

Rhetorical Dimensions of the Post-September Eleventh Grief Process

by

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When terrorists crashed airplanes into the World Trade Center towers and the Pentagon on September 11, 2001, how did American society change? To what extent did these tragic events instigate public discursive or symbolic responses that enable coping with the loss of life and recognition of the nation's vulnerability? Military flyovers have become regular features of civilian events such as sports contests and New Year's Day parades such as the Rose Bowl. Indeed, placing competitive and celebratory events within a militaristic framework appears to be one legacy of 9-11, with public gatherings literally and figuratively under the wing of martial mindset if not martial law. Fans attending a Kansas City Royals baseball game, for instance, instead of singing "Take Me Out to the Ballgame," now intone "God Bless America." On their way to the ballpark they might listen to Toby Keith's retributive anti-terrorist song, "Courtesy of the Red, White, and Blue (The Angry American)." People who view the baseball game on television may see the "Main Street U.S.A." commercial sponsored by the Ad Council. This advertisement shows a picture of a modest neighborhood street. The voice-over announces: "On September 11th, terrorists tried to change America forever." Then the screen fades to the same neighborhood scene; however, now every porch on the street bears an American flag waving in the background. The voice-over concludes: "Well, they succeeded." Then the final tagline appears on the screen: "Freedom. Appreciate it. Cherish it. Protect it" (Advertising Council, 2003). Does the moral of September 11th culminate in smug flag-waving as a palliative? Do such public displays impel or impede the "mourning after" September 11th?

Elisabeth Kübler-Ross presents five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. The ultimate goal is to reach the fifth stage: acceptance (Kübler-Ross, 1969, 34-35). Kübler-Ross's discussion of the stages of grief dominates literature on death and dying (Attig, 1996, p. 42). She offers a conceptualization of the grief process, attaching names to the manifestations of grief rather than providing a failsafe, linear series of prescriptive steps that mourners employ in coming to grips with grief.

The basic contention of this study is that much public discourse expresses a preference for denial and anger as sufficient fulfillment of the grief process. In doing so, ultimate acceptance of September 11th and its implications is forestalled, pre-empted, or rendered undesirable as a sign of weakness or surrender. By applying Kübler-Ross's stages of grief to public discourse, one may diagnose the extent that a loss is recognized, understood, learned from, and transcended. Just as an individual's "symbolic language" can offer a publicly accessible index to awareness of death (Kübler-Ross, 1974, p. 40), so can public discourse reveal the authorized modes of reacting to death. More broadly, our examination of grief associated with September 11th reveals an ideological tint to bereavement. We argue that a conjunction of denial and anger renders difficult and painful self-examination unnecessary and undesirable. Instead of rigorously examining the systemic patterns of American and more generally of Western society that inflict alienation and inflame hatred, dwelling on anger and denial allows pursuit of business as usual but infused with a reinvigorated sense of America's innate moral superiority. This essay focuses on discourse from President Bush, popular music lyrics, and media commentaries as indices of how America experienced and evaded grief for the tragedies of September 11th. The discussion first focuses on what America is grieving, then examines Elisabeth Kübler-Ross's theory of the grieving process to discover where the United States as a whole is in the grieving process, and finally recommends how to continue along the grief process in a productive way.

A Rhetorical Perspective on Grief

Although grief has been predominantly examined psychologically as an intrapersonal dialogue, we highlight a more public, discursive dimension. This essay identifies verbalized indicators that signify specific stages of the grief process. As a rhetorical and not merely a psychological phenomenon, public articulations of grief articulate coping mechanisms that can be identified discursively. Indeed, public expressions of grief provide observable indices of how mourners work through the pain and confusion of their loss. We do not claim that precise linguistic markers serve as necessary or sufficient criteria for situating discourse at a particular stage of the grief process. Nevertheless, identification of prevailing discursive patterns, especially recurrent clusters of terms and tropes, can signify where communicators

gravitate in the grief process. These terministic clusters qualify as signs of how grief is experienced and manifested.

Embarking on a closer analysis of grief requires clarifying the connection between theories of grief and theories of communication. As presented and interpreted originally, Kübler-Ross's theory dealt not with a society as a whole, but with individuals who are dying or confronting the death of someone close to them. The examination of grief has been approached largely as an intrapersonal issue, a matter of each individual coping with the reality of death. The so-called stages of dying, more appropriately known as the phases of grief, were indeed designed to describe the reactions to an individual's death. Kübler-Ross carefully notes that a "loss of any kind" can instigate the grief process (Kübler-Ross, 1974, p. 31), thus the loss of collective security and assured American infallibility could trigger the coping mechanisms she describes. We believe it is unwise to dissociate the intrapersonal phenomenon of working through grief from the public process of mourning. Indeed, public pronouncements about September 11th not only offer external indicators of bereavement, but may actually serve as part of the grief process itself as mourners "talk through" their pain.

