1994).

"To live is to suffer, to find meaning in life is to find meaning in suffering. If there is a purpose in life, there must be a purpose in suffering and dying" (Frankl, in Meyer, Moore & Viljoen, 1989, p.431).

In a criticism of depth psychology's attempts to expose death, Frankl proposes that we unmask the unmaskers - referring to those practitioners who pride themselves on their power to unmask the dark unconscious mysteries of a person. Frankl believes that this unmasking must stop somewhere; the place being the "unmasking psychologist" (Frankl, 1995, p.126). Frankl reminds us that we cannot unmask something that is genuine. These unmasking tendencies devaluate what is genuine and truly human in human beings.

"I am convinced that, in the final analyses, there is no situation that does not contain within it the seed of a meaning" (Frankl, 1995, p.53).

With regards to death, Frankl speaks of how our human transitoriness can be a strong motivation for our responsibleness. Death allows us to recognise that responsibility is basic to human existence. A logotherapeutic maxim that he formulated in a dream goes as follows: "Live as if you were already living for the second time, and as if you had made the mistakes you are about to make now" (in Frankl 1995, p.124). Speaking of moving closer towards his own death, Frankl comments that it does not bother him as long as he has reason to believe that he is maturing. What allows Frankl to overcome death is the continued manifestation of the personal meaning of his life which is to help others find the meaning of their lives.
James Carse (1980) describes grief in the following way:

"It is in grief that we feel most acutely the discontinuity, the meaninglessness, of life... death need not confront us in the loss of a person with whom we have shared much life- death confronts us whenever we experience a radical threat to the continuity of our existence. Anything that causes us to see that our lives come to nothing, and are essentially meaningless, has the power of death, since it has thrown across our path an impenetrable boundary, a terminus to all the lines of meaningfulness that extend outward from our vitality... We are in grief whenever the continuity of our lives has been destroyed... Grief is our refusal to recognise the fact that death has not taken away our freedom to reconstitute the continuities it has destroyed (p.7).

Carse reminds us to identify what the agency of death is for each theorist and thinker we encounter by looking at how they describe how they are threatened by discontinuity. From an understanding of this we can make sense of how they conceive grief. For example, people who have no religious faith see death as dispersion, and continuity is established by disregarding death. Life is a continuity of continuous change. Nothing comes to an end but simply changes its form. We see here that the focus begins to shift away from death to ones paradigm and epistemology. Carse also gives importance to those events which can be seen as metaphors for death.

An important aspect regarding the degree of significance assigned to the loss lies in the extent to which the death is viewed as an appropriate death. Weisman (1977) warns that one person's acceptable death may be unacceptable to another. The death of a 90 year old is typically seen as more acceptable and appropriate than the death of a teenager. However, Stephenson (1994) reminds us that the appropriateness of death must be considered from the perspective of the griever. For example the death of an elderly parent may be acceptable to the rest of the family but not to the spouse who expected to die first. Therefore, to the surviving spouse, the death of the other spouse can be seen as unfair and inappropriate. Only by understanding the meaning of the death to the griever can we come to understand the meaning of the grief.
In our relationship with death we are both survivors and experiencers. Survivors are better able to cope if they are aware that death and loss can be an opportunity for growth. When one begins to reformulate loss, the energy that has been bound up in the past becomes freed up. By reframing beliefs and assumptions around death, loss can be placed within a context of growth and life cycles (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983).

Feifel (1977), in a simplified way, demonstrated how we think of death when he portrayed death as either a door or a wall. Does one see death as the complete cessation of life, or a transition from one phase of life to the next. This does not mean that the one is better than the other as one can regard death as a wall and evaluate that as good e.g. all the suffering is finally over. The point Corr, Nabe & Corr (1997) make is that the manner in which one thinks of death philosophically is tied in some important way to one's evaluation of it. Feifel (1977) believes that in the final analysis all human behaviour of consequence is a response to the problem of death. He continues this line of thought by adding that the appreciation of finiteness serves not only to enrich self-knowledge, but also prompts us toward achievement and creativity.

The depressed mood that accompanies most grieving is explained by two theories. One is Seitz's (in Cleiren, 1994, p.20) low enforcement theory where the depression is seen as being caused by a massive loss of formerly provided reinforcement. The other is Seligman's theory of learned helplessness (in Cleiren, 1994). The bereaved is powerless to change the situation as he cannot get the object back. This then leads to a depressed state in which potentially adaptive behaviour does not occur.

Gauthier and Marshall (in Cleiren, 1994, p.20) on the other hand, describe the major cause of pathological grief as being the social environment. The intensity of the bereavement reaction is determined by disposition, abruptness of the loss, its significance, the availability of a replacement and social reinforcement for grieving or avoidance. In the course of a normal grief process the social environment will initially reinforce grief, later recovery and finally it will reinforce the development of new activities. Gauthier and Marshall regard the main causes of prolonged grief to lie in inadequate or misplaced social reinforcement where grief symptoms are reinforced.
instead of adaptive behaviour.

Goldberg (in Despelder & Strickland, 1983), on the other hand, viewed death as a family crisis for which new problem solving skills must be developed. The family as a social unit needs to fulfil various tasks such as reassigning roles within and outside the family. Looking at individuals understanding of death, we notice the importance of the family's views about death. An individual's personal meaning systems are evolved in part from his relationship to his family, culture, religion etc. (however it is beyond the scope of this writing to delve into each one of these factors that influence a person's meaning systems).

Moos (1995) posits that loss cannot be studied as an individual phenomenon because of the interaction between the family members. Families and individuals are dynamic evolving systems (Rubin, 1986), and when a death occurs in a family the reaction of each individual will affect others and therefore trigger change throughout the family system. Similarly, the family systems theories of Minuchin and Bowen illustrate how loss needs to be studied as a family phenomenon, as the family system affects and is affected by the grief of its members (Detmer & Lamberti, 1991).

A loss is shaped by the social context in which it occurs. From the viewpoint of symbolic interaction theory, part of the social context for understanding, organising, validating, and defining feelings, actions and priorities is removed when a significant person is lost (Rosenblatt in Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 1993). Those feelings of emptiness, sadness, anger, or anything else that might be labelled 'grief' can in part be attributed to the loss of social context. Losing any person who has been important in defining self and situation provides a character to grief. The loss of a social interaction basis for defining events, feelings, and meanings will compel people to search for alternative bases for defining the situation and self. The definitional processes that involve social activities are called "constructionist" by Gergen (1985).

People who have had a significant loss may find new significance in possessions belonging to the deceased. People may use photo albums, mementos, household furnishings, and other possessions to define their place in the world and simultaneously
their relationship to each other. When the relationship with the deceased, which helped in defining oneself and one's world, is lost, people may turn to things to remind themselves of the definitions that were maintained in the relationship. These articles may also help in the search for new meanings that will take the loss into account. Titus, Rosenblatt, & Anderson (1979) use constructionist theory to explain why the importance of possessions to bereaved people can lead to conflict around inheritances. The meanings contained in pieces of estate may define the relationship with that person as well as one's place in the family.

Symbolic interaction theory combines well with family systems theory wherein the individual functions within and reflects on a relationship system (Rosenblatt in Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 1993). As family members differ in their relationships to the deceased, they consequently will differ in what they grieve. Family systems have implicit and explicit rules regarding how to grieve and how to express emotions (Ford, 1983). Family systems are always in flux and rules are open to challenge, negotiation, and reinterpretation. A loss may lead to a negotiation of the rules and may inevitably add to what is being grieved.

A relatively original theory of death and loss called terror management theory was developed from the writings of Becker (in Schulz, 1992). Terror management theory assumes that cultural systems serve the function of buffers against human awareness of vulnerability and eventually mortality. Cultural systems encourage conceptions of the world as a just place and promise symbolic immortality through identification with the system and real immortality through religion. However, to enjoy these benefits one has to abide by the systems rules and to live up to the common cultural standards. In order to achieve the feeling of being a worthy participant in the cultural system people are motivated to believe in, and belong to, these cultural systems. The theory predicts that making death more conspicuous would motivate people to respond more positively to those who uphold cultural values and especially negatively to those violate them. The model then predicts that the closer the bond to one's culture the less death anxiety would be experienced. Interestingly, Becker also believes that the notion of illusion is consistent with some views of symbolic immortality, according to which a person finds an antidote to his terror of death in identification with the cultural system (in Schulz,
The expression and intrapsychic experience of grief is seen to be controlled and moulded by the internal debate wherein personal and cultural forces are balanced (Klapper, Moss, Moss & Rubinstein, 1994). It follows then that the need to control and understand grief both serve to shape and contain it.

It has been well documented that culture influences the way loss is perceived and experienced (Charmaz, 1980 in Klapper et al., 1994). Klapper et al argue that the intrapsychic experience of grief can be understood by observing the culturally based ideals about coping with loss as well as the bereaved's perception of these expectations.

DeSpelder and Strickland (1983) also sees death as a community event. Death does not end the survivor's membership in family, community or nation. A survivor's response to death is complex, encompassing a multitude of personal, family, and social factors. DeSpelder maintains that by understanding the issues involved in survivorship, we offer ourselves greater opportunity to cope successfully with loss and to use the experience of loss to become more fully human.

Of particular importance are four factors that have been identified by Edgar Jackson (in DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983) as conditioning a person's emotional reaction to bereavement. The first factor is the individual's personality. An immature, dependent personality will be more vulnerable to the loss of a person in whom a large amount of emotional capital has been invested. Such an investment may represent an attempt to compensate for feelings of personal inadequacy by projecting part of one's self identity onto another person. Therefore, when bereavement occurs too much of the projected self is still involved in the loss. The second conditioning factor identified by Jackson is social roles, which provide a framework wherein the survivor tries to cope with grief. A question to ask, says Jackson, is: What does society say should be a particular survivor's response to death in general or to a specific death? The social and cultural environment are important in defining a person's grief and mourning. The third factor is the survivor's perception of the relative importance of the deceased. The fourth
conditioning factor identified by Jackson is the person's value structure: that is, the relative worth the person assigns to different experiences and possible outcomes. A value structure that allows death an appropriate place in a person's philosophy of life can be significant in determining how he or she experiences loss and grief.

DeSpelder and Strickland determine the components of a mature concept of death which include the understanding that: death is irreversible and permanent, it involves the cessation of physiological functioning, and is universal and inevitable. Recognition of these facts is believed to constitute possession of a mature concept of death, although other non-empirical ideas about death may be associated with an understanding of these observable facts. Such non-empirical issues may include questions of the meaning of death and continued existence after physical death. These questions affect our understanding of death, and we deal with them in various ways as we develop our own concepts and feelings about death.

In addition, what a person "knows" about death may differ from time to time, according to circumstances and experiences. DeSpelder and Strickland propose that a person's understanding of death and loss may fluctuate among different ways of "knowing" as he or she develops a personal framework in which to place it.

Bereavement, for example, comes from the root word torn up or shorn off - as if something has suddenly been yanked away. The word thus conveys a sense of something being deprived, of having something stripped away against one's will, of being robbed. However, if we think about bereavement only as a destructive violent event, our understanding will be different from that of a person who defines bereavement as a change that is cyclical and natural, a normal event in human experience (DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983).

