The Interpersonal and Social Dimensions of Emotion Regulation in Grief

Matthew Ratcliffe & Eleanor A. Byrne

This chapter addresses the nature and role of emotion regulation in grief. Human emotion regulation often involves processes that are interpersonal and social in structure. Given this, the death of a particular person can deprive us of regulatory resources that we would otherwise draw upon in responding to upheaval. A distinctive sense of disorientation and uncertainty therefore arises. The course of grief then depends, to a substantial degree, on how one's emotions, thoughts, and activities continue to be shaped by relations with other people, as well as by wider social and cultural environments. To illustrate these points, we conclude by reflecting on how social restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic may have affected people's experiences of grief.

Introduction

This chapter investigates how experiences of grief are shaped by processes of *emotion regulation*. Human emotion regulation processes often involve interactions with other people and the wider social environment. Given this, we suggest that the course of grief is not simply attributable to what one feels at various times in response to a death. Rather, how grief is experienced depends on how we relate to particular people (the living and the dead) and to the social world more generally.

When considering the nature and role of emotions, it is commonplace to emphasize brief episodes, such as being scared of a snarling dog, happy to see somebody, sad about the bad news, or angry with someone for insulting you. However, grief is neither a short-lived emotional episode nor a constant mood. More plausibly, it is a longer-term process, incorporating different emotional episodes at different times (e.g. Goldie, 2012; Higgins, 2013; Ratcliffe, 2017). One might ask why grief should be construed as a s*ingular* process, rather than a disparate series of emotional episodes. The answer, we suggest, is that a grief-process is unified to the extent that it involves recognizing and responding to a unitary life-disturbance. Grief involves temporally extended emotional engagement with a *loss of life-possibilities*, where those possibilities are interrelated. Other people are integrated into our lives in complex, structured ways and, when someone dies, a host of interdependent projects, habitual activities, and patterns of thought cease to be sustainable. Amongst other things, grief is a matter of recognizing and responding to the implications of a death over time, thus negotiating a wide-ranging and integrated disturbance of the experiential world. The extent to

which grief is unified thus reflects the extent to which the structure of a human life is unified (Ratcliffe, 2017).

In what follows, we will show how it is illuminating to conceive of bereavement's effects on the structure of a human life in terms of emotion regulation and dysregulation. In so doing, we also want to show how our understanding of human emotion regulation can be enriched by considering ways in which temporally extended emotion processes unfold, rather than limiting ourselves to brief emotional episodes. The latter are often comparatively *shallow*, by which we mean that they have little or no impact on the overall shape of a life and therefore do not pose a distinctive *type* of regulatory challenge. Where grief is concerned, this challenge consists in the combination of (a) disturbance of a life-structure that ordinarily regulates emotional responses, (b) loss of regulatory resources that one would ordinarily turn to in order to navigate such disturbances, and (c) consequent reliance on other people to provide what is lacking. The example of grief thus serves to reveal how the structure of our emotional lives depends on relations with other people and with the wider social environment.

Emotion Regulation in Grief

First of all, what is emotion regulation? In his pioneering work on the topic, James Gross (e.g., 1999; 2001; 2014) distinguishes between regulation *by* emotion and regulation *of* emotion, where the term "emotion regulation" is restricted to the latter.[1] Regulation can involve either enhancing or diminishing emotional responses and is not simply a matter of enhancing those emotions that are "positive" (according to one or another criterion), while suppressing those that are "negative". Rather than seeking to straightforwardly suppress a negative emotion such as sadness, for example, we might instead be motivated to "cry out" inchoate sadness by listening to a certain piece of music or looking at a particular photograph. A range of "instrumental motives" are also involved in emotion regulation, sometimes resulting in tensions between motives (Gross, 2014, p.13). For instance, we might choose to do something that will make us feel bad, when we know that it is to our longer-term advantage. There is a distinction to be drawn between conscious and non-conscious

[1] Gross (2001, p.215) further distinguishes between "*antecedent-focused* and *response-focused* emotion-regulation strategies", where the former act upon emotions before they are fully formed, while the latter act upon already established emotions. This distinction is not clear-cut, as the boundary between emotions-in-development and fully constituted will inevitably be blurred. Furthermore, a fully formed emotion of type A could at the same time comprise a stage in the formation of emotion B. Gross (1999, p.560) also identifies a number of more specific regulatory strategies: situation selection; situation modification; deployment of attention; cognitive change; and modulation of response.

regulation strategies. Gross's conception of emotion regulation encompasses the full spectrum, from non-conscious processes to those processes that we are reflectively aware of and deliberately engage in (Gross, 2014, p.7). In exploring how the *phenomenology* of grief is shaped by certain *processes*, our claims are not limited to those that involve complete or even partial awareness.