Infusion of discourse into the grief process addresses two major misconceptions regarding grief: linearity and passivity. The stages of grief are neither linear nor mutually exclusive. Two or more stages may occur simultaneously, and the order of the stages may vary (Kübler-Ross, 1974, pp. 25-26; Attig, 1996, p. 43). The ability to cope with grief suffers, however, when mourning ossifies at a particular stage, obscuring the possibility of eventually accepting American vulnerability and imperfection. A general consensus has arisen that while people or collectives might not progress uniformly through the stages of grief, the acceptance stage clearly represents ultimate reconciliation with loss and enables transcendence of tragedy (Kübler-Ross, 1974, p. 33). Acceptance, while desirable, is not simply a terminus at which grief stops. Like denial or any other stage of grief, acceptance requires active reinforcement. Public discourse and ritual have an important role to play in actively sustaining the coping mechanisms involved in grief.

The stages of grief also tend to form part of an essentially passive outlook on grieving. The same year that K-R's landmark *On Death and Dying* was published, Kreis and Pattie (1969) proposed a simpler, three-stage grief process: shock, suffering, and recovery. The theories that interpret death as a series or cycle of stages, however, lend themselves to an outlook on mourning as a passive process, something that one undergoes but does not actively shape. Thus a mourner might be in shock, endure suffering, and experience recovery—all of which cast the mourner more as patient than agent. The popular assumption that time heals all wounds suggests that grief can be reduced to waiting, merely letting the stages of grief run their course. Some critics have argued that all stage concepts of grieving suffer this passive outlook (Marino, 1996). A more rhetorical perspective on grief reverses this outlook by examining public discourse as part of the active, creative coping that grief involves. Grief theorist J. William Worden has revised his original analysis of mourning to include a final task: “readjust one’s symbolic tie to the lost loved one” (Marino, 1996, p. 13). Considering that the creation, manipulation, and dissolution of symbolic ties forms the core of rhetorical practice, rhetoric connects directly with the grief process. Attig (1996) also recommends greater emphasis on the active process of bereavement rather than passively suffering through the stages of grief. If bereavement is active, then the discursive representations of traumatic events can reveal the ways that people collectively are—or should be—working their way through mourning. Rhetoric therefore plays several roles in bereavement. Discursive treatments of tragedy can perform any or all of the following functions: (1) model preferred ways of coping with grief; (2) empower mourners to participate in various stages of the grief process; (3) restrict or obscure the desirability or possibility of engaging in the phases of bereavement.

What Are We Grieving?

In order for Kübler-Ross's stages of grief to apply, people must lose something very close and special to them. In a collective sense, even more was lost than the human casualties on September 11th. As a whole, America lost a major defining trait of invulnerability.

Then, in the early hours of September 11, 2001, that hubris and worse yet, the sense of invincibility died a sudden and horrific death. A handful of

fanatics had achieved what no empire had ever managed: to temporarily decapitate the command centre of the US. The worst foreign attack on US soil signaled that the US, once inviolate, had discovered the vulnerability and insecurity that was the lot of lesser nations. (Rapley, 2004)

Indeed, the assault on perceived invulnerability struck at American identity: “As Americans, we have not been the same since Sept. 11. Our sense of security, feelings of invulnerability and confidence were shaken to the core by the terrorist attacks” (Brahms, 2002, p. 1D). Almost immediately, however, the trauma of loss began to be reintegrated into a larger narrative of American triumph, not only in dealing with the immediate event but in recognizing the status of the United States as inherently superior to such threats. As one commentator noted, “Americans have a remarkable ability to metabolize an event of this magnitude. They do it through sheer size, and power, and will, through the creative chaos of free-market democracy; they make apocalypse part of the Great American Story” (Levin, 2002). The *Tampa (Florida) Tribune* quotes a Zephyrhills, Florida, teacher: “Sept. 11 is an event that still affects all of us, every day. And while we want to remember the happenings of that day, we also want to remember that we’re still here. And we’re still one of the most amazing countries on the planet” (Hussey, 2003, p. 17). The United States, since becoming the world’s superpower after World War II, and especially since the collapse of the Soviet Union, has had an aura of invulnerability. The Zephyrhills teacher’s quotation makes the claim that even after the attacks, we are still the best country in the world. Robert Maddox, a retired professor from Pennsylvania State University, stated, “We were accustomed to safety and security, unlike some other countries that have their border threatened year after year. They never know whether they’re going to war. We didn’t have such feelings” (Hendee, 2001, p. 1A).

The fact is that we are not as invincible as we might have thought. Since the exposure of airport security lapses on September 11, 2001, the number of airport screeners doubled, cockpit doors have been reinforced, security personnel or pilots carry handguns, and now everyone has their bags thoroughly searched. Pranksters still engage in stunts such as smuggling contraband items to remind us of our vulnerability (Donnelly, Fonda, & Thomas, 2003). A new terrorist database that has over 100,000

potential terrorist names is now available for airlines, the CIA, the FBI, and other agencies and organizations to quickly access information about potential terrorists (Stein, 2003). Though we may have the mightiest conventional military, we are prone to terrorism, and the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 brought this fact to the American people in a shocking way.

Ignoring Vulnerability: The Denial Phase

Evasions of grief or refusal to admit vulnerability occur for good reason. Public expressions of grief involve admissions of weakness and mortality, recognition that we can be hurt by things we cannot control. Political leaders feel especially intense social pressure to display strength and restrain emotion—just ask Edmund Muskie and Howard Dean. The urge to appear strong dovetails with the masculine ideal of imperviousness to emotion. Together, these forces of national pride and machismo stifle expressions of grief that admit suffering: “In our society we are supposed to be a strong and courageous people and we urge grievers to be strong and courageous even at a time when it is unhealthy to avoid the normal suffering and heartache” (Kreis & Pattie, 1969, p. 5).