Lazarus and Launier (in Cleiren, 1994) state that the interpretation of the loss situation rather than the situation itself determines the consequences for the individual. When confronted with a new situation the individual appraises the situation by attempting to link what happens to one's schemata. When one is confronted with a new situation, primary appraisal takes place to assess its relevance to well-being. The three main
outcomes of appraisal are that a situation be judged as irrelevant, positive and stressful. If a situation is labelled as stressful, secondary appraisal takes place to decide on a plan for action to solve the problem. This involves looking at the implications of the situation, one's own capacities to handle the situation, and the choice of adequate coping strategies. A situation judged as stressful may be interpreted again in three different ways: challenge, threat or pain. Primary appraisal also determines intensity and quality of the emotions. Secondary appraisal refers to the ongoing assessment of the resources we have available to cope with a situation. Here, we attempt to choose the optimal course of action to take, in order to minimise damage. Theories of appraisals are continued by DeSpelder and Strickland (1983), who view the survivor's experience of the loss and grief as being conditioned to a large extent by his or her model of the world; that is, by the person's perception of reality and judgement of how the world works.

As a meaning-generating phenomenon, death does not remove the meaning of life, rather it pushes the person to create meaning in finite living (Kovacs, 1982).

Rogers (in Neimeyer, 1994) followed by forwarding a number of concepts that have been useful in the discussion of death. In his discussion of the "fully functioning person", Rogers assumes that there is perfect harmony between self-experiences, the self actualising tendency and the need for positive regard and self regard. The fully functioning person has no conditions of worth, no need to use defenses and is open to experiences. Individuals who fall short of this theoretical ideal are then threatened by the awareness of approaching death. They respond by protecting themselves against it through distortions and denial. A critical notion in Rogers' theory is an ability to maintain self-esteem in conditions that are interpreted as movement toward death. Rogers' concept of the 'ideal self' also has relevance to death as death threatens to finalise the discrepancy between the self and the ideal self.

Lonetto and Templer (in Neimeyer, 1994) persevere with psychoanalytic constructs by suggesting that death anxiety is determined by two factors. One factor reflects overall psychological health as evidenced by measures of general anxiety and depression while the second factor reflects specific life experiences concerning the topic of death. It
was proposed that the first factor represents death anxiety while the second factor represents a straightforward fear of death. A breakdown of defense mechanisms may bring about death anxiety, together with other psychopathological conditions such as depression, certain types of anxiety disorders, and psychosis.

"Everything that man does in his symbolic world is an attempt to deny and overcome his grotesque fate. He literally drives himself into blind obliviousness with social games, psychological tricks, personal preoccupations so far removed from the reality of his situation that they are forms of madness - agreed madness, shared madness, disguised and dignified madness, but madness all the same" (Becker in Neimeyer, 1994, p.27).

Death can be viewed as a form of loss which inherently causes a separation, both physical and psychological, from the deceased. As a person grows, he/she encounters separation and loss in varying forms i.e. change in body size, loss of a pet, moving home etc. By the time of the child's third birthday, he/she should have a incipient awareness of separation events (Bloom-Feshbach in Gray, 1991). The passage through childhood and adulthood will necessitate a mastery of separation events, as part of the normal maturation process.

The general view presented by Taylor and Brown (in Niemeyer, 1994, p.13) states that most people develop and maintain positive illusions regarding themselves, the world, their ability to control the environment and the future. These positive illusions differ from defense mechanisms and foster positive psychological adjustment. Being "higher-order beliefs" these higher order beliefs may not be tested very often.

People may acknowledge the inevitability of their own death and still consider it as an event belonging to the remote future without any relevance to the present. These important core beliefs have adaptive value, and the tendency to disconfirm it is very low. So, an individual may strengthen his belief that death is always at a safe distance by a type of learning that makes denying more effective. Becker (in Schulz, 1992) speaks of how children, facing such a battle, eventually give up in despair, building "character" defenses to conceal inner defeat.
Proponents of the healthy view of death assert that the fear of death is not natural and the child who receives good maternal care will develop a sense of basic security and not be subject to morbid fears of losing support, being annihilated or dying. A corollary from this approach proposed by Yalom (1980) and others, states that death anxiety is a manifestation of unfulfilled strivings in life and is "inversely proportional to life satisfaction" (p 207). Yalom postulates that the fear of living leads to, or is transformed into, the fear of death. Neimeyer (1994) disagrees and feels that it is more logical to consider that the fear of death transforms or alters the life experience. As a proponent of the morbid view, Becker claims the fear of death is natural and is present in everyone. He argued persuasively that the dread of death leads to denial on many levels.

A further perspective asserts that the impact of death of a family member is related to the importance that person had for 'survival of the genes' of the bereaved. Littlefield and Rushton (in Cleiren, 1994) do not express a view on the nature and function of grief, but only consider the magnitude of problems after the loss to be ultimately determined by the degree of impediment of genetic survival. This theory puts forward the view that women would suffer a greater loss than men because men have greater chances of reproducing themselves, and are fertile until old age. It is predicted that the ranking order of the kinship groups with regards to difficulties with bereavement would be as follows: parents would be most affected, followed by spouses, then siblings and finally children.

Rando (1993) developed a new stage model within complicated mourning is explained. According to Rando, given the amount of time since the death, there is some compromise, distortion, or failure of one or more of the six 'R' processes of mourning. These processes are (a) recognise the loss, (b) react to the separation, (c) recollect and reexperience the deceased and the relationship, (d) relinquish old attachments to the deceased and the old assumptive world, (e) readjust to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old, and (f) reinvest. The experience of mourning for Rando is especially subjective, and what is a "normal" death to one person may be extremely abnormal and consequently extremely stressful to another.

Theories on death seem to become more complex and diverse by building on various
aspects of previous ideas. A modern theory is the following one proposed by Gaines (1997).

Gaines sees Freud's emphasis on the need to detach from the lost object as having obscured another aspect of the work for mourning, which is to repair the disruption to the inner self-other relationship caused by the actual loss. Gaines proposes that the individual needs to reconnect the severed bond and to maintain the availability of a sustaining inner relationship. Gaines calls this task "creating continuity". Here the mourner is faced with the difficult project of simultaneously making room for new investments while consolidating the old. By creating or maintaining continuity Gaines refers to those internalizing actions that take place after object loss occurs, that repair, modify, expand, or intensify preexisting internalisations of the lost object, so as to enable the individual to continue to experience a sense of inner connection and meaningful relation to that object, and to maintain this connection over time. It also includes a variety of activities such as visiting the grave, conversing with friends, donating money to institutions etc.

Fundamental to these tasks is the concept of internalization which consist of a variety of modes which have their own structural and experiential characteristics. Introjection, incorporation and identification are the most commonly used modes of internalization.

The mourners problem in Freud's earlier thinking is primarily an economic one where the libido is bound up in a departed object. Only when this finite quantity of libidinal energy is detached from the lost object and can be reinvested in a new object can the person recover. Freud, however, moved beyond the exclusive focus on detachment, toward a recognition of the task of continuity. Freud realized that identification is not a pathological process, but occurs normally as a mechanism to help the child adapt to change and losses in the relation to his parents, and is actually one of the major ways in which development occurs (Freud in Gaines, 1997). Later still, Freud stated, "If one has lost an object or has been obliged to give it up, one often compensates oneself by identifying oneself with it and by setting it up once more in one's ego, so that here object choice regresses, as it were, to identification (in Gaines, 1997, p.63). In his last major statement on mourning, Freud made it clear that the function of identification is to
facilitate the work of detachment. Freud did not seem to recognise the contradiction of abandoning the object by strengthening the inner relationship to that object. The usefulness of viewing mourning as a process of detachment stems from at least two factors. First, it is a powerful fact of life that coming to terms with a loss must involve some relinquishing of hopes, dreams, and some future expectations; some acceptance of possibilities that will never be. This idea of detachment offers a compelling description of the individual's inner process of relinquishment: the struggle to hold on to life as it was, the step-by-step letting go of wishes and plans, the gradual acceptance of a new reality.

Second, the idea of detachment offers an explanation for the phenomenology of pathological mourning. In cases of pathological mourning one sees a syndrome characterized by a relatively shallow or brief period of overt grief, a conscious acceptance of the reality of the loss, and numerous behaviours, dreams, affect states, and transference reactions indicative of unconscious fantasies of undoing the death. Alternatively, there may be a period of intense grief and absorption with the loss, which never really ends and forever remains an obstacle to resuming normal life (Gaines, 1997). In both cases, the individual is overly involved with the lost object and is unable to detach from it.

The limitations of the detachment model, according to Gaines, is primarily one of distributing the libidinal energy. He asserts that libidinal objects can be exchanged for one another, but significant relationships, with their multiplicity of functions and their formative role in an individual's inner world, cannot be replaced.

They must be maintained, and new relationships added to the old. Another limitation of viewing mourning as exclusively a process of detachment regards the fate of the departed object and the relationship to it. Does it now become irrelevant and fade away? The detachment model fails to make explicit what happens to this relationship with the lost object. Gaines proposes that a bereaved child whose sense of safety in the world, whose definition of self, and whose model of his future all derive from his internalization of his relationship to his departed parent, cannot detach himself from that relationship.
Gaines states that what is required is not some simple relinquishment of the relationship, but some transformation of it, so that the inner relationship can continue to be animated without ongoing nourishment from an actual relationship. Loewald (in Gaines, 1997) described mourning as involving "... not only the gradual piecemeal relinquishment of the lost object, but also the internalization, the appropriation of aspects of this object, or rather, of aspects of the relationship between the ego and the lost object which are 'set up in the ego' and become a relationship within the ego system" (p.555). This is what Gaines refers to as the creation of continuity. Gaines indicates that the need to create this kind of continuity for children is obvious, but it is also present for adults. Although children need parental objects to build and maintain inner structure, adults also continue to use the relationships to their parents to maintain a stable inner structure as well as to modify that structure to meet evolving adaptational needs. Relationships to one's parents continue to be needed and continue to evolve throughout our lives, before and after their deaths. When a parent is dead, this reorganization of the relationship and reapplication of it to the present and future will take place largely internally. Some aspects of the relationship to one's parents only become relevant after they are gone e.g. the memory of how a parent dealt with aging and impending death. Gaines maintains that the sense of connection and continuity with one's parents are particularly meaningful and are needed as one copes with the fears of isolation and abandonment often associated with the idea of death.

Surprisingly, in different words, Freud alludes to this aspect of mourning where he said, "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 (in Gaines, 1997, p.386).

Object constancy is regarded by Gaines as being an important factor in an individual's ability to create continuity. From early childhood to adolescence one develops the capacity to tolerate longer and longer separations from a parental object and still maintain an active inner connection. Wolfenstein (in Gaines, 1997, p.558) suggested
that only after the decathexis of the parents during adolescence, which she termed "trial mourning", is the individual capable of mourning an actual loss. Gaines adds that maybe only after the degree of object constancy that follows the internalization process of adolescence has been achieved does the individual begin to be able to maintain the continuity necessary to cope adaptively with loss. As the development of the capacity for object constancy increases, the individual becomes better prepared to cope with permanent loss by death.