An important issue, for current purposes, is that of whether emotion regulation is conceived of as something occurring only on occasion (e.g., in especially challenging circumstances or when an emotional response has gone somehow awry) or as a ubiquitous component of our emotional lives. Kappas (2011) notes insightfully that, in mundane situations, emotional responses to situations "auto-regulate" by changing in ways that track one's changing relationship with an eliciting stimulus. For example, a fast-approaching car no longer elicits fear once the emotion has led to situation-changing behaviour and one has stepped well out of the way. Hence emotional episodes are not generally responses that stay "switched on" until a "dedicated emotion regulation system" steps in to sort things out (Kappas, 2011, p.20).

Another important distinction is that between intrinsic and extrinsic emotion regulation: whether you are regulating your own emotions or those of other people (Gross, 2014, p.6). It is increasingly acknowledged that many emotion regulation processes in humans are interpersonal or social in structure, relying on patterns of interaction with particular individuals or engagement with wider-ranging social pastimes and social situations. For instance, it has been suggested that interpersonal attachments from infancy to adulthood play important roles in emotion regulation (e.g. Shaver and Mikulincer, 2014). Indeed, Campos et al. (2011, p.27) go so far as to suggest that we and our interpersonal environments are "necessarily entwined in the generation of affect".

By combining these two themes, we can identify the distinctive regulatory challenge posed by grief. To the extent that emotions arise in the context of a structured life, there is a sense in which they are self-regulating. Emotions respond to changing patterns of significance and salience that reflect not only changing circumstances, but also a fairly stable background of projects, pastimes, habits, commitments, and values. However, where this life-structure is profoundly disrupted by events, our emotional lives lack their usual, self-regulating context. Certain types of emotions, including grief, are involved in recognizing, responding to, and navigating life-disturbances. However, in the case of grief over the death of a person, there is a further complication. The deceased may be someone we would otherwise have turned to for support in times of emotional turmoil. Hence, in considering

emotion regulation in grief, it is important to distinguish (1) emotions that are regulated by life-structure; (2) emotions that involve responding to disturbances of life-structure; and (3) emotions, such as grief, which fall into category (2) and may involve an additional loss of regulatory resources that we would otherwise draw upon. Grief thus poses a distinctive challenge for emotion regulation, which is qualitatively different from that of eliciting, sustaining, modifying, or suppressing a range of episodic emotions that arise during the course of daily life.

It is worth noting that Gross (2014, p.8) distinguishes "emotion regulation" from the longer-term challenge of "coping" with a bereavement. Consistent with this, one might object that influencing the course of grief is not a matter of emotion regulation at all. However, that would be to artificially limit our conception of emotion regulation, so as to exclude precisely those emotions that have the most profound impact on the structure of our lives. It would also involve failure to acknowledge a *type* of regulatory challenge that differs substantially from that posed by mundane episodic emotions, such as being afraid of the dog or angry about missing the bus. Grief follows a complicated, fragile trajectory, which depends in many ways on how we relate to other people and to the social environment. As we will see, what sets this apart from many other instances of emotion regulation is a distinctive sense of indeterminacy and lack of direction.

Grief and Dysregulation

To appreciate the relationships between grief and processes of emotion regulation, it is important to clarify how the structure of a human life, the context within which our emotions more usually operate, can come to depend on a particular person. We will focus specifically on the case of a long-term partner, although similar points apply to the full range of human relationships. All or almost all of one's goal-directed activities and projects can come to depend on a partner for their sustainability or even their intelligibility. Our goal-directed activities hang together to varying degrees, with projects embedded in other projects that relate to still further projects. One might do *p* in order to achieve *q*, which contributes to *r*, in the context of project *s*, which is itself embedded in a larger project, *t*, and so forth. Over time, the majority of one's projects and associated activities may come to implicate a particular person, as when one does something *for her* in order to pursue certain ends that relate not to *my life*, but to *our life together*. Pastimes, of the kind one might pursue for enjoyment or relaxation, may do so too: what is enjoyed is not simply "walking in the park" but "walking in the park *with you*". Thus, almost all of the habitual patterns of activity and

thought that structure one's life can depend on another person for their intelligibility: "when I get home, I'll cook us some dinner, after which we'll sit on the sofa with a bottle of wine". Associated patterns of expectation are similarly structured. It is not just a matter of expecting to encounter someone in a particular place. One also anticipates the outcomes of that person's various activities and gauges the significance of unfolding events against the backdrop of cares and concerns that depend on one's relationship with the person.