One clear discursive index of denial is the extent that euphemisms are employed to obscure the immediacy and severity of death. Euphemisms serve an important social function as strategic evasions that reduce the likelihood of verbal offense. Many maxims of politeness operate by substituting roundabout terms for topics considered taboo. Death, of course, qualifies as a widely avoided topic, and the euphemisms for death could fill volumes. Euphemisms can cause problems, however, when they obscure actual events enough to inhibit facing or coping with the underlying reality (Grazian, 1997). Sensitivity might call for euphemisms, but they can become mechanisms to evade the painful and humbling process of encountering how life might change as a result of human loss. Despite the ubiquity of euphemisms in interpersonal contexts, they have received little attention because researchers apparently consider them annoying circumlocutions or deceptions (McGlone and Batchelor, 2003). Research has not addressed the role euphemisms play in the grief process. If euphemisms do play a role in coping with traumatic loss, they acquire greater significance and deserve further examination. In the

context of September 11th, euphemisms have been employed not merely for death, but for the entire experience or concept of being victimized by terrorism.

The euphemistic names for events relevant to September 11th cause concern because they prolong denial instead of allowing mourners to cope with grief. In interpersonal contexts, McGlone and Batchelor (2003) find that communicators choose euphemisms largely to save face by circumventing discussion of difficult or embarrassing topics. In public discourse, euphemisms may serve as diversions to avoid confronting issues that reveal vulnerability. This refusal can thwart the soul-searching that ultimately strengthens an individual or a nation after tragedy. “Until America emerges from her state of denial that nobody can hurt her, she can only hurt herself [and] she will fail to make headway in the war on terror” (Rapley, 2004).

Denial is the buffer after hearing the shocking news. The *Omaha World-Herald* stated one of the major perceptions Americans had in 2001 was: “Americans in 2001 are citizens of the world’s lone remaining superpower and had an attitude that no one would dare attack here” (Hendee, 2001, p. 1A). The nation certainly used this buffer; however, with the images of a burning buildings on television screens, the nation quickly realized that denying our lack of security is null and void. The *World-Herald* also cited a psychologist from the University of Nebraska Medical Center quoting one of his previous conversations: “I’m waiting for the other shoe to drop” (Hendee, 2001, p. 1A). The article points out that almost two months after the attacks, people seemed to fear more attacks were imminent.

Kübler-Ross (1969) notes that the denial stage is extremely important to help cushion the immediate impact of loss. Even the name selected for the annual commemoration of the attacks enshrines denial. September 11th of each year has been designated by unanimous Congressional resolution and by executive proclamation as “Patriot Day.” As the public began to anticipate additional attacks, the Bush administration quickly issued statements to solidify America in the denial stage. For example, on September 27, 2001, President Bush spoke at Chicago’s O’Hare International Airport. “We’ve got quite a crowd traveling today, all of whom—all of whom are here to say as clearly as we can to the American public, get on the airlines, get about the business of America” (Bush, 2001, September 27). Sixteen days

after the attacks, the palliative for grief seemed to be going about business as usual. When the going gets tough, Americans should go shopping for airline tickets. Paradoxically, the remedy for tragedy was to patronize the very transportation systems whose security lapses were exploited. Another irony arises by juxtaposing the instruction to support business with the explanation that America was attacked because of its perceived materialism. In the 2002 State of the Union message, “Bush’s intimation was clear: American materialism and selfishness invited the 9/11 terrorist attacks” (Semmler, 2003, p. 72). Yet the recommendation to “get about the business of America” reinforces the materialistic mindset the attacks targeted.

President Bush labeled September 14th as “National Day of Prayer and Remembrance” (Bush, 2001, September 14), and September 11th as “Patriot Day” (Bush, 2002, September 9). According to the President, we are supposed to behave the same on both of these days. The official proclamation recognizing Patriot Day states:

I call upon the people of the United States to observe this day with appropriate ceremonies and activities, including remembrance services and candlelight vigils. I also call upon the Governors of the United States and the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico, as well as appropriate officials of all units of government, to direct that the flag be flown at half-staff on Patriot Day. Furthermore I encourage all Americans to display the flag at half-staff from their homes on that day and to observe a moment of silence beginning at 8:46 a.m. eastern daylight time, or another appropriate commemorative time, to honor the innocent victims who lost their lives as a result of the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. (Bush, 2002, September 4).

Bush delivered a strikingly similar, though more religious, speech on September 14th the previous year about the National Day of Prayer and Remembrance:

On this national day of prayer and remembrance, we ask almighty God to watch over our nation, and grant us patience and resolve in all that is to come. We pray that He will

comfort and console those who now walk in sorrow. We thank Him for each life we now must mourn, and the promise of a life to come. (Bush, 2001, September 14)

One must wonder what the differences are between the two days. The Day of Prayer and Remembrance explicitly acknowledges the pain and loss resulting from the attacks. One year later the observance remains the same, but it now becomes subsumed under the rubric of patriotic fervor.