Another factor affecting the individual's ability to maintain continuity is conflict. It has been frequently noted that the aggressive component of an intensely ambivalent relationship complicates mourning. The loss is experienced unconsciously as the result of death wishes toward the individual. This creates unbearable guilt or fear of retaliation, and so the reality of the loss is denied which in turn disrupts continuity. Gaines points out that any conflictual element in relation to the lost object that has been dealt with by maintaining distance, distrust, and resentment will interfere with mobilizing the positive elements of the relationship that can be used to maintain continuity.

Creation of continuity, says Gaines, has a bittersweet quality. Creation of continuity and detachment are both processes that appose denial and wishful clinging to the object; they actually work together in a dynamic relationship. Detaching or 'letting go' may make room for new possibilities but does little for relieving this passive position. Creation of continuity, on the other hand, is experienced as the individual reasserting himself as the active agent, making commitments and planning for the future. It is a process of ego remobilization.

While creation of continuity may contain an illusion of power to defy fate and time, it is just the kind of illusion, created in play or "transitory space" that Winnicot (in Gaines, 1997, p.561) identified as being at the root of creativity and the sense of personal initiative. Gaines argues that the individual cannot recover from loss until he can reestablish some sense of active determination and control in the very area where the loss has deprived him of all control.

From the point of continuity, mourning clearly does not end. One continues the psychic
work of maintaining the continuity forever. As one goes along, this may be done with less pain, strain, or conscious effort, and with a differing mixture of accompanying effects. At other times, developmental changes may require reactivation of the process (Gaines, 1997). From this point of view, mourning is something that cannot be finished. Rather, it is a process that is carried on continuously, at times nearly quiescently. Later, at times of change or developmental progression, it is reintensified as one again confronts the sadness of one's loss and experiences in a new way the need for a sense of connection with one's departed objects. This conceptualization of loss and mourning allows for a more flexible, individualistic evaluation of how well or poorly someone is mourning. Obviously, all mourners are not expected to fit the linear model of loss, acute grief, detachment and reinvestment. While the acute phase of grief comes to an end, the challenges of coping with a loss continues throughout the lifespan.

2.8 The song and dance of death

Vaugh (in Mckay, 1990) believes that reflection on the enigma of death, especially in reaction to mortality, carries one into the heart of a bitter paradox reflected in art, poetry, philosophy, song and literature.

"Poets are irresponsible people"

(Freud in Miles & Demi, 1994, p.104).

The following poetry and prose, though, are examples of non scientific conceptualizations of these experiences. Poetry and prose helps us understand the individual's understanding of death and loss from a perspective that is far less influenced and restricted by previous modernist conceptualisations.

Endings as metaphors for loss denote the end of a relationship, the end of a holiday, retirement - all these endings typify changes that arise in the course of living. Some writers passionately describe these 'little deaths' while others describe their relationships with death. Kenneth Ring wonders if the study of death has emerged so strongly in order to globally sensitize us to the experience of death precisely because the notion of death on a planetary scale now hangs, "like the sword of Damocles, over
our heads - possibly a way of the universe inoculating us against the fear of death" (in Despelder & Strickland, 1983, p.419).

**Living your Dying**

Working through our endings allows us to redefine our relationships, to surrender what is dead and to accept what is alive, and to be in the world more fully to face the new situation.

(Keleman in Despelder & Strickland, 1983, p.192).

**The Angel Of Death**

The Angel of Death is always with me - the hard wild flowers of his teeth, his body like cigar smoke swaying through a small town jail.

He is the wind that scrapes through our months, the train wheels grounding over our syllables. He is the footstep continually pacing through our chests, the small wound in the soul, the meteor puncturing the atmosphere. And sometimes he is merely a quiet between the start of an act and its completion, a silence so loud it shakes you like a tree.

..........  

Still,
it is humiliating to be born a bottle:  
to be filled with air, emptied, filled again;  
to be filled with water, emptied, filled again;  
and, finally, to be filled with earth.

And yet I am glad that The Angel of Death is always with me:  
his footsteps quicken my own,  
his silence makes me speak,  
his wind freshens the weather of my day.  
And it is because of him  
I no longer think  
that with each beat  
my heart  
is a planet drowning from within  
but an ocean filling for the first time.

Morton Marcus  
(in DeSpelder & Strickland, 1983, p 427/8)

An altogether different view on death and loss is given by Gibran (1953):

The deeper that sorrow carves into your being,  
the more joy you can contain.  
Is not the cup that holds your wine the very  
cup that was burned over the potter's oven?  
And is not the lute that soothes your spirit,  
the very wood that was hollowed by knives?  
When you are joyous, look deep into your heart  
and you shall find it is only that which has given  
you sorrow that is giving you joy.  
When you are sorrowful, look again in your  
heart, and you shall see that in truth you are  
weeping for that which has been your delight.
Some of you say, "Joy is greater than sorrow,"
and others say, "Nay, sorrow is the greater."
But I say unto you, they are inseparable.
Together they come, and when one sits alone with
you at your board, remember that the other is
asleep upon your bed.

(Gibran, 1953, p.16).

2.9 CONCLUSION

The focus on this chapter was on theories on death. There are theories of annihilation of
the self (non-existence), death as a radical transformation and separation, death as a
threat to the meaningfulness of life, and death as a threat to realisation of life's basic
goals and potentials. The evolution of theories on death has slowly shifted from a
modernist view of death as an instinct that can be defined and measured to a more post-
modern view of death as something that can never be known as a fact or a truth.
Bringing the human component back into the discussion of death gives the topic a
breathe of freshness.

On a review of the above literature, it may be concluded that the statement by Socrates
that no person can ever know death, might be true. It would therefore be foolish to
restrict our attempts at expanding our understanding of the human being, by exclusively
focusing on the empirical approach. It is therefore hoped that this paper indicates the
necessity of utilising a social constructionist and post modern approach in combination
with positivistic modernist thinking in order to widen the scope of death psychology. This
approach allows accommodation of a broader spectrum of thought on death and loss.

The study of death is inextricably linked to the development of identity and the sense of
self. Allocating meaning to death is an universal event and cannot be considered as
independent of the experience of life.

"To speak of dying is to speak of living. During life everyone experiences dying in a
fragmentary form but finally each person has to experience the conflicting feeling of the nothingness of life and the fulfilment of life" (McKay, 1990, p.38).

Barnes (1994) writes that those who have gone into the depths of life are most certain of its heights and believe the struggle to be worthwhile. In conclusion, Dag Hammarskjold (in Hardt, 1979, p.ix) wrote: "In the last analysis, it is our conception of death which decides our answers to all the questions life puts to us".
CHAPTER 3

DEATH AND LOSS:
RECONSTRUCTING, DECONSTRUCTING, CONSTRUCTING...

3.1 Introduction

Death is more than a biological process. It is one of the most unique experiences an individual will ever face as it takes place exclusively within the skin of that person. However, nearly every act of dying influences others. The act of dying and its consequences is a social event. One of the key factors in determining a social group or community is shared meaning. The socially created meanings around death are shared in the process of human interaction. The communication of these meanings can be verbal or non-verbal, subtle or overt. A specific death has distinct meanings wherever the deceased had meaningful relationships. The living are not only concerned with the death of a person, but also with what happens to the survivors as a result of the death. So, meanings surrounding the death of a person continue long after the biological person may be gone. In fact, a person may even take on more significance after dying than before. Meanings become intricately linked with beliefs which influence our behaviours and vice versa. So, a death experience almost always occurs in a social situation to which personal meanings are ascribed.

Just as biological bodies are created, live and die; bodies of meaning are also created, live and die. Meanings are transmitted and have some continuity through societal and familial groups. The family (or society) teaches the children (or new generation) how to understand and deal with death. Meanings that are not overtly communicated become difficult to change or to modify and may result in one becoming stuck with an 'unhealthy' or 'unworkable' understanding of death. Any individual can change his or her death related meaning systems, but it is difficult to maintain these new understandings if they are not supported and validated by significant others.
"As in the ripples caused by dropping a stone into the lake, changes in death-related meaning will inevitably have consequences that move into and penetrate other areas of living."
(Lemming & Dickinson, 1985, p.33).

Each one of us holds an image of death. That image is the sum of all our thoughts, feelings, and experiences surrounding death. The meanings of loss are answered from our teleological views of life, death, God and humanity. "Our deep investment in these issues stems from threat of chaos, purposelessness, meaninglessness, and we seek to transcend once and for all. We construct the meaning of our lives, express it through values... and then defend them as if our lives depended on their preservation" (Weenolsen, 1988, p.63).

Meaning requires interpretation, and we interpret life events according to our individual paradigms or theories. From birth to death, each of us is engaged in the continuous process of seeking to make sense of our life experience. As infants we begin to construct our own pre-theories about the world out of the information that comes to us through our senses (Piaget in Weenolsen, 1988, p.236). Gradually, life experiences and their interpretations create rules; they become instrumental, semantic, symbolic, conceptual, metaphorical and sensory - which are products of an increasingly complex organism interacting with the world. A person or object represents not only itself but our relationship to it, its relationship to other objects as well as other selves, and finally its place in world of which we are continuously attempting to create some meaning or make some sense. These meanings of experience are created on different levels at different stages of development. The experience of the death of a significant other requires significant restructuring of life, self, meaning, and the rules for creating meaning.

3.2 The shift in research methodology

The assumption in positivistic, quantitative research, is that the objective study of observable variables is sufficient to produce knowledge about the structure of reality (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). However, there has been an argument for research methods
that foster creativity, invention and the generation of new theory. Although the study of
death and loss is vast, there is a lack of original and innovation conceptualisation
around these issues.

The drive to rigorously define and control is the strength and weakness of quantitative
research. "In the act of measurement the physicist interacts with the observed object
and thus causes it to be revealed not as it is in itself but as a function of measurement" (Heisenberg, 1971). The desire to measure or quantify, together with an exaggerated
idea of scientific rigour, has led to narrowly circumscribed empirical studies, and
frequently to the exclusive use of quantitative measures (Bluebond-Langner, 1987/8).

Quantitative research is too mechanistic, narrow and limited to capture a comprehensive
view of an event that cannot be truly experienced. It is not an incorrect procedure but
rather one that loses the human in the intensely human experience of death and loss. Empirical methods also lack the sensitivity required when dealing with such a powerfully human aspect of life. Quantitative research investigates around the phenomenon of death by focusing on self made constructs such as death anxiety and death instincts. Purely qualitative work has its limitations in its wishy-washiness. It is sometimes scorned for its subjectiveness as one person's experience is regarded as being so unique as to be of little worth to another person.

Frankl regards reductionism as today's nihilism. Reductionism, he believes, reduces a human being, by no less than an entire dimension, namely the human dimension. "It projects what is uniquely human from the three-dimensional domain of the total human being into the two-dimensional plane of the subhuman. In other words, reductionism is sub-humanism" (Frankl, 1995, p.60).