Given the extent to which human lives are intertwined with one another, bereavement can involve the loss of an *experiential world*, a life-structure that one's thoughts, activities, and emotional experiences previously took for granted (Attig, 2011; Fuchs, 2018; Ratcliffe, 2019). Grief is integral to both comprehending and navigating this disturbance of a habitual world. Comprehension, in this context, is not to be conceived of principally in propositional terms. It is not merely a matter of labelling numerous propositions "false" that were previously labelled "true". Even when it is explicitly acknowledged that "this person is dead" and that "all of this is no longer possible", there may remain an experienced tension between one's explicit beliefs and a world that appears to persist in the face of them. This is because projects, pastimes, habits, and expectations are not generally experienced as internal psychological states that one possesses in the context of a pre-given world. Instead, they are integrated into the experiential world in the guise of what appears salient to us and how it matters to us. Situations and events are experienced as having a range of potentially significant consequences and as pointing to various practically meaningful activities, some or all of which may somehow depend on the person who has died (Ratcliffe, 2019). These possibilities do not disappear instantaneously. Instead, one experiences the gulf between the reality of a death and a world that still specifies various courses of action, such as turning the key, opening the door, and being greeted by a partner. Hence, *full comprehension*, involving the complete recognition of how what has happened impacts on one's life-possibilities, does not occur immediately after learning of the death. Instead, there is a gradual process of "sinking in", involving frequent experiences of conflict between a habitually established world that continues to specify various activities involving a particular person, and the realization that none of that is possible now.

This theme is prominent throughout Sonali Deraniyagala's memoir, *Wave*, which describes the grief she experienced after losing her children, husband, and parents in the 26th December 2004 tsunami. Her account vividly conveys the utter unfathomability of loss as she faces a world that is no longer sustainable, yet in which activities that no longer make sense continue to be experienced as salient:

> Our home, Their school. Their friends. Taking the Piccadilly Line to the Natural History Museum. The jingle of the ice-cream van. What do I do with all this? I wanted to shred my knowledge of our life. (p.36)
>
> The house is much as we left it. Here is our debris, but it is all intact. All of it. I am bewildered. I can't join the pieces together. They are dead, my life ruptured, but in here it feels as it always did. (p.86)
>
> I trip up constantly, between this life and that. Even now, seven years on. A rush of footsteps in the apartment above me is all it takes. It brings me at once into our home in London. (p.205)

These same tensions are also describable in terms of *who* one is. To lose a practically meaningful world, including all of those relationships that gave life meaning, is also to experience a tension between the person one is, or at least was, and one's current predicament: "How is this me? I was safe enough. Now I don't have them, I only have terror, I am alone" (p.37). One aspect of this is no longer being able to think of oneself in terms of certain roles that one played in others' lives: "What I did for my boys never stopped. Now I have to give that all up?" (p.43).

In addressing emotion regulation in grief, it is important to distinguish two different aspects of experience. First, there is the gulf between worlds past and present, which we have just described. Second, there is the experience of an immediate and longer-term future as oddly bereft of structure. Where habits, projects, and pastimes once determined how things *matter* and thus specified what ought to be done or at least what might be done in a given situation, this phenomenological structure is now lacking. Instead of being faced with a choice between A and B, one finds that the conditions of intelligibility for that choice are no longer there. "Shall we cook spaghetti tonight or go to our favourite restaurant instead?" Neither option makes sense now and, consequently, neither do various patterns of activities and thoughts. This amounts to a peculiar experience of indeterminacy.[2] Meaningful courses of action are no longer set out; what once guided and structured one's activities and associated emotional responses to situations is absent. As Juliet Rosenfeld (2020, p.246) writes of the time following her husband's death, "with Andrew dead, I began to feel like a helpless infant, with everything I knew and trusted gone".[3]

[2] Lear (2006) offers a detailed account of something much like this, but in the context of cultural collapse rather than the collapse of a particular person's life structure.