Kübler-Ross (1969) also points out that the need to deny comes and goes, and although we may enter another stage of grief, every now and then we do deny our loss. Country music star Toby Keith, who has been writing many songs about the war on terrorism, released his album *Unleashed* on 23 July 2002. This album included the song “It’s all Good,” which was based on current events. He stated on his website: “No matter how bad it may appear to be in this country, we still live in the best place in the world. Period” (Keith, 2002). This statement, practically quoted verbatim a year later by the aforementioned teacher from Zephyrhills, Florida, indicates that a reassertion of superiority amid the exposure of weakness might restore a sense of invulnerability or at least conceal its loss. Admission that things might be bad quickly gives way to the sentiment that even tragedy in America is better than everyday life elsewhere.

On September 11, 2003, Zephyrhills, Florida conducted an “upbeat” event to “celebrate community unity and national spirit” (Hussey, 2003). Oklahoma City scheduled two city wide “celebrations” on September 11, 2003 titled “Celebrating America’s Freedoms: A Day of Remembrance” (City of Oklahoma City, 2002). The title and the subtitle maintain a mutual tension, as the celebration of freedom does not define what the celebrants are remembering. The activities during the day resemble the Fourth of July more than a commemorative ceremony. Events included a speech revealing six American freedoms and their relevance to daily life, a “patriotic” concert by the Oklahoma Philharmonic Orchestra, and a finally candlelight vigil, which finally explicitly acknowledges the loss of life. Without major activities during the day that deal with the attacks, does the candlelight vigil at night cope with the terrorist attacks or simply grudgingly acknowledge their occurrence?

Activities such as those in Oklahoma City and Zephyrhills may be reassuring, but to what extent do they facilitate dealing with grief? Focusing on patriotism rather than on the attacks themselves evades the underlying reason for a “Patriot Day.” Instead of remembering the thousands of lives lost while we believed no one would think to attack America directly, the events focused on Patriotism (capitalized because it is loyalty to the greatest country on earth), and attempting to rebuild the tarnished image of America as the ultimate superpower. Many reactions and commemorations still clearly periodically revert to the mindset that America is invulnerable or simply deny the gravity of the terrorist attacks by avoiding the true subject.

Public perception may still linger in the denial phase. Relatively soon after the original attacks, dire warnings seemed to be losing their force. During the February 2003 “Orange alert,” observers noted that:

[for] some districts, though, an orange alert is not enough to put the brakes on school travel. Pennsylvania's 48,000-student Baldwin-Whitehall school district, in the Pittsburgh suburbs, and the 109,000-student Charlotte-Mecklenburg school system in North Carolina will restrict student travel only if federal officials announce a red alert. (Zehr, 2003, p. 4)

In a widely reprinted 22 February 2003 letter to the *Atlanta Journal Constitution*, a reader mocked how seriously people took the color-coded terrorist alert system:

In the spirit of capitalism, I propose that Corporate America sponsor the various levels in the color-coded terrorism alert system. Besides raising money that could be directed toward anti-terrorism activities, it would instill a sense of pride and patriotism among employees when they hear the words: “This security alert brought to you by the caring folks at (your company name here).” And don’t forget the favorable publicity and increased sales. I suggest the following sponsorships:

- Green alert: Eli Lilly, makers of Prozac (Sure, everything’s fine—for now)

- Blue alert: American Express (Don't leave home without it. In fact, don't leave home at all)
- Yellow alert: Hertz car rentals (Get out while the going's good) and Kodak (Because you just don't know how many Kodak moments you have left)
- Orange alert: Home Depot (For all your duct tape and plastic sheeting needs)
- Red alert: Coke (It's the real thing!), Orkin (Hello Orkin man, good-bye world), and Target (self-explanatory). (Prasso, 2003)

Only two years after the attacks, even in the face of impending war (which means our shores could be directly attacked) respect for the danger level the CIA, FBI, and the President believed we were facing had begun to erode.

Three years after the terrorist attacks, denial persists. "Observing the activities of the 9/11 commission in Washington, I cannot help but wonder if America, in mourning the loss of her invincibility, is still stuck in denial" (Rapley, 2004). Kübler-Ross notes that denial of death is quite easy in a society that encourages such avoidance. She remarks that getting beyond denial is difficult, since it requires recognition of finiteness, yet facing one's finitude fosters greater appreciation of life (Kübler-Ross, 1974, p. 21). On the collective level, recognition of individual finitude has an analog of recognizing the conditionality of American power and coming to grips with the nation's vulnerability. Conversely, reaffirming American invincibility solidifies denial by refusing to recognize any doubts about national security or policy directions that might arise from September 11th.

Kübler-Ross offers prescient commentary on the destructive potential of denial. If denial becomes impossible or untenable, then "we can attempt to master death by challenging it" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 24). She continues: "If a whole nation, a whole society suffers from such a fear and denial of death, it has to use defenses which can only be destructive," and identifies war as one of several "indicators of our decreasing ability to face death with acceptance and dignity" (1969, p. 24).