It seems as if psychological research has moved in two diverse directions - towards simplicity and condensation as in quantitative research or towards comprehensiveness and inclusiveness as in qualitative research (McKay, 1990). The strength of both these directions is lost when used exclusively without respect for the other. This paper proposes a bringing together of both of these directions so that their inherent values can be combined. As I have mentioned earlier I do not propose an all encompassing
strategy or theory. It is naive to assume that any one research strategy will provide satisfactory answers to all the challenges in psychology (Kastenbaum, 1987/8). No particular form of knowledge is superior to any other since each type has an unique contribution to what it means to be human (Fertziger, 1985). Quantitative and qualitative research should be "... viewed as two phases of science, rather than two ways of doing science" (Van Vuuren in McKay, 1990, p.65).

Our assertions about the nature of phenomena and the field of psychology have implications about the way in which phenomena may be discovered or known (Mckay, 1990). No research procedure can be separated from theory since they all function within the realm of a particular set of assumptions and ideas about the nature of the world.

The theories of psychologists such as Freud give us greater insight into their own personal constructs of death, than they provide information about death itself. It is as necessary to recognise the limitations of strict empirical scientific approaches as it is to recognise the value of the arts and creative writings as sources of insight into the human being. Attitudes to death are not merely results of dealing with the stress or are not merely manifestations of death anxieties or coping mechanisms. The phenomenon of death can be understood by studying the significance of the relationship between attitudes and ideas or insights about death (Kovacs, 1982).

Certain theorists have accentuated the importance of constraining one's focus to the level of the observable and quantifiable. Others regard this punctuation as not being adequate when dealing with the complexity of human experience which may require metaphorical forms of description (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982). Reductionists would argue the usefulness of such metaphorical accounts.

The move toward post-modernism can also be seen as a move away from pragmatism where observable outcomes can be tallied. While the pragmatic position seeks to reduce phenomena into manageable and practical bits and pieces of information, we also need to look in the opposite direction. Such a position, characterised by a sensitivity to holism and complexity, is motivated by aesthetics. By embodying the
aesthetic perspective, our understanding and appreciation of human experience can be expanded (Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982).

Integrated ecosystemic approaches ask both pragmatic and aesthetic questions. Maslow (in Keeney & Sprenkle, 1982) puts forward that we think both about the particulars and about wholes, without falling into the trap of concentrating on one at the expense of the other.

Although mention has been made of modernism and post-modernism, empirical and non-empirical forms of thinking, social constructionism attempts to move beyond the dualism by placing knowledge within the process of social interchange (Gergen, 1985). Social constructionism can be seen as one leg of the post-modern movement. The constructing or co-constructing of something can be seen to be the objective of the social constructionist model. As opposed to modernist research, the researcher's aim is to not to discover 'truths' or 'essences' that exist away from the researcher in the real world but rather to construct local truths together with the research subjects. Here the researcher is seen rather as being a participant to the research process engaging himself/herself in the discussion. The researcher is therefore never seen as standing apart from the research system, but always within the system, co-creating it through conversation. A characteristic of social constructionist research is that the researcher is continually influencing and being influenced by the research process.

The social constructionist also focuses on the importance of language in social interchange, because words obtain the meaning through this social interchange. Meanings evolve through individuals in conversation with one another. All human activity occurs in the understanding that is created through social construction and dialogue (Anderson & Goolishian, 1993).

Life is best understood and has meaning when we consider it as an ongoing story. The development of a sense of self is the construction of a life-story. Every death creates a story. Stories bind together events in time, organizing reality in terms of a connected, past present and future. By asking the participants to tell their story of how they experienced themselves at the time of the parental loss and how they experienced
themselves through various life-stages, allows for a richer view on this topic. This open ended narrative based interview gives a new perspective that complexifies and adds to the existing literature and our understanding of these issues.

We are reminded by Jungel that life does not just happen (in McKay, 1990). He believes that people are active and creative subjects who consummate their life, giving it meaning and shape. As we fashion life, we also fashion our death. Our personal and social beliefs of life articulate social and personal perceptions of death (Leming and Dickinson, 1985).

Life experience is richer than discourse. The structuring of narratives requires recourse to a selective process in which people prune from their experience those events that do not fit with the dominant evolving stories that they and others have of themselves. So, much of people’s lived experience goes unstoried.

A further focus of this paper will be not only to highlight those common themes expressed, but also those aspects of the interviewee’s stories that are not mentioned.

3.3 Methodology

A sample of three adults were approached to engage in a conversation around death and loss. These adults all experience childhood parental loss. The interview was semi-structured and comprised of a number of open-ended questions guided mostly by naive curiosity. The sample consisted of three males all of whom had lost a father due to illness. The sample was gathered by word of mouth. The fact that all lost fathers is coincidence.

This paper will attempt to look at the issue of loss in a new light. The aim is not to attempt to find a connection between childhood parental loss and adult personality. It is rather an exploratory search looking at the meaning-systems and experiences of these adults. This dissertation aims to explore the experience of three South African adults, as reflected in their accounts of their experiences of childhood parental loss as well as their understanding of death itself. Following a social constructionist perspective, this chapter
describes a research methodology which regards the findings to be co-constructed by the researcher and the participants.

Steier (in Hamilton, 1985) mentions that it is necessary for the social constructionist researcher to apply the same rules to himself as he does to his research. In line with this, a contribution from the researcher’s personal experience of the research as well as his experiences of childhood parental loss are included this paper.

3.4 Conclusion

Moving away from positivistic research, this study encompasses a more post-modern constructionist epistemology. Emphasis is placed on the individual understanding and experience of events as well as the personal meanings that are created.

The concern of this paper is that the pragmatic and modernist thinking be juxtaposed with the aesthetic, where both are vital components of all systems. A brief literature review has been added for a number of reasons. Firstly, modernism is of value. Secondly, the inclusion of literature not only fulfils certain modernistic dissertation criteria, but serves to highlight its incompleteness in portraying life. Individual meaning systems and personal understandings of events allow for an altogether unique perspective. Social constructionism and narratives combined with 'theory' results in a more complex and richer understanding.

Death has a special significance and unique connection to each of us. The scope of this dissertation and the limitations of theory does not allow for a modernistic and positivistic study of these death themes and meaning systems. As we do not live in a totally post-modern world, a post-modern dissertation also presents with difficulties. But, with an appreciation that we are caught in the process of moving from a modernistic world to a post-modern one, this dissertation illustrates the predicament of not simultaneously working with both schools of thought.
Heinrich was approached by his mother to take part in this interview. He heard that it was an interview about children who had lost parent/s at an early age and was indifferent about discussing issues surrounding his experiences of the death.

The interview began with Heinrich mentioning that he was comfortable speaking about death and loss and that it was "no problem for me". He felt that there was no difficulty in speaking about this because it concerned an issue that happened many years ago. For Heinrich, his father's death is a historical issue and therefore has little influence on his present living.

"I mean, I am used to it, you know. For me, growing up without a father is, its, eh, I'm used to it... I mean my father died when I was about four years old, and so I actually never knew him. So it actually, it never... it never bothered me".

Heinrich disregards the idea that his father had any influence on his life. The denial or minimalization of the relationship, and hence the loss was powerful and consistent during the interview. For Heinrich, speaking about his father and death is "no big deal". He regards it as "really part of life for me". On which type of relationship he presently has with his father, Heinrich emphatically denies that he has any relationship with his deceased father at all.

Heinrich placed a lot of emphasis on his developmental stage at the time in explaining as to why his father's death has had such a small influence on his life. He says: "Ag, I think that the basic thing is that it depends on what age you were when the person's father died... or any family member for that matter - close family member... but I think it depends on the age ... that's the big thing", and " I don't think it bothers me like somebody would if.. who lost his father at the age of say 10 years old, or even 6 years or 9 years old. Because he knew his father at that stage".
Heinrich felt that older children would be affected more by their fathers' death because they could understand the concept of death. While older children would have a clearer understanding of death and a better formed relationship with the parent, Heinrich felt that it didn't bother him.

After the death of his father, Heinrich's mother married and divorced twice and is currently married. With regards to his mother's three marriages after his father's death Heinrich constantly reminds me that it does not bother him.

"I think she were(sic) a bit hasty... but it's not for me a problem any more because I am out of the house, I'm married, I've got a child. So it doesn't bother me".

Heinrich's mother married far too quickly in his eyes. He was a bit resentful that his mother remarried several times as he believed that his mother wanted a father in his life. Heinrich felt that there was no need for this as he had his grandfather. The relationship between Heinrich and his grandfather was a strong one. "After my father's death I think the only father that I had was my grandfather. Because we did everything together you know... we went camping, we went fishing, he'd come and pick me up after school to go swimming, and do all those(sic) stuff". Heinrich developed a close male bond with his grandfather. The fact that his grandfather also experienced the loss of a father at a young age allowed them to connect well with one another, "That clicks between the two of us... he had an experience and I had a(sic) experience".

Interestingly, Heinrich's only friend was raised by his uncle and not his father. "So, he never had a relationship with his father and I think it, it's stages like that where I click with people".

Heinrich is able to engage people at a more personal level when he feels that they share an important experience.

No prior or consequent deaths in Heinrich's life had an emotional effect on him except for his grandfather's death two years ago. "It did shock me, really. But that's the only
thing that shocked me. My other grandfather died and it didn't bother me, you know. My
great-grandfather died, it didn't bother me". Heinrich's grandfather seemed to play a vital
role in his life. He strongly valued being able to ask his grandfather for advice and being
taught how to use his hands to fix things. Being independent and self-reliant are
qualities highly regarded by Heinrich.

"... he took over the role of my father basically". His grandfather was the only person in
the family that he could relate to, and they would see each other every day.

Heinrich's grandfather died unexpectedly at the age of 70. The first time Heinrich
expresses some emotion is when he speaks about his grandfather's death. Heinrich
found it devastating that his grandfather was no longer available to him. "... I could pick
up the phone and call him and ask him what must I do with this... ask him advice. You
can't pick up the phone and call him. So, that was devastating for me". Heinrich believes
that he presently still grieves over this loss.

Heinrich developed a fatalistic attitude toward life. He had a deadness toward feelings
and relationships, except for his wife and child. Even when the pets he took care of died,
he felt nothing. "...If it dies it dies, you know. That's part of life. That's how I see it... I
mean, I can drive my car and a truck hits me tomorrow, I mean, its part of life". Heinrich
speaks of how he accepts life as it is and does not question its injustices. He says
nothing much affects him.

With regards to the funeral, Heinrich could not remember attending. He not only did not
recall the church service, he also felt that it was unimportant to him because he did not
know his father that well.

There is, however, some thought about how life would have been different had his father
not died, but again Heinrich concluded with: "... but its not like it bothers me every day,
you know".

During the few occasions that he wonders about life with his father, Heinrich fantasises
about his father helping him with sport and physical hand work. Heinrich communicated
regret at the loss of potential achievements in sport and his career. He would have greatly appreciated somebody to guide and encourage him, "... if you did something wrong, to tell you alright, you must do this". On a similar note Heinrich was remorseful about the fact that nobody was present to "show me a way to a better education". He felt that if his father were alive, he would have guided and encouraged Heinrich in his studies and education after school, which would have enabled him to reach his current financial position much faster and with a lot less difficulty.