[3] We take it that this indeterminacy, this loss of a structured future to guide, regulate, and give meaning to activity, also accounts for a phenomenological similarity between grief and reverie, which Robert Romanyshyn

Hence, one thing that is distinctively unsettling about grief over the death of a person is this sense of being directionless and lost. However, there is an additional factor to consider. In the case of grief, one is not only faced with disorientation, but, more specifically, disorientation associated with the loss of someone who would otherwise have provided much-needed structure and direction during unsettling times (Ratcliffe, 2020). Close attachments to particular people can play many important roles in regulating our emotions, activities, and patterns of thought. Consequently, so too can our expectations concerning whether and when those people will be available. Thompson (1994, p.42) thus suggests that those who are close to us contribute to a range of different processes that fall under the general category "emotion regulation":

> Because attachment figures, friends, parents, spouses, offspring, and significant others constitute invaluable interpersonal resources for coping with emotion, expectations concerning their accessibility, helpfulness, and sensitivity can significantly enhance - or undermine - the capacity to manage emotional arousal.

Complementing such claims, it has also been suggested that a wide range of biological and psychological processes are dysregulated by separation and loss (Hofer, 1984; Sbarra and Hazan, 2008). With a bereavement, one can lose the life-structure that regulated one's engagement with the world and, along with it, the principal regulator one would otherwise have relied upon to navigate such dysregulation.[4] We have suggested that this applies in the case of a strong relationship with a long-term partner and that it can apply equally to other kinds of relationships. What should I feel? What should I think? What should I do? There is no longer a map, in the guise of a practically meaningful, structured world that points to answers and directions. In addition to lacking a map, one also lacks a guide.

It should be added that the death of one person may also deprive us of regulatory processes involving other people. It is commonplace to socialize with other people *as a couple*, for *us* to have friends, and for *us* to meet with various people on a regular basis,

(1999, p.33) describes: "Grief had broken the habits of my mind. It had stunned me and shattered the old, familiar contours of my world. In reverie I was experiencing the world as if for the first time, wandering through it with no real purpose or intention".

[4] It is important to emphasize that, in referring to those we share our lives with as "regulatory resources", we are not suggesting that people tend to think of them in that way. Furthermore, although we focus in this chapter on how people do serve as "regulators", we also acknowledge that recognizing that loving and grieving for someone involves a great deal more than just that.

sometimes through one partner's connections with them. Given this, bereavement threatens to disrupt a network of other relationships, some of which may contribute to regulation.

So, in reflecting on dysregulation in grief and how it is negotiated, we should distinguish the following: (1) loss of an experiential world that would otherwise have provided structure for our emotional lives and dispensed with the need for additional regulatory processes; (2) loss of a person who would otherwise have helped us to negotiate disturbances of life-structure; and (3) regulatory resources that remain, including other people who we can draw on when faced with (1) and (2). Grief's trajectory is shaped by all three. However, an important qualification should also be added to (2). Although certain kinds of support can no longer be sought from the person who has died, bereavement need not involve experiencing that person as wholly and irrevocably gone. Those who suffer bereavements may develop various kinds of "continuing bonds" with the deceased, some of which are sustained indefinitely. For instance, someone might continue to have perception-like experiences of the deceased, talk to the deceased, experience happenings as signs, messages, or gestures of support, find continuing comfort in memories, internalize some of that person's commitments or preferences, or nurture a sense of connection through personal possessions (Klass, Silverman, and Nickman, 1996; Klass and Steffen, 2018).

Consistent with this, it should not be assumed that having one's life shaped and regulated by a relationship must end abruptly with bereavement. Instead, there are many ways in which the relationship might continue to play an important role in one's life, including a regulatory role (Ratcliffe, 2020; in press). Nevertheless, in the remainder of this chapter, we will focus more specifically on how continuing relations with the living can help to shape grieving processes, when one is faced with the combination of dysregulation and loss of an important regulator.

Emotion Regulation and the Social World

When emotional upheaval involves the death of someone who would otherwise have aided us in navigating upheaval, we can continue to seek direction from others. Colombetti and Krueger (2015) suggest that, more generally, emotion regulation utilizes environmental "scaffolding": we manipulate environmental resources in ways that elicit, enhance, maintain, or suppress different kinds of emotions. Examples include wearing certain clothes, listening to music, drinking coffee, interacting with treasured objects, and visiting art galleries and museums. Where grief is concerned, participation in practices such as mourning rituals can

play important roles, as can engaging with certain social environments. Perhaps most importantly, though, we draw on particular people in a range of ways.