Retaliation and Retribution: The Anger Phase

Kübler-Ross states that the first reaction to death is, “No, it’s not true, no, it cannot involve me.” Soon thereafter a new logical reaction follows that displaces initial denial: “Oh, yes, it is me, it was not a mistake.” Along with this realization come anger, hate, rage, and resentment. The anger that accompanies anguish is one of the most difficult aspects of grief to overcome (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 50). Constant replays of the airplane impacts and the World Trade Center towers crashing earthward made simple denial futile. Besides, denial in itself does nothing to cope with tragic loss. Modern Western culture seems unaccustomed and relatively unreceptive to a gradual grief process (Lukeman, 1982). Craving a quick resolution to feelings of helplessness that accompany unexpected loss, mourners are tempted to embrace decisive actions, especially if those actions promise retribution for the loss. Especially tempting are actions that promise to restore confidence that something can be done to take care of “unfinished business” (Lukeman, 1982, p. 46), even if that reparation involves killing death on others to avenge deaths that were inflicted. This externalization of anger serves a cathartic function. With “a tremendous amount of rage locked into mourning” (Lukeman, 1982, p. 50), release of anger provides relief that someone is to blame and something can be done.

Anger as Empowerment

The United States underwent and still experiences grief from September 11th. This country has endured similarly earth-shattering events before, such as Pearl Harbor and the Oklahoma City bombing. While neither of these events is forgotten, the country has moved through the grief process and accepted their somber reality. Pearl Harbor was attacked, as Franklin Roosevelt made clear, by a sovereign nation: “the empire of Japan.” As a result, war could be declared against a clear-cut, military enemy not only garbed in an identifiable uniform but visibly distinguishable by racial characteristics, the latter assertion underlying the internment of Japanese-Americans. Solemn commemorative ceremonies take place at the site of the attack, and Pearl Harbor contains museums that house artifacts from the event. Timothy McVeigh embodied the ultimate villain. His capture, conviction, and execution brought definite closure to the Oklahoma City tragedy. Justice was done. September 11th, however, was different.

The attacks of September 11, 2001, were perpetrated by an amorphous conglomerate, al-Qaeda, instead of an easily identifiable sovereign nation. The enemy arose from within, since the terrorists used American commercial airliners as weapons and attended American flight schools. The enemy in our midst also is not easily excised, since even the capture of Osama Bin Laden would not dampen the destructive fervor of terrorists—as the capture of Saddam Hussein demonstrates. It is not surprising that this dissatisfying lack of closure and failure to fit familiar narrative patterns of villains can fuel frustration. From their personal experiences with grief and from interviews with five hundred griever and their families, Kreis and Pattie conclude that the anger borne of grief tends to be “irrational, born of frustration,” and anger in the wake of loss “often distorts the truth” (1969, p. 17).

When death is unexpected, as was the case with the 9/11 tragedies, the search for someone to blame exerts a powerful pull (Worden, 1991). Experiences and expressions of grief become problematic when the loss stems “from any incident that is highly traumatizing, sudden or unexpected,” losses that Robert A. Niemeier, president of the Association for Death Education and Counseling, classified as “non-normative” (Marino, 1996, p. 13). Unnatural deaths, such as a child predeceasing parents or a healthy person cut down in the prime of life, make little sense in themselves, so mourners search for rationalization if not justification. Thus Saddam Hussein and his entire regime were identified as culprits, instigators, or conspirators linked with the September 11th terrorist attacks, not so much on the basis of accurate or compelling evidence but because it provided a familiar narrative structure that rendered 9/11 more understandable. The enemy coalesced from an amorphous group of infiltrators to a sovereign nation. The enemy was familiar, since Saddam Hussein was cast as the villain in operation Desert Storm. A recurrent villain, a sovereign nation circumscribed by a definite geographic area, and a conventional military threat make up the ingredients of the standard war story. Here was a blameworthy scoundrel and a war we could fight to win.

Keeping grief at the anger stage becomes especially problematic when the anger is displaced toward an external agent. Typically the mourner directs anger toward the deceased: “How could you die and leave me? You abandoned your loved ones.” Desperately seeking some sense of control over the

death or its implications, the bereaved may find comfort in blaming someone else for the death (Worden, 1991). This kind of displacement ultimately can prevent the mourner from taking responsibility for dealing with the loss, as comfort now equates with inflicting pain on those deemed responsible. Ultimately the anger directed toward others shields the mourner from having to confront the admission of death. The mourner feels empowered by the ability to produce pain, avoiding the sense of impotent victimage that an event such as 9/11 could instill. Since sudden, unexpected death creates feelings of helplessness among survivors (Worden, 1991), anger and its physical manifestation in violence offer ways to reclaim control over events. Kübler-Ross urges tolerance toward anger, but only insofar as anger facilitates progress toward ultimately reconciling with the fact of loss (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 54).