Heinrich does not recall much of his father. "It was like a dream, you know". He could only remember two or three instances when he spent time with his father, and even these were not clear - "I can't remember details". Heinrich remembers a limited amount about his father. "...the time they came and took him up, took him to hospital in the ambulance, and the other time he was washing a car".

He did not have a picture in his mind as to what his father looked like or what his voice sounded like, but does carry a picture of his father with him. Heinrich expressed no desire to learn more about his father and seemed satisfied about the few details he had. Although his mother was available and willing to talk about his father, Heinrich was not willing to make any enquiries. Heinrich knew his father was a policeman but had no idea of what rank he achieved or where he worked: "... don't know what he did in there... never bothered me to ask, or I never though about it to ask. It never bothered me".

For Heinrich, death is a natural event that is not to be questioned. Death of a loved one is not the "end of the world". He firmly believes that one must not dwell on the painful aspects of a death or loss: "... like my grandfather, I mean it really bothered me a lot... but I can't go and sit and sulk about it, you know. Life goes on". Heinrich is incredibly ambivalent about his feelings towards loss. He repeatedly affirmed that death does not bother him, but on thinking about his wife's possible death he changed his mind. His wife's death would affect him possibly because the only people he admits to being close to are his wife and child. "... the only people at this stage I depend on is my family, you know, my wife and child, and that's it. That's the only thing that's going for me at this stage". He does not have meaningful connections with anyone else. Heinrich mentions that he has one friend to whom he has not spoken to in a long time. He has difficulty
developing relationships. "I don't make friends easily... I don't know why, but I don't trust anyone"

Heinrich father's death was his first experience of death. As the interview progressed I noticed that Heinrich began speaking more about events that touched him in various ways. While at first he gave the impression that nothing ever perturbed him he later spoke more emotionally about his experiences of loss. Heinrich recounted a story of a dog he loved that was abused and later killed in a car accident. He had personally nurtured this dog since it was a puppy. "I broke down really. So that bothered me... After that, if a dog dies, it dies".

Heinrich finds it frightening even to imagine future losses. On being questioned on how he would react to the loss of a loved one he responded: "...if it came to that stage I would probably see what happened... I am not going to shoot myself, you know, I take life as it comes".

Heinrich dislikes the idea of being affected by life (and death). It perturbs him that his mother suffers from depression as a result of his father's death. "I think that's one big problem, that she never came over the fact that my father died". He does not believe in depression or stress.

"...thinking that my father died at a young age, it could probably happen to me". Heinrich went in for surgery to remove some growths from his head. As his father had died of cancer and had also had melanoma on his head, Heinrich was faced with the thought of his own mortality. Typically, Heinrich refuses to entertain the thought of his own death and responds by: "...it doesn't help you to go and sit and say alright, now will I die of this or will I die of this... I mean I have got a little child to look forward to ... (and) there's still hopes of another child coming, so there's still hopes of someday I'll take maybe my daughter to go watch her do sport, maybe I'll have a son, participate in his sport... give him encouragement".

His relationship with his mother has been poor for a number of years. He wants nothing to do with her and reminded me that he no longer relies on her or depends on her for
anything. Heinrich finds his mother's heaviness and connection to the past too great a perturbance to bear. "I've got a life of my own. I don't wanna see her every day. She still wants to keep a grip (on me) because of the fact that my father died".

From a young age Heinrich learnt to take care of himself. He received little support from his mother as it seemed that she was too preoccupied with her own grief to be available for Heinrich. There was a great emotional distance between the two of them with little physical affection being shown. "I would never go to her and hug her."

Heinrich is ambivalent as to what effects, if any, death and loss have had on him. He mentions that he had no problem growing up alone because the consequences of his father's death made him "hard".

Heinrich finds it extremely important to be a good father who is there for his children, but is concerned that he has had no father role to learn from.

In conclusion, Heinrich mentions what for me highlights the most prevalent theme of the interview - one of denial. "For me it is a part of life... there is no big deal about it, and that's it".
On meeting Jan I was struck by his energy and sense of humour. I warmed to him easily and he immediately began speaking about his father.

When Jan was eight years old his father died of a thrombosis. This is an illness that would never have killed his father in the present day because of the advance in technology. "It's unheard of." Jan describes his father as a successful self-made businessman who, "used to smoke, drink whisky and was horribly overweight".

At the time, Jan experienced intense sadness and cried but did not understand why he was so sad.

"I had this terrible, terrible, hollow feeling of immediate sadness because I .. OK, this is what people spoke of, when a person dies, he's gone, you're not going to see him tomorrow. And I realised that ... it hit me very, very hard, very immediately, and I think it was a nice clinical way of dealing with it. 'Cause there is no other way ...."

Jan spoke of the relationship he had with his father, "... I can't say I ever knew what he was like. Too young, I suppose". There was limited interaction between Jan and his father: " Never rolled over him and played like you play with your father. I can't remember that type of play". There was a distance between father and son that Jan is ambivalent about. "He was very fond of us, but I can't remember the contact... Maybe there was that contact, maybe I was too young to remember".

Jan does not recall spending special moments with his father where they enjoyed each other's company. On his father's returning home from work he recalls a respectful wariness. " And he would come home and he would say 'Breadwinner', bread under the arm, howzit, here I am, I've worked hard, don't bug me". Jan's personal experiences of
his father contrast quite strongly with the messages he received from his mother and other family members and friends. "... in later life you obviously hear he was a great guy and he did this well, and he was a soft-spoken person, and he was really a good father and all the rest of it".

Jan felt that his father's death did leave a gap in his life. However, this gap was sufficiently replaced by his mother. "... I think for a son to grow up without a father is fairly tough because you need a role model, but I think that my mother filled that role very, very well". What was important for Jan was that his mother never remarried and devoted herself to bringing himself and his sister up as well as she could. "She was always there looking for us".

After his father's death, Jan's family experienced a financial crisis. They had to sell their home and his mother, who was a "non-working" woman was receiving a state pension. "You just have to make do... I must say that I never had a financial fear, type of thing. I always knew that there was a meal coming and always had clothes. But at the same time, from my own perspective, I realised that I can't expect much. Never expected the extra... at school tours and stuff, you had to pay five rand, and I didn't even ask if I could go. I just accepted that I don't go, because we do not have five rand". However, Jan did not believe that he experienced any "psychological effects" because of financial constraints. Rather, he saw the family as being brought closer because of his father's death and its consequence: "I think as a family we were bonded by it".

The financial situation was seldom spoken about openly but nevertheless was communicated quite clearly to Jan. " She never moaned about money, but we realised that she was under pressure". Jan spoke of a difficult childhood but had a tendency to reframe each difficult situation positively. " But at the end of the day we fended for ourselves and came out the other end, swinging". I got the impression that Jan's family drew strongly together after his father's death.

Jan spoke with some fondness about memories he had relating to his father. He vividly recalls the car his father drove and the hat he used to wear when he drove. Even today certain events remind Jan of his father, "You know, always when I see an oke with a hat
I think of my father, his stupid bloody hat.

Jan spoke proudly about his experience of his father's funeral. It was the largest funeral that Jan had ever been to, which meant to Jan that his father was well liked in the community. However, not one person at the funeral remained in contact.

Jan found accompanying his mother in her mourning process to be very unsettling. "We used to go to Westpark (cemetery) and then one day I just said 'Stuff it. What are we doing here? What are we achieving? Why do we come here?'". Jan remembers as a seven-year old telling his mother to stop mourning for his father. Jan did not grieve in the 'normal' way expected of adults and seldom cried as a child: "Never did that".

The family environment in which Jan grew up was conducive to open communication about loss and the type of person Jan's father was. Jan recounted, with a lot of warmth, a number of stories about his father.

He found it unfair that a good person such as his father died at a relatively young age while "... you have an oke who drinks spirits in the park that is 90 (years old)". Around this issue, Jan consoles himself in the Christian way.

"It had to be, and I must accept it. Never really question it. But sometimes you feel like 'why me', everyone else has got a father, and somebody to look up to, and I must suck hard tit here".

Jan wonders about how life would have turned out had his father not died. He felt that even though it may have been easier and more enjoyable, he may not have had any of the positive experiences such as meeting his wife and having his children.

"How would you have turned out, would I have survived? We could have died in a car accident or a plane or something. You can't really question the pattern of life. You don't know what is in store for you". Jan questions the fairness of life by wondering why his father could not have lived another 5 years because that would been far easier for him and his family to cope with. He answers himself with: 'But life doesn't work like that'.
After Jan spoke so openly about his attempt to understand death and place meaning on loss in his life, he concludes with "It never affected me as a person".

The issue of gender identity has always been something on Jan's mind. He grew up in a home environment where he was the only male amongst females, " 'Cause it was all women... sisters, mother, female budgie, female dog, female cat... the maid, and me. And I am not gay. It's quite a miracle". Although he enjoyed "boy's games" and sport, Jan found that his mother was not able to enhance his participation in these activities. These activities were taught to Jan by his schoolmates and peer group. Here Jan sorely missed the involvement of a father figure.

"Shit, nobody watched me play rugby. It's things like that you miss. That I must say, you often see guys fathers' come to watch them play rugby and that, and sometimes you are envious. 'Cause there was nobody there to take interest, and say, 'Ah, how did you play today, good or bad?' They (his family) were indifferent. I was never the greatest rugby player, but like all kids you want to participate in something, and feel you have achieved something. But there was nobody ever to say good or bad. Never".

Jan regarded his father as a self-made man who was financially astute and he missed being taught about these personal strengths. "But I think what he could have taught me a lot about was business and life in general. Contacts, that type of on-your-feet education. That, I think I missed a lot". Jan constantly wonders how his father would react to his everyday lifestyle and dealings. Jan believes that he has a natural business flair which comes from his father." I often try in my mind - I honestly try and speak to him. Come on man, is this a good idea. Tell me which shares are going to go up and which are going to go down (laughs). I, I often try and communicate in my mind. Feel - have I turned out OK, is this what you would have thought - have I let you down. I often think of it like that".

Jan's mother was not able to be of great assistance with regards to school work either, as she had limited knowledge of the subjects. However, his mother had a great sense of
trust in his abilities. He developed a sense of responsibility and never needed to be pressured. "You know, I always felt, even though I was the youngest kid, I always felt like father of the house...Even as a little boy I always felt responsible". The death of his father led Jan to be self-reliant and independent. "I've made my own way, and I'll always make my own way".

"I feel what got me through this whole single parenthood was the fact that, as a kid, I felt a sense of responsibility. I always felt that I'm at a disadvantage and I must toe the line, because there's nobody to lean on here. Not try and be bashful about it, but always - I think that's the best way to describe it - is that I had an underlying sense of responsibility. I always had this feeling that ... my mother's good to me, and I want to be, like, to be good to her later in life. I always had that desire". Jan was very sensitive to his mother's personal struggles.

Although his sense of responsibility may have been initiated due to a keen awareness of his only surviving parents personal struggle, he does not regard it as a vice. In fact, Jan sees himself as being a stronger person as a result of his childhood experiences. "I can handle certain crises better and so on. I've been through it".