It is debatable how the relationship between the course of grief and forms of scaffolding (social or otherwise) should be conceived of. Brinkmann (2020, p.128) makes the strong claim that grief is not an internal psychological process, but an instance of e*xtended emotion*. In other words, grief is partly constituted by features of the environment that the grieving person interacts with in a structured, sustained fashion. Grief, Brinkmann writes, is "an *extended* psychological process that involves objects and persons in our environment as constituent parts of the emotion". However, rather than risk getting caught up in lengthy debates about whether certain forms of scaffolding are partly *constitutive* of grief or merely *causally* related to it, we will remain metaphysically neutral here. What is at least plausible, we suggest, is that some of the *regulatory processes* that shape grief are interpersonal and social in nature, rather than exclusively intrapersonal. We rely on other people to regulate grief because (a) internal processes are insufficient and (b) external regulators that we might otherwise have turned to in order to shape the formation, transformation, and termination of our emotional responses are absent.

Given the roles played by interpersonal regulation, it could well be that stronger claims that have been made concerning *interpersonally distributed grief* are defensible, at least sometimes. For instance, Krueger (2015) suggests that "our grief" can consist in a single token experience shared by more than one subject. Where those subjects participate in intricate, sustained patterns of mutual regulation, it could be that two grieving processes are intertwined to such an extent that they are better regarded as a single, unified process in which two (or more) people participate. Nevertheless, even if this is granted, the kind of interpersonal regulation we are concerned with is wider-ranging. It can equally involve experiencing grief as "my grief" or even "mine, and mine alone", while relating to someone else in the second- or even third-person. Others do not have to be grieving with us in order to play regulatory roles. Hence the interpersonally and socially distributed structure of regulation can be acknowledged without making stronger claims about either socially extended grief or token emotions shared by two or more subjects.

To say that other people regulate grief is not to imply that there is some single emotion, called "grief", which is manipulated in one or another way through interactions with others. Rather, this is a general way of referring to processes that are more specifically focused, and most likely, quite diverse. As Thompson (1994, p.30) suggests, the term "emotion regulation" does not refer to a single phenomenon, but to a "broad conceptual

rubric encompassing a range of loosely related processes". This becomes all the more evident when we move away from straightforward emotional episodes, abstracted from their wider-life contexts, and acknowledge that human emotions also include multi-faceted, longer-term processes, shaped by a host of interpersonal and social interactions. It is not simply "grief" that is regulated, but various different ingredients of the grieving process, thus influencing the larger structure and trajectory of that process. The example of grief also throws into doubt the viability of a clear-cut distinction between regulation of emotion and regulation by emotion. In so far as grief involves comprehending and negotiating a life-disturbance, it plays a wider-ranging regulatory role. Yet, precisely because of this life-disturbance, grief itself requires regulation.

Other people and the wider social world can play various different roles in regulating grief. One of these is to sustain aspects of life-structure that remain intact, along with associated patterns of emotions. After all, not every project and pastime need depend on the deceased in the same way or to the same extent. Accordingly, the grieving person might immerse herself in parts of life that remain intact, something that can be aided or obstructed by particular others. For example, Joyce Carol Oates (2011, p.172) writes:

> To be back in the presence of undergraduates who know nothing of my private life. For two lively and absorbing ours I am able to forge the radically altered circumstances of this life – none of my students could guess I am certain, that "Professor Oates" is a sort of raw bleeding stump whose brain, outside the perimeters of the workshop, is in thrall to chaos.

Another role played by other people is that of helping to make sense of what has happened, to re-organize one's thinking and practice in ways that harbor the potential to contextualize, interpret, and steer emotions. For instance, Kathleen Higgins emphasizes the importance of collaborative narrative construction:

> Those who grieve make use of stories, which seem to assist the efforts to reorganize their lives, and this suggests that narrative structure, with its temporally unfurling character, is valuable to processing grief in a way that the 'on-off' notion of 'getting over it' is not. (2013, p.172)

People also contribute to the establishment of new sets of practices that can come to operate as a structuring backdrop for one's thoughts, activities, and emotions. As noted earlier, without the life-structure that more usually specifies potential paths for our activities

and thoughts to follow, there can be a strange sense of indeterminacy. It is not unlike counting "1, 2, 3, 4…" and then finding that there is no fact of the matter concerning what ought to come next. Without goals, values, commitments, and projects that make the difference between one practically meaningful course of action or outcome and another, there is no sense of what is to be done next, where one could or should go. When a person is profoundly lost in this way, others can act as guides, not only steering activities, but also nurturing changes in life-structure. Hence the task of finding new paths to follow can, to some extent at least, be delegated to them.