Anger still seethes despite appearances of acceptance. Amid the 2004 Presidential campaign, Vice President Cheney bristled at Senator John Kerry's claimed ability to "fight a more effective, more thoughtful, more strategic, more proactive, more sensitive war on terror" (Cheney blasts Kerry, 2004). Although Kerry's comment referred specifically to a "more sensitive war on terror that reaches out to other nations and brings them to our side," Cheney reacted to what he considered a preposterous connection between sensitivity and the war on terror. Invoking the desire to avenge the September 11th casualties, Cheney saw sensitivity as incompatible with the anger that should be maintained. Cheney stoked the fires of anger by replying: "A sensitive war will not destroy the evil men who killed 3,000 Americans and who seek the chemical, nuclear and biological weapons to kill hundreds of thousands more" (Cheney blasts Kerry, 2004). Destruction of the designated perpetrators would serve not only as a deterrent to further terrorism, but would offer reassurance that retributive justice had been served. Destroying the forces of terror also would reassert America's might, compensating for its impotence in preventing the 9/11 attacks.

Sing a Song of Vengeance

Amid the impoverished vocabulary of grief rituals in contemporary America, popular music rushed in to fill the void. Country musicians, perhaps conscious of their listener demographics, responded with a flurry of patriotic songs. Toby Keith, for example, wrote "Courtesy of the Red White

and Blue: The Angry American.” The song not only promises revenge for the terrorist attacks, but reasserts American power as anger channeled into military might.

Chorus:

Hey Uncle Sam
 Put your name at the top of his list
 And the Statue of Liberty
 Started shakin’ her fist
 And the eagle will fly
 Man, it’s gonna be hell
 When you hear Mother Freedom
 Start ringin’ her bell
 And it feels like the whole wide world is raining down on you
 Brought to you Courtesy of the Red White and Blue

Verse 4:

Justice will be served
 And the battle will rage
 This big dog will fight
 When you rattle his cage
 And you’ll be sorry that you messed with
 The U.S. of A.
 ’Cause we’ll put a boot in your ass
 It’s the American way (Keith, 2002)

The stunned paralysis of denial has transformed into a fist in the air and a boot in the ass. This song, which won a video of the year award and is part of the AMA Top Country Album of the 2002, captured his angry feelings regarding the terrorist attacks (Keith, 2002). People were rightfully upset about the attacks, and anger naturally swelled toward the people who were perceived to be responsible for the attacks.

Darryl Worley’s “Have You Forgotten?” is the title track of his 2003 album that followed his USO tour of Afghanistan the previous year. The lyrics allude to recommendations from psychologists that the terrorist attacks not be replayed frequently on television for fear of reviving traumatic stress. Instead of heeding this advice, Worley embraces the anger that flows from reliving the tragedy.

They took all the footage off my T.V.
 Said it’s too disturbing for you and me
 It’ll just breed anger that’s what the experts say
 If it was up to me I’d show it every day
 Some say this country’s just out looking for a fight

After 9/11 man I'd have to say that's right (Worley & Varble, 2003)

The violence that springs from anger becomes the fruition of grief. Lashing out at the perpetrators deserves praise not only as an appropriate response, but as the culmination of the grief process. Far from an emotion that needs to be curtailed or transcended, the stimuli of anger should intensify with daily revisitations to the terrorist attacks.

"I Raq and Roll," performed by Clint Black, includes qualifiers that at first give the impression of tempering the thirst for vengeance. The lyrics note: "We're not begging for a fight/ No matter what they say," and "I pray for peace, prepare for war" (Black, 2004). The song quickly proceeds to crow about American technological tools of war.

I'm back and I'm a high-tech GI Joe
I've got infrared, I've got GPS and I've got that good old-fashioned lead
There's no price too high for freedom
So be careful where you tread (Black, 2004)

Although violence might qualify as a last resort, it arises as the inevitable logical and moral response to ultimate evil.

If everyone would go for peace
There'd be no need for war
But we can't ignore the devil
He'll keep coming back for more (Black, 2004)

By casting Saddam Hussein and America's enemies as demonic, the struggle acquires an eschatological tone. Violence might be avoidable under ordinary circumstances, but a demonic threat mandates unbridled force. Further dehumanized in the song as "the garbage" that American troops dispose, the objects of anger deserve wrath, which justifies anger not only as a reasonable response but as a patriotic duty.

In the aftermath of September 11th, even songs unconnected with the events were appropriated to fuel retributive fervor. Martina McBride's "Independence Day," written by Gretchen Peters, initially was released on her 1993 album *Way That I Am*. The lyrics and the accompanying 1994 video make it clear that the song deals with domestic abuse. McBride's own web site describes the song as "a soaring

anthem that features a brutally honest portrayal of domestic violence” (McBride, 2004). In the video, scenes of an Independence Day parade and fair interlace with clips of a young girl’s father hitting her and pinning her to the ground. Their home burns, presumably an act of arson that kills the father, thus freeing the girl from the abusive household, but the act also “sent me to the county home.” The song has been adopted as the theme of Sean Hannity’s conservative talk radio show, played at the top of each hour and featured in “Hannity’s Pro-American Song Club” (Hannity.com, 2004). What listeners hear, however, is a carefully culled selection of the song that omits the domestic violence context and broadcasts clips that seem to call for justice to be served on the perpetrators of the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Hannity’s program broadcasts only the refrain:

Let freedom ring, Let the white dove sing
 Let the whole world know that today is a day of reckoning
 Let the weak be strong, let the right be wrong
 Roll the stone away, let the guilty pay
 It’s Independence Day (McBride, 2004)