Jan never allowed his father's death to hinder him in life and refused to use it as an excuse to gain special treatment.

Jan developed a philosophy of life which is based on learning from one's experiences. He believes that every generation has learned from the previous generation. "The thing that I learnt from my experiences with my father, was that I must make sure that my kids don't have to go through the same trauma and problems". He has vowed to ensure that his children get all the experiences that he missed as child such as quality time, someone to talk to, an introduction to "stupid little things like cricket". "... as a father I know in myself what's important to hand over to my kids. What I missed is what they should have".

Jan has also developed a belief that life is too short to bear grudges. He also tries to shield his children from the pain that he experienced, which makes me question how positive he really does see this experience.
Jan's paternal grandfather was deceased before Jan was born. This Jan believed, "left a double gap" as grandfathers are an important source of influence. He wishes that his children will have a strong image of him to cherish should he die too.

Jan had a wonderful sense of humour. This personality characteristic, he agrees, was developed as a means to survive. "...that's my way of coping. Make a joke of it".

Jan was comfortable speaking to me and felt he coped well with the possibly damaging experience of childhood parental loss because of the positive image that his mother created of his father. He believed that fathers who died and were not spoken of in a good light or weren't good role models, could result in problems for the developing child.

"But no grudges, I've got no grudges".
CHAPTER 6

DOUW'S STORY

Douw is a successful businessman whose father died when he was approximately ten years old. Douw began the conversation by immediately recounting his father's death.

Douw clearly recalls being present during his father's final moments. Douw remembered his father dying of a heart-attack, the arrival of the doctor and "then it was all over". He finds his father's death an especially pertinent subject now as he is presently the same age as his father was when he died. Douw has become more health conscious lately and worries about his children welfare should he suddenly die.

Douw found his father's death extremely traumatic "It's a hell of a difficult thing because it is that stage of your life you kick ball with your dad and you play tennis with him and..." Companionship and "someone to look up to" is what Douw missed most as a child. He regards his father's death as the main reason for his rebellious behaviour as a child and as an adult. "You are really lost and actually become a rebel.

Douw spoke of a complex relationship with his mother and believes that his rebelliousness was in part a refusal to her authority. His family's functioning became problematic and his grandmother came to live with them to "... get the things running again". Douw noticed that his mother was powerfully shaken by the loss. His mother was a housewife but "luckily she had a trade to go back to".

Douw sees a number of themes flowing through his life stemming from the loss of his father. He recalls a repetitive dream he had as a child in which he attempts to reconnect with his father but is unable to. Douw feels that although the loss occurred during childhood, he still experiences themes today that link to the loss. Douw regards himself as a hard-headed rebel and explains this as being due to the lack of having someone to confide in. "You never had advice".
He wondered if he would be in the same career had his father lived longer. "I think I would have gone into the accounting side of things. I think you normally follow your father. The line I am in is probably completely opposite. I would never have bee in the creative field". Douw is constantly plagued with the doubt as to the direction in which his life has unfolded. "I know I should have been in my father's business". He expresses regret at not achieving success in his father's career and wonders if he would not have belonged better in that environment.

Ja, but I don't know if it's right or wrong. I don't know if anybody can give you the answer... but I question myself Frank, should I do it? Those are the questions and that's where I miss my father because I am sure he would have told me go that route. He would have said it to me".

This indecisiveness continues around being a good father with his children. "But now you sit with my kid that's going into Std 8. What do you do with him and what advice do you give him". Douw worries about his success so far as a father to his children and explains that he never had been in a situation where he could learn how to deal with present parenting dilemmas. "I don't know to what extent you've got to sit and you've got to tell your kid now what to do... What do you tell him?" Is it right for him to follow me or should he go in a different direction?"

Douw finds that he has become a lot "harder" than he would have had he not experienced such a loss in childhood. By harder he explains that he is less able to share in other people's losses and is overall less compassionate and empathic. "I have very little sympathy for people. I love people but I don't deal in other people's sorrow. That is one thing that I have lost completely". On hearing of a friend's loss his response is "..so what, he died". This "hardness" is related by Douw directly to the loss of a father "at an age when you need a guy". Douw never cried when his father died and can only recall having cried once since. "And it was just like a closed book".

Douw feels that his lack of expressed emotions as a child was somehow inappropriate. He maintains that while most younger people "go through the whole process of
mourning" he

was "just blank". He feels that still today there is "an aspect that is cut off - it means nothing to me".

He feels that still today he has certain unresolved issues around his father's death. The loss was never discussed by the family or outside the family. "You know, these days people would go to therapy and they make you talk about that... it's got to come out... and it was never done with us". The reason Douw struggles to give sympathy to other people is because he never had the opportunity to communicate his experiences and feelings. The topic of death and loss was not comfortably spoken about, "it's one of those... - let's rather put it aside". The 'cold spot' Douw has is "mainly because you never discuss things... it is never coming up and going through it". Douw is personally not comfortable with speaking about loss as he is afraid of becoming "emotional again".

Douw mentions a lack of an emotional connection to people who are grieving and includes an inability to control death experiences. "I do feel sorry, but you can do nothing about it. If you die, you're dead. You're here today and tomorrow you're gone. It's like losing money... if you lose R100, you've lost it and can't get it back".

The subsequent change of school and moving house were also regarded as traumatic. Douw was sensitive about his being different to other children and struggled in dealing with other schoolchildren's questions about his father. These difficulties played yet another role in his becoming a rebel.

Douw conceptualises death mainly in terms of the Christian faith: "...so I understand the whole working of the Bible and after death, and not to be scared. If you die you die".

Douw recalls his dad in terms of polarities such as in the following statement: "... the things I remember from him you know was the good times and I got a hell of a lot of hidings and he was very strict...". He tries to continue the same parenting style with his children, "but you can't, it's slightly obliterated... it's too far in the past". However, certain actions remind him of his father.
Douw finds it emotional when a comparison is drawn between him and his father in terms of their behaviour. Douw became tearful when recalling emotionally charged memories involving his mother and father. He explained these emotions as "the re-occurrence sort of coming through", and "... its definitely coming back to me".

Being in a position of authority and responsibility is not comfortable for Douw. "Now you're the leader. You've got to advise people... But I have never been to anyone who has told me how to resolve my problems".

A theme that has recurrently raised its head in Douw's life is one of personal identity. He struggles find any conviction in his decisions and constantly doubts himself. "You have got to go and find yourself in the world and you go through things and you know there's always that uncertainty - where the hell do you go?, what do you do? is it the right thing?"

With regards to gender identity Douw recalls being brought up in a female environment :"... it was probably more under the female wing I was brought up... my grandmother, my mother and my sister". Learning about one's identity as a male is difficult especially stories initiating him to rugby and sex "because you heard everything from the older kids instead of a mother and father". His was strongly influenced by his peers. Once again Douw relates these complications to his present difficulties discussing sex with his children.

Around the time of his father's funeral, Douw took a number of photographs which were lost a number of years ago. This he feels is "the greatest pity". He recalls confusion at the time of the funeral but is glad that he attended.

Douw seems to downplay the extent of the trauma he experienced in later deaths. "... my grandmother died and my grandfather died exactly a year later. So we went through a bit of trauma. It wasn't so serious".
Douw is intrigued by the fact that he still today wonders how his father sees him. He imagines his father evaluating his life and judging his actions.

There is continuation in terms of repeating activities initiated by his father which have now become family rituals. "It's one of those things we used to do as kids... That's, well it's a tradition".

Throughout his school, university and business career Douw has noticed a pattern. "I would excel to a point... and then just drop back again... And I often wondered whether that is not the lack of praise or a father. It's like you have a good Irish coffee... it's not the best... I expect that there's another one that's better".

He later added that he thought his drive was the achievement of recognition. The time that Douw missed his father the most was recently when he received a highly valued award from a peer.

Douw denies the idea of his own death. "I won't be around". "There's nothing you can do about it. To be quite honest it doesn't worry me... hopefully my family will be secure enough...".

Douw sees himself as similar to his description of his father - strict but good.
THE ULTIMATE CONCLUSION

"In death consciousness disappears and the atoms that comprise the body disperse into other forms, but a person's continuity continues through the effects of his or her actions. So when those dear to me die they continue on in the memory of the living, in the influences that their existence had, in their children, in the memory of their friends, in the things that they created; and all memories, influences, and creations take their place in the causal chain of effects" (Rowe, 1984, p.103).

7.1 Introduction

What is hopefully conveyed in these pages is life's relationship to death throughout the life span. The key observation has been that death is one of the central themes in human development throughout the life span. Death is not just our destination but is a part of our 'getting there' as well. Death-relevant thoughts, experiences, and circumstances always accompany us. Both the individual's interpretation of death and the specific circumstances under which it occurs are likely to influence the nature of death-as-a-destination. Furthermore, our ideas about this destination may change appreciably during the course of our maturation and life experiences.

The three co-constructed stories will be observed from a social constructionist perspective. The conclusion that will be drawn will demonstrate my personal understanding of the interviews and my preference for certain theoretical positions.

7.2 Constructing death and loss

"The individual's world of meaning is a complicated interconnected network of meanings that encompasses not only present relationships with people and things but the past and future and the projects on which one is engaged" (Rowe, 1984). As the death of a father cuts across the continuity of meaning a search for answers often follows that will
re-establish the continuity of people's lives. Death need not be in the form of the loss of a significant other, but rather it confronts us whenever we experience a radical threat to the continuity of our existence. These other deaths and losses punctuate all our lives.

What was reported to be the most traumatic and painful experiences for the participants was the lack of continuity which arose in many spheres of life. The participants spoke of a variety other losses secondary to the loss of their fathers i.e. loss of reward, appraisal, praise, guidance, encouragement etc. The loss of the participation of one's father in daily activities was regularly mentioned. Loss of future was strong for Jan, Heinrich and Douw as they all felt that their lives would have been somehow better had their fathers lived. Douw speaks of the loss of fulfilling his potential with his metaphor of never achieving the perfect Irish coffee. Loss of hope is being fought against by Heinrich because his own death will deny his continuing relationship with his young daughter.

Douw and Jan spoke of the extreme difficulty of coping with the news of their father's death, while Heinrich was shocked at his grandfather's death. Heinrich, however, never mentioned experiencing any feelings on hearing that his father had died.

But suppose the loved one had died before leaving a mark on the child? This is what Heinrich claimed. A loss of a relationship that is unclear or unformed results in an unique form of grief. Jan explains this well when he expressed his feelings of sadness as being real and powerful but not being sure as to what had been lost. Jan expressed his sense of confusion and vividly recalled the time he was informed of his father's death. "I never knew what death was, I had never experienced it or anything, but the word(s) 'he died' was an immediate realisation - gone. Final, final, gone". Jan knew he was losing something but did not know what it entailed. " I didn't have a real interaction (with my father) so I didn't know what I was taking leave of as such, I was too small".

Some participants felt they did not mourn 'properly' or cry. Douw, whose father died at a later stage than the other participants, had a similar difficulty. Douw mentioned, "I never cried when my dad died. I can recall once I've cried (up until today)... and it was just like a closed book... it's complete".