Engagement with a wider social and cultural context can play a similarly important role in sustaining and revising networks of habits, practices, and norms that – in some instances, at least – serve to manage emotions, structure relations with others, and specify paths to follow. For example, in an interesting book, *Death, Grief, and Mourning in Contemporary Britain*, Geoffrey Gorer (1965) documents a variety of mourning practices, norms, and rules established in Britain at the time of writing, along with changes that have occurred. His discussion emphasizes how cultural norms associated with grief have shifted and diversified, placing more weight on the preferences of the individual. Relevant practices include funerals and other rituals, dress codes, and periods of abstinence from social activities. Although not in these terms, Gorer suggests that people's emotional processes have been dysregulated by the erosion of established, normative, socio-cultural scaffolding and a shift towards individual choice. Grief, he says, risks becoming "unpatterned". Gorer distinguishes between various trajectories that grief might follow, depending – in part – on socio-cultural structures that regulate its unfolding. Being able to "weep freely", he claims, is a "reliable sign that mourning is being worked through and overcome" (p.64). In contrast to grieving processes that involve movement and change, there is what he calls "mummification", where one "preserves the grief for the lost husband or wife by keeping the house and every object in it precisely as he or she had left it, as though it were a shrine which would at any moment be reanimated" (p.79). More generally, Gorer connects the inability to "get over grief" with "the absence of any ritual either individual or social, lay or religious, to guide them and people they came in contact with" (p.83).

Whatever might be said about the specifics of Gorer's account, we think he is right to maintain that interpersonal, social, and cultural processes are integral to the *dynamism* of grief, a dynamism that is essential to the recognition and negotiation of loss. In particular, other people can play important roles in bridging the experienced gulf between worlds past and present and also in reducing the sense of indeterminacy. In turning to first-person

accounts of profound grief, we find that the themes of feeling isolated from other people in general, cut off from the social world as a whole, and stuck in stasis are inextricable. A ubiquitous theme is that of feeling, at least for a time, removed from the shared world. Consider the following testimonies:

> "I felt astonished that people could carry on as normal when I felt my world had ended."
> "Life still goes on for people around you, but your life has stood still."
> "I am looking through a window at them like some urchin from a Dickens novel."
> "You are in a grief bubble looking out at normality." [5]

A world of accepted norms, practices, and meanings persists, but the more specific life-structure that gave meaning to one's own activities, *enabling* one to engage with that world, has gone. Hence the experience is not just a matter of having one's own world profoundly disrupted; there is also a curious sense of detachment from a consensus realm that carries on regardless. This is inseparable from the sense of being disorientated and lost. Gone is an organized future, filled with possibilities for meaningful self-development:

> "I don't know where I fit in anymore."
> "I wasn't depressed, just lost!"
> "I have no future."
> "I feel I never will be able to move on."

In light of the interdependence between relating to the social world as a whole, to the future, and to other people, it is clear why interpersonal relations have important roles to play in bridging the gulf between worlds and restoring some sense of life structure. Conversely, we can see why widespread distrust and social isolation might impede a person's ability to reengage with the world, or come to inhabit a new one. Hence the issue of how grief is interpersonally, socially, and culturally structured relates to that of how typical and

[5] The testimonies quoted in this section were obtained via two separate on-line questionnaire studies, both of which were conducted in 2020. One of these was concerned specifically with the phenomenology of grief and was part of the first-author's AHRC-funded project "Grief: A Study of Human Emotional Experience" (https://www.griefyork.com). The other study investigated phenomenological effects of social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic, including their effects on experiences of bereavement. It was undertaken by the first-author, in collaboration with researchers at the Universities of Okinawa, Bristol, and Birmingham (https://groups.oist.jp/ecsu/covid-19-survey). Anyone over 18 years of old with relevant life-experience was invited to complete the questionnaires. In both cases, respondents were instructed to provide free-text responses to a series of questions addressing various aspects of experience, with no word limits.
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pathological forms of grief are to be distinguished from one another. The regulation of grief includes facilitating a dynamism that is integral to things "sinking in" and to the reorientation required to recover an organized, meaningful future. This is to be contrasted with forms of grief where a gulf between worlds lingers and movement is lacking.[6]