Shorn of its framing as a tale of child abuse and domestic strife, the refrain restores order with its reassurance that justice will be served to the terrorist villains. “Independence Day” provides an excellent example of how to subvert reflection on pressing internal problems (child abuse, dysfunctional families, the juvenile justice system). The “day of reckoning” calls listeners to focus their energy on punishing the perpetrators rather than an internal reckoning with the ideological weaknesses and contradictions that the attacks exposed. Instead of facing the social issues raised by the song, audiences have tended to adopt it as a feel-good rallying cry to reassert American power against the culprits that instigated the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Such appropriation of popular music often occurs. Bruce Springsteen’s 1984 hit “Born in the U.S.A.,” a painful account of a Vietnam war veteran’s disillusion and dissolution, became a nativist rallying cry praised and adopted by supporters of Ronald Reagan (Leopold, 2004). Only the refrain that repeated the title line was chanted, while the tale of a down-and-out, friendless, jobless veteran was lost in silence. Instead of a harsh critique of how Vietnam veterans were treated, Springsteen’s song transformed into a celebration of the very system that failed to reintegrate the veteran into society.

Anger as Policy

There is definitely a difference between Kübler-Ross's original application to terminally ill patients expressing anger and the collective expression of anger. But just as terminally ill patients can make life difficult for family and health care providers, public discourse can displace anger "in all directions" (Kübler-Ross, 1969, p. 50), such as toward specific population groups and countries. Discrimination against Arabs and Arab-Americans started to be expressed more openly. In November 2001, Republican Representative Saxby Chambliss of Georgia was pressured to be removed as a member of the House Intelligence Terrorism and Homeland Security Subcommittee because he stated: "Terrorism prevention could be improved if the local sheriff were to 'arrest every Muslim that comes across the state line'" (Chambliss' demotion sought, 2001). Even today, especially since the war in Iraq, Arab-Americans are concerned about the discriminatory repercussions of September 11th:

According to Merrie Nagimy, president of the ADC [American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee] chapter, several Arab Americans, including a couple of university professors, have lost their jobs since the Sept. 11 attacks. Jeff Boshar, the group's treasurer, said there has been a "16-fold increase in hate crimes" following the 2001 attacks. "We will not tolerate this discrimination," Nagimy said. "This is a vulnerable community. People are scared and angry." (Johnson, 2003).

Anger breeds anger in an escalating cycle. Angry mourners vent their anger by attacking other groups, who then become angry and retaliate in ways that intensify the anger of their targets, *ad infinitum*.

Perhaps the most compelling indicator of the anger phase is President Bush's rhetoric. Immediately after the terrorist attacks, America was placed on a wartime footing that persists today. "America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism" (Bush, 2001, September 11). Only four months later in the State of the Union Address, President Bush defined the targets as the "Axis of Evil":

Our second goal is to prevent regimes that sponsor terror from threatening America or our friends and allies with weapons of mass destruction. Some of these regimes have

been pretty quiet since September the 11th. But we know their true nature. North Korea is a regime arming with missiles and weapons of mass destruction, while starving its citizens.

Iran aggressively pursues these weapons and exports terror, while an unelected few repress the Iranian people's hope for freedom.

Iraq continues to flaunt its hostility toward America and to support terror. The Iraqi regime has plotted to develop anthrax, and nerve gas, and nuclear weapons for over a decade. This is a regime that has already used poison gas to murder thousands of its own citizens—leaving the bodies of mothers huddled over their dead children. This is a regime that agreed to international inspections—then kicked out the inspectors. This is a regime that has something to hide from the civilized world.

States like these, and their terrorist allies, constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world. (Bush, 2002, January 29).

The “pointing fingers” aspect of the speech directly shows the new stance of foreign policy, a policy of retribution. Kübler-Ross notes that anger is especially large for “the man who has been in control all his life and who reacts with rage and anger when he is forced to give up these controls” (1969, p. 48). This is why our country has become so emotionally devastated from the terrorist attacks. The United States had to in a single instant give up the idea of invulnerability, the idea the country has kept so sacred since at least the end of World War II. The reaction, as Kübler-Ross notes, is an angry catharsis. Within two weeks military forces were hunting down Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, and on 19 March 19 2003, the United States declared war on the first member of the “Axis of Evil,” Iraq. In essence, American military actions abroad represent attempts to recover the invulnerability born of presumed moral superiority. Regardless of how much America bombs/liberates other countries, the rhetoric and actions of the “War on Terror” are going to be filed alongside the “War on Drugs” and the “War on Communism.” While these wars might promote righteous causes, they are inherently impossible to win as long as the enemy remains

amorphous and the terms of victory ill-defined. Absent clear criteria for victory, anger remains unsatisfied and the fight continues.

Media coverage of the military actions in Iraq and Afghanistan have not helped to progress the United States through the anger stage. CNN, for example, is individualizing each death. Clicking on CNN's website, one can find a nearly complete listing of all coalition casualties and freed prisoners of war. The effect, depending on the individual viewing the website, is going to be anger (i.e., "the terrorist bastards killed these troops"), or despair (i.e., "I can't believe all these people are dead."). Neither effect is desirable. The first effect *reinforces* the anger as opposed to merely feeling and expressing anger, while the second restarts the grief process anew by reverting to denial.