In presenting a picture of his father to me, Douw mentioned, "I remember the good times
and I got a hell of a lot of hidings and he was very strict”. I wonder how well Douw has managed to integrate such seemingly positive and negative aspects.

Jan, on the other hand, believes that his father's death never affected him "as a person". However, he later remarks that his father's death made him more responsible, self-reliant and independent. Jan also felt that he is stronger and more able to cope with crises "because I've been through it". Interestingly, Jan also sees surviving his father's death as an ordeal that he has suffered. Does this impact on his feelings of being somehow different from others?

Heinrich, like Jan, does not consider his father's death as having had any effect on him. He relegates all aspects of his father's death firmly in the past. However, it was fascinating that his father's death at a relatively young age has brought up thoughts about Jan's own mortality. Thoughts about his own death indicate that death is something that Heinrich carries with him wherever he goes. They are possibly closer companions than he recognises.

I was immediately struck by the ambiguity or lack of clarity amongst all three participants on the status of their relationship with their deceased fathers.

Heinrich relegates all emotions and experiences around his death to the past and presents with a sense of closure on the loss.

Although Heinrich denies any relationship at all with his father, he speaks about internal conversations with his father and fantasises about life had his father not died. Heinrich even keeps a photograph of his father with him. There is continuity here that is not being recognised. Heinrich was never motivated to learn more about his father: "It never bothered me to ask, or I never thought about it to ask. It never bothered me".

Jan also felt that he did not really get to know his father and explained this on his being so young at the time of the death. However, in Jan's case there is clearly a sense of continuity in the relationship between father and son in the following statement:"... I always feel that I, I've got some form of inherited ability". Jan often holds internal
conversations with his father on a variety of issues.

Douw is quite direct in highlighting the continuing connections between his father's death and his present living in the world. He wonders regularly as to his father's reactions or responses to the decisions he has made in personal and business matters: "I know I should have been in my father's business". The participants seem to hold their fathers' opinions of them and their lives in high regard.

Memories of the participants last interactions and the details of the last day were cherished, but often painful reminders of their fathers. Douw speaks very positively about his interactions with his father the day before he died. "You know, that's one of those things you always treasure... we actually kicked around with a rugby ball. Instead of him sitting (at the family gathering) he actually played with me".

One of the factors that seems to have an influence on the relationships the participants have with their deceased fathers, besides the developmental stage, is the communication environment in which they all grew up. Douw was raised in an environment where he had little opportunity to express his feelings and experiences around the death. "It was never really discussed with us. I can't really recall the we actually sat down and said look this is it...".

Jan's family, on the other hand, spoke openly and positively about his father and the death. 

"I think it is necessary, so it gave me something to grow on. Never spoke badly of him, not a bad word. Always good, always bringing up topics... He did this and he used to go there, and we used to do this. And now, at thirty seven years old, I feel I knew my father very well, because of the fact that we spoke about it - it was never a closed subject".

Memories played a large role in the conversations with all the participants. Both Jan and Douw spontaneously and fondly recalled a number of stories about their fathers. These stories help to create a bond and a sense of familiarity. Stories assist in developing an internal picture of the deceased parent. The importance of memories such as
photographs are again highlighted by Douw's great sadness at the loss of a number of photographs of his father's funeral that he had taken as a child. Jan's connection with his father was never static and is continually evolving.

It is often helpful to maintain the internal image by expressing it aloud and sharing it with others. This to some extent has to do with the role of language in preserving memory. Expressing and sharing these feelings and images in words enhances memory. This type of communication brings the lost relationship 'alive' in a way that is different from inner contemplation. In addition, the responses and stories of others about the deceased person both validates and enriches that person's inner picture. Sharing this connection with others brings the relationship into the present context, making it part of their shared ongoing lives. Here the importance of the social construction of the deceased person is highlighted (Silverman, Nickman & Worden in Gaines, 1997).

The topics of loss and death contain many important meanings for Jan who was appreciative of the opportunity to speak about his father and his experiences.

"I was looking forward to you coming, I really was. But shit, somebody wants to speak to me about my father, that's lekker... To me, I was very glad that you actually wanted to speak about it. This is the first time in my life that anybody has ever come to me and said to me, 'Well, I want to speak to you about your experiences, - how do you remember your father?'"

A powerful metaphor for the attempt to maintain a sense of continuity with regards to certain aspects of Douw's relationship with his father is the 'ritual' of holidaying on the game reserve with the entire family. There is continuation here in terms of repeating activities that were initiated by one's father.

The presence of alternative parental figures was noted to play a powerful role in Heinrich and Jan's upbringing. In Heinrich's case his grandfather continued to perform many of the functions he attributes to being a father. The similarity of experiences between Heinrich and his grandfather (they both lost fathers at young ages) seemed to enable an easier transition of parental figures.
Heinrich is caught between developing a sense of continuity with regards to his relationship with his father and placing closure on the issue. Although he places the loss firmly in the past, he does express some present moment thoughts and feelings about his father. His response to the ongoing effects of the loss is presented by Heinrich as a fatalistic acceptance of life and his fate. Loss forces people into painfully passive positions. When we lose a loved one we are impinged on by an event that we cannot change (Gaines, 1997). This sense of helplessness is responded to in a variety of ways and may motivate a search for meaning.

Sullivan (in Anchin & Kiesler, 1982) indicated that a large part of who we are is a product of our interactions and relationships with people around us. It follows then that the death of a significant person in our lives, requires us to reconstruct a sense of personal identity. Gender identity was mentioned as an underlying concern by both Jan and Douw who were raised in predominantly female family environments. Jan emphasises the importance of role models from whom to learn and to emulate. Jan believed that his mother fulfilled this function very well, while Heinrich relied strongly on his grandfather.

Douw and Heinrich regarded themselves as "harder" due to their experience. Douw relates his hardness and "cold spot" directly to the loss of his father. Because of the lack of an environment conducive to open communication, he became dead to the world. This cutting off from the world can be seen as a means of coping with powerful and confusing experiences of a young child, as well as an attempt to bring order, stability and control into life. He alluded to the fact that delving into these issues was quite unsettling as it elicited powerful emotions.

Although Heinrich regards himself as harder because of his experience, he repeatedly reminded me that he was not at all affected or bothered by the loss. The confusion or ambiguity as to the influence the death may reflect the difficulty in acknowledging both the finality and continuity of death. This ambiguous relationship with death is a pervasive theme among all three participants.
A clue into Heinrich's way-of-being-in-the-world is given by the following statement: "It doesn't bother me what happens tomorrow. I take life as it comes... they say don't worry before it happens, worry when it happens". It is as if Heinrich tries to defend against the impotence and helplessness elicited when confronted with death, by dismissing its importance in his life.

Jan learned to view the world not as a place of abundance but rather a place of relative hardship. He accepted his place in this world and seldom questioned its unfairness. In a powerful statement reflecting his relationship with the world, Heinrich says: "I would like to grow old with them (my children), but like I said it is not for me to decide. We can't go on having what we want. If God decides it's your time, it's your time..."

I get the strong feeling that Heinrich continually downplays his emotions. I wonder if Heinrich regards the world as a place where one needs to be extremely careful about being emotionally vulnerable. On the few occasions that Heinrich has risked personal investment in a relationship, he has met with death. My impression is that he chooses very carefully in which relationships he will entrust himself. Rather, he tries to participate minimally in life. He protects himself by become emotional invulnerable. His scoffing at the existence of stress and depression may be a way of avoiding the acknowledgement that life has an affect on him. If he had to admit to either of the two, he would have to acknowledge that losses in his life have affected him. He claims to be beyond the reach of death and loss. Denying their effects may allow him to keep them at an arms length. Heinrich's experiences of death have been unexpected and beyond his control. I get the sense that Heinrich sees the world as a hard, cruel place.

Death had an impact on the participants both as individuals and as members of a family. Jan and Douw experienced difficulties as family members mostly as a result of dealing with the changed circumstances that arose after the death. Financial difficulties, changing schools, moving home and having one's mother begin to work, all served to add to the uncertainty and instability during the period. It seems that a death in the family also dynamically restructures the relationships and roles of the remaining family members. The participants spoke of the importance of their relationships with their mothers following their fathers' deaths.
It seemed that the participants as children were highly sensitive to the mother's emotions. All of the participants expressed an acute awareness of their mother's emotional turmoil at the time of the loss and for years thereafter.

Douw mentioned the following: "My mother... has suffered a hell-of-a-lot and it actually has got an impact on her more now than anything" and "growing up as a single mother is hell-of-a-difficult".

A lot of Jan's behaviour throughout the years was motivated by the desire to gain approval from his mother and not to disappoint her. "I've never wanted her to be disappointed in my action(sic). I'd never go and do anything naughty or stupid, so she could end up in being disappointed in my action... and I'm not going to be the reason for her to have more trauma in her life".

Jan also clearly remembers being highly perturbed by his mother's grief and mourning, and recalls forbidding her to continue. Heinrich is extremely uncomfortable with his mother's grief which is "still bothering me today".

All the participants indicated that being a good father was of special importance to them. Douw was overwhelmed by the urge to do the right thing and regrets that he never had a father to teach him these skills. Benedek writes that the experience of becoming a parent activates memories of how one was parented and what it was like to be a child (DeVries, Lana & Falck, 1994). In line with this statement Douw feels that a number of issues are beginning to surface for him at this stage of his life. Douw, who is currently the same age as his father was when he died, is also faced with his own mortality.

On life after death, Jan strongly believes that he will move to a different form of existence. He finds it confusing that some people don't believe in a hereafter. "Whether Christianity is right or wrong, at least it gives you something to hold on to". Christianity gives some meaning to the suffering.
7.3 Conclusion

According to Sullivan, to be a person we must exist in a web of connectedness with others (Chrzanowski, 1982). If this is accepted then death can be understood as the irreversible damage to the web of connectedness between people. Death reveals the interconnectedness of life to the extent that it confronts us with a threat to the continuity of our own existence. This abrupt loss of meaning in life is the very force of death itself! So, death perceived as discontinuity, is not that which robs life of meaning, but that which makes life's meaningfulness possible.

Since we cannot experience death directly we come to know what death is through the radical discontinuities that appear in our lives by way of the death of others. It is the meanings we place on these other deaths that create our understanding of death. A brief look at some views of death shows a general lack of consensus. While Plato denies that death is real, Kierkegaard states that living is the only choice we have.

Although there were a few common experiences, it seems as if one's individual meanings within a family and cultural setting results in unique understandings and responses to death and loss.

The participants seemed to grapple with opposites in terms of polarities such as connected/disconnected, relationship/no relationship, acceptance/outcry etc. Kalish (1985) supports this observation with his statement: "We are entitled to be inconsistent about what death means to us at any given time, since it is so immense and so complex that its meanings are often in flux - changing at the very moment we try to grasp them" (p.57).