Let us move from the early 1960s, when Gorer undertook his research, to the present. The important roles played by interpersonal, social, and cultural factors in regulating grief are very much apparent when considering the effects of social restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those effects are no doubt diverse, and we do not seek to make confident generalizations concerning grief during the pandemic. Instead, we draw on first-person accounts in order to further illustrate the contributions more usually made by interpersonal and social scaffolding.

For some people, the experience of grief was affected by not being able to say goodbye or not being able to attend a normal funeral.[7] This, combined with the ongoing privation of social contact, may be associated with an intensification of certain painful emotions, a sense of unreality surrounding the death, and / or an experience of grief as unchanging, "on hold":

> "My dear friend died [….] and I think being unable to go to her funeral (it was online, bleak, her parents alone in a crematorium in masks – dystopian) or get together with other close friends intensified the grief."
>
> "It feels like grief was paused as it could not run the usual course of attending funeral etc. The sense of unreality still persists as [I] have not been able to see family and be aware of the missing person."
>
> "I fear that when and if this situation resolves, I will look back on that time and feel unable to cope with the way the end of my father's life was. I hope that I can recall that it was out of my control at that time and accept that I could not change things. [….] I feel unable to let go of the grief as I feel that I am putting it on hold while we wait for this situation to end and we are all, in a sense, fighting for survival. I feel that this is preventing me from reflecting on what has happened to our family."

[6] Grief experiences that fall within this latter category are sometimes associated with diagnostic labels such as "persistent complex bereavement disorder" (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), "prolonged grief disorder" (World Health Organization, 2018), and the earlier proposed category "complicated grief" (e.g. Prigerson et al, 1995).

[7] This theme is also apparent in a study of relatives of people in vegetative and minimally conscious states. Here, fantasies about funerals were found to be associated with closure and resolving a feeling of being stuck "in-between" (Kitzinger and Kitzinger 2014).

One respondent explicitly stated that "coping mechanisms were not there", while others reported difficulties associated with being "cut off from other people" and from institutions such as churches that would otherwise have provided emotional support. Some stated that social restrictions had exacerbated the loneliness of grief, prolonging the experience of being removed from the social world:

> "I've been in a little bubble and the Covid lockdown has reinforced this and I'm not sure what normal is any more and how I will ever reach it. [….] Lockdown has been awful. All of our support networks were pulled and it made us feel very alone, which is the worst."

Others describe how social restrictions have affected their grief for people who died before the events of 2020. One respondent, who lost an adult daughter two years earlier, wrote, "I am still grieving for her but because I am seeing people less I get less opportunity to talk about her I haven't been able to see her friends and I don't want them to forget her".

Grief will no doubt have been affected in diverse and sometimes contrasting ways by social restrictions. Nevertheless, these experiences together illustrate the more general point that grief is shaped and regulated by relations with other people, in the context of larger social and cultural environments. It can be added that, for some people, social restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic have exacerbated the regulatory challenges posed by grief. Regulation *of* emotion and regulation *by* emotion are required in a situation where (a) an experiential world that ordinarily shapes one's emotions is profoundly disrupted; (b) this disruption involves the loss of a person one would ordinarily turn to for support in navigating disruption; and (c) the kind of social support that might otherwise compensate for the absence of (b) is denied, either in whole or in part.

It remains to be seen what the longer-term effects will be on people's experiences of grief. However, what we have sketched here at least serves as a conceptual framework for addressing the issue. We have proposed that some of the most profound emotions that people experience consist in long-term processes rather than brief episodes, where those processes are structured by interpersonal, social, and cultural environments. Distinctions thus need to be drawn between the regulation of mundane emotions that arise within the context of a structured experiential world, emotion-processes that involve recognizing and responding to significant disturbances of that world, and ways in which these processes are themselves regulated when the more usual structure of a life has been profoundly disrupted. We have

suggested that, even where life-structure is lacking, there remains the possibility of drawing on regulatory resources that are interpersonally and socially distributed.

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