Anger is a necessary and natural part of the grieving process. It does not, however, constitute a sufficient reaction to loss. When the cocoon of American invulnerability ruptured, Americans lost a major defining characteristic, and they will naturally express anger at this assault on their status that might force a reappraisal of national identity. But unlike the terminally ill patients Kübler-Ross visited, the way America expresses its anger can and will carry larger political and social ramifications.

What Now? Recommendations for Growth

Although the goal is to reach the acceptance stage, the grief process is not a race to a finish line. People grieving individually and collectively must take whatever time is necessary to process and reconcile with their grief. Neither staying stationary nor rushing through the stages resolves the issues of grief. With this caveat in mind, the following recommendations could assist in coping with tragic loss.

One factor that inhibits full experience of grief is the absence of generally recognized rituals for mourning. "However, in contemporary mainstream America, there are no culturally common postfuneral grief rituals, and therefore there is no consensus about how to mourn 'appropriately'" (Castle and Phillips, 2003, p. 45). Aside from the rigid structures of state funerals such as the ceremony for Ronald Reagan, the vocabulary of public symbols to designate grief remains paltry. This absence of grief rituals seems to be a modern phenomenon. In his seminal study of Greco-Roman funerary practices, Donovan Ochs observes that the shared enactment of highly structured death rituals reinforced the sense of community

and indeed actually helped to define the essence of community (1993, p. 119). American puzzlement about ritual observance surfaces in the ongoing debates about the design of a suitable memorial at Ground Zero. Three years after the terrorist attacks, architects continue to haggle about the structure's appearance, with the result being a hodgepodge of designs (What's to be done, 2004).

Rituals of mourning perform a vital social function. Ochs explains: "No social organization, if it is to both continue functioning productively and maintaining itself effectively can afford the debilitating impact of a prolonged bereavement" (1993, p. 33). Rituals are effective because as Dorothy Becvar states in her book, *In the Presence of Grief*, "At a fundamental level, [rituals] sustain continuity with the past, offer stability in the present, and provide guidance for the future" (2001, p. 210). Her research from D. Feinstein points out:

They transmit the combined wisdom of previous generations and are built on the promise that future generations can derive the lessons of painful experiences without having to repeat them. Rituals, like myths, address (1) our urge to comprehend our existence in a meaningful way, (2) our search for a marked pathway as we move from one stage of our lives to the next, (3) our need to establish secure fulfilling relationship within a human community, and (4) our longing to know our part in the vast wonder and mystery of the cosmos (Becvar, 2001, p. 210).

Ritual observances, through their regularity and predictability, restore a sense of order amid chaos. The rhythm of ritual provides continuity amid the interruptions that result from unexpected death.

Jewish grief rituals offer an example of a systematic and effective way to encounter grief (Brahms, 2002). Jewish custom prescribes specific time periods for fulfilling obligatory mourning. During the first week after death, a period known as shiva, survivors remain confined to the home. During this time, the community rallies around the mourners, providing for their needs. A thirty-day period follows, during which the survivors return to synagogue and workplace, but refrain from celebratory activities. For a year, mourners recite the Kaddish, the mourner's prayer, daily or weekly. Then the anniversary of death, known as *yahrzeit* (Yiddish for "one year's time") is noted annually while

life has gradually returned to its normal pace. While certainly not the only model of grief rituals, the Jewish method illustrates a systematic, incremental return to life after confronting death. This ritual has been practiced by the Jewish community for approximately 3,000 years.

Puzzlement about how to incorporate September 11th into the nation's psyche is reflected in the absence of a substantive name for the event. The name as a date permanently fixes the initial stage of denial not only because the name inherently avoids the subject it references (terrorist attacks), but also it fails to replace the initial date of trauma with a larger signification. Becvar admits grief is necessary to appreciate joy. Once America admits as a nation that it is vulnerable to attack, as a nation we may feel "liberated" (Becvar, 2001, p. 261). And in the end, we might even be stronger because we overcame the tragedy.

Even three years after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and United Airlines flight 93, the United States is facing an identity crisis and is mourning the loss of its defining characteristic of invulnerability. Kübler-Ross presents one of the most widely accepted views of the grieving process. Although the process was designed for personal or interpersonal grief, the theory can prove instructive about how collectivities grieve. Perhaps one of the main differences between the grief of the group and grief of the individual comes from the power a group has over others when exerting its anger, rather than an individual's exertion of anger that may tend to be more inner-directed. As long as the United States continues to seek retribution on anyone other than Al Qaeda for the attacks, the United States will have a difficult time progressing toward accepting its vulnerability.

Socially there is need to stop denying the occurrence and the ramifications of the terrorist events. Between the naming of the day and the Patriot "celebration" of cities, people are avoiding the difficult self-examination that the tragedies of September 11th invite. Anger also fuels denial as long as retribution toward others qualifies as sufficient to absolve grief. Borrowing freely from Kenneth Burke's terminology, perhaps the most productive response to September 11th would be to develop a grammar of grief. Instead of avoiding the discomfort of discussing death and transferring anger to the most expedient enemy, the nation may need to embrace tragedy by refining its repertoire of rituals.

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