On evaluating my presentation of the three stories of death, I made an interesting observation. Although one of the aims of this paper was to highlight the importance of a richer, more human experience of childhood parental loss, I notice that I have struggle to significantly shift away from dry literature.
My conceptualisation of these experiences has been enormously influenced by the theory with little space being given to personal understandings. Linking my observations to existing literature and theory at the expense of losing the individual with his web of meanings may be due to my comfortableness and safety within the confines of theory. Involving my 'self' more deeply with the stories of the participants, and expressing what sense they made to me and how they touched me, was far more uncomfortable than expected. The second order cybernetics requirement that the researcher or therapist be part of the therapeutic system, now has a much greater personal significance.

I have investigated the theories of death and loss and have discovered that they hold no truth. However, I find myself attempting to conclude here by returning to theory. As the experience of death is the most personal of all human experiences I devote the following chapter solely to my unique experience.
CHAPTER 8

OR IS IT?

My interest in death became aroused when I was about 21 years old although it was a topic that had been on my mind for a number of years. At this stage of my life I had just completed the army was aimlessly trying to find direction in life at university. I felt I had no idea of who I was and what was important in my life. I presented as a very serious quiet person, but I clearly remember how anxious and confused I felt. After a particularly bad patch in my life at that time I decided to pursue an understanding of what I was undergoing.

My searching from that time has taken me through to studying psychology and choosing to do my dissertation on death. As I involve myself more in narratives of life and death I become more fascinated in this area. The greatest realisation I have had is that death affects many areas of my life. At present, my investment in the process of understanding death is one the strongest driving forces in my life, and it is filling some missing piece or gap in who I am.

My father died of cancer when I was 4 years old. That incident changed the course of my entire family’s life drastically. At the time of his death my two older brothers were 7 and 11 years old. Living with us at the time were my mother’s parents who still today reside with us. My mother was an unemployed housewife who had to suddenly enter the workplace and bring in an income.

My father’s death was the first death that I can recall and since that time there has not been a single family member who has passed away.

When I was told by my mother that my father had died, I vividly recall my brothers crying, but I had no tears at all. I had some understanding about the seriousness of the event, but the intensity and heaviness of the moment was overwhelming and I remember making a silly joke to lighten things up. This is something that I found myself
doing throughout my school and army career.

Just as I had lost my father, I seemed to have lost most things that I had become familiar with. A large consequential loss was that of my mother. She began working and became quiet, preoccupied and emotional. I felt that I no longer had the quality of mother that I had before. More than anything I craved emotional support comfort and reassurance. I felt alone and unconnected. For the following years we lived in a strange monotonous silence. We did what was necessary and followed the motions of living.

After my father died the world became a dangerous, unsafe place. Seeing my mother undergoing emotional turmoil meant to me that I had no caregiver I could rely on. Instead, I felt that I needed to ensure that the important people around me were satisfied and pleased. So, for a number of my growing up years I tried to be the model child. Doing the right things meant a happier mother and a safer 'me'. During these years my focus was on other peoples needs rather than my own.

I remember very little of my father and of my life before we moved house, but I do have a vivid recollection of what it felt like. I struggle to describe that knot in my stomach that I have carried with me for many years. I can simply say that the world had overnight changed into a scary, crazy place. Things weren't safe and I definitely was not.

As there was little warning of my father's death and because there was limited money available we had to move home and change our standard of living. My eldest brother was then sent to boarding school, with me and my middle brother to follow.

The biggest impact of the death of my father at that stage wasn't the direct loss of my father but the atmosphere of unsafety that it seemed to create. Not only did my family seem emotionally unstable, but the change in routine of our daily lives was very unsettling. The financial uncertainty played a big role. Even though money began to arrive after my mother began working, I never felt secure. To this day I tend to be very aware of my money matters and struggle to spend money on things that are not necessities without feeling uncomfortable.
"Those families whose ideas and feelings about death are inconsistent, poorly understood and avoided, create for their children a setting in which the child's unstructured perception of death will find no guidance in which his tendencies toward fantasies will find support" (Schoenberg in Gray, 1991, p.239).

I do not recall my family ever discussing my father; it was something that was not mentioned. But even though there was minimal overt communication about my father, the intensity of my mother's struggle and emotional turmoil was loud and clear.

I don't know what type of cancer killed my father, the date of his death or how old he was when he died. I had very little knowledge of his life or of his family. Until recently these questions were of no significance to me at all.

I must comment again on the fact that my experiences of those times are only being brought into my conscious awareness as I investigate them. Life at that time was more of a feeling than a conscious understanding and it is only now that I am forcing these feelings into words. My understanding now of my understanding then is constantly evolving as I continue to revisit those times. It is through this process that I glean new understandings of myself in relationship with the world at present.

To me, death and loss are inseparable. Every relationship we ever make will inevitably be lost. The openness to loss links up to the openness to fully experience and participate in life.

I have always regretted not being present at my father's funeral. Not really to say a final goodbye but rather to be a part of those final moments. I often wonder who was there and what people said about my father. It is a strong curiosity for me hear what people thought of my father.

The impression that I had was that my father's funeral was a private meeting for adults at a far away place - a gathering that children had no right to attend. For most of my life I have left my father at this mysterious grave site where I was not allowed. He belonged at a place where I did not.
Doing a study on present feelings and thoughts about long past events becomes confusing when these experiences have always been there but have slowly been evolving. As I am writing this now I feel myself re-experiencing that atmosphere that I first experienced as a child. This diffuse feeling of emptiness and unsafety is something that I have always carried with me. It doesn't disappear but becomes increasingly more comfortable as I continue my journey of recapturing and narrating my childhood experiences surrounding death.

Today I have a greater patience with myself when I find myself attempting to ensure my safety with others and security in relationships. I have come to a greater acceptance that I do require a certain amount of structure in my life in order to limit my anxiety.

My sense of humour and sometimes over-sensitivity to the emotions of others, have to a large degree been formed by the life consequences of death in the family.

Because of the lack of a reassuring and a safe context in my younger years I feel that in order to be safe, accepted and OK I need to please others. It seems that my own needs were not sufficiently recognised and were to a large extent ignored until I felt safe enough to begin to explore them later in life. I only began exploring myself when I was secure enough in that my basic physical and survival needs were sufficiently being met. As the issues of death and loss are so anxiety provoking, I wonder at how great an effect timing has had on my growth and development. It seems as though I only absorbed as much of these experiences as I could at each moment, with the 'unabsorbed' following me throughout my life.

Although choosing to investigate death in my dissertation was relatively simple and spontaneous, I found myself resisting exploring my ideas and feelings and placing them in words.

I wonder what type of impression I am trying to portray of myself and my experiences. I find myself being apprehensive on being judged, evaluated and worst of all misunderstood with regards to these issues.
My general anxiety about life and the lack of a supporting male role model, amongst other factors, led me to grapple with identity issues. Although I grew up in the presence of two older brothers I seldom received the affirmation of myself as a male. I did not regard myself to be as confident and carefree as my peers, compounding a worry that I was different and that something was wrong. To this day I am more comfortable amongst females than males and have more female friends.

On previous occasions I have approached the influence of the death of my father as something to 'sort out' and 'complete'. I approached it with a view to finally being able to resolve it and leave it behind. The thinking and language I used around death was one of seeing death as a problem; something that should not bother me and should be overcome, although on a rational level I knew death to be natural. So I packed my relationship with my father away and moved on only to be disappointed to find it resurfacing again and again with seemingly unrelated themes. For example I was recently watching a film called "The City of Angels" where an angel chooses to give up the perfection of 'angelhood' to become human so that he can experience human feelings. This angel later loses the woman he loves but still manages to fully embrace life with passion. This scene moved me with surprising intensity. My understanding of this is that I have chosen the safety of 'deadness' and blandness while foregoing a passionate experience of life. So death is for me a theme that is inextricably interwoven throughout all experiences in life. It is a theme that is more part of the basic fabric of life rather than an arbitrary facet to be studied.

Until now I never realised the number of times my father has crossed my mind. Only after conducting the interviews used in this dissertation have I began remembering occasions when I missed my father or when I wondered what he would be thinking of me and what I am doing. Would he approve of who I have turned out to be and what I am doing with my life? I strongly believe that I have always had a relationship with my father and that this relationship grows with me as I grow.

Growing up without a father I found myself dependent on my mother. It was only when I found myself worrying one night about what would happen to me if my mother also died that I discovered this dependency. The fear it brought up in me led to the realisation of
how risky a close relationship with my mother is. From that day on I have found myself in a highly ambivalent and fluctuating relationship with my mother. I was not going to allow myself to be so emotionally close to her again.

Clear memories of my father are limited. I have about six incidents or occasions where I can recall my father. My unsureness is that the few stories that I have heard involving my father have been visualized and repeated so many times in my mind that I struggle to confidently distinguish between my memories and other people's stories. I would treasure some highly individualised and personalised memories of my father and myself that I can selfishly hold as my own. A further dilemma is that some of the feelings I have and memories I hold are one's that are charged with negative emotions. Various loyalty issues surface when faced with integrating these memories, especially when my intention is partly to strengthen my bond with this person.

I remember taking one of my pets to the vet to be put down. I was not particularly fond of this animal and was therefore shocked by the magnitude of emotion that I experienced. That was the only death experience I had encountered since my father. It has only recently been safe enough for me to begin grieving, and small losses are resulting in disproportionately intense emotional responses. I believe that all losses are somehow linked together with each loss being a potential portal to past losses. I have begun to recognise my need to grieve and to experience the emotions linked to a variety of losses.

In trying to gain a better understanding of myself and the impact of childhood parental loss, I have had to look into a number of areas of my life. The primary aim of embarking on this journey is to re-awaken or rather to revitalise my relationship with my father. This seemingly specific goal has led me to explore my relationship with myself and others, and my view of the world.

Where my journal actually began is uncertain. It is clearly a dynamic, fluid and constantly evolving process with hesitations and fluctuations. I began by acquiring as much information about my father as I could. I collected photographs, personal
documents and found and visited his grave site. I regularly have internal conversations with my father. Although not much new information as such is arriving, my relationship with my father grows and evolves as I do. My interest in this relationship has spread to an interest in the broader field of loss and death, including bereavement.

Death to me is loss, and every relationship I will ever enter into will inevitably end in loss. My ability to fully experience the large and small losses in life will reflect the extent of my participation in life. The less open I am to death, the less passionately I am able to live. A deadness to death reflects in a deadness to life. As a child I came to a conclusion that death, and therefore life, were too overwhelming to accept. I did what was necessary to protect my integrity and to survive. My meaning systems influenced me into withdrawing and numbing myself from life. As time goes by I am re-sensitising myself to life, and as more of myself unfolds I begin to feel more alive. I am finding that my capacity to experience emotions is deepening.

The meanings I have attributed to death have permeated all areas in my life because these meanings co-determine my relationship with life.

In my own experience, I am impressed with the kind of person who seems to live fully within both the moment and the life span. The life-death drama enriches this person. The 'destination' and the 'getting there' are integrated into the individual's total relationship with life and death. By reconciling myself with this inexorable death-as-it-is-lived, I may unite the satisfactions and conflicts of life with the culminations and frustrations of death. I would want to accompany myself as I experience the long journey of personal identity through my life span.


