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Vulnerable Lives

The Experience of Death and Loss among the Aka and Ngandu Adolescents of the Central African Republic

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This chapter examines the context and nature of responses to loss among two culturally distinct adolescent groups in central Africa-Aka foragers and Ngandu farmers. Cross-cultural research on grief among adolescents has seldom been conducted (for exceptions, see Eisenbruch 1991; Oltjenbrun 1989; Bachar et al.1997). As far as I am aware, grief among adolescents in small-scale, relatively egalitarian cultures has never been systematically studied. When grief is examined cross-culturally, it is placed within a Euroamerican context, giving the impression that the experience of adolescent grief is similar across cultures.

The study of grief in small-scale cultures may be important for identifying potential human universals of loss and grief and how various demographic and cultural contexts contribute to diversity in how grief is experienced. Anthropologists working with small-scale cultures have documented the relatively high (by Western standards) mortality rates. Infant mortality is often 10-20 percent and juvenile mortality 25-60 percent (Hewlett 1991; Hewlett et al. 1996). Researchers have also demonstrated that many children in these cultures live with stepparents in late childhood and adolescence due to the loss of one or both parents (Chagnon 1997; Hewlett 1991). Life history theory indicates adult and child mortality rates predict a variety of behavioral and reproductive patterns later in life (Charnov 1993; Chisholm 1996). LeVine et al. (1992) note that infant mortality is the prime factor that explains differences in childcare patterns between industrialized and agricultural cultures (i.e., agricultural parents

being more indulgent with children due to higher mortality rates). While these studies describe frequent death among foragers and farmers, and hypothesize a variety of consequences in adult life, few, if any, studies have examined how children or adolescent foragers or farmers view or deal with recurrent death. Some studies describe funeral rituals (emphasizing adult burials) but seldom do they try to understand how individuals view and feel about the deaths of family and friends, how death and loss impact their lives, how they deal with recurrent loss, or how age (e.g., the loss of children versus adults) or gender may influence one's feelings of loss and grief.

Woodburn (1982a) has conducted one of the only studies of death in hunting and gathering societies. He indicates that, by comparison to farmers and pastoralists, foragers have relatively temporary grief; social continuity is not stressed because of their immediate return system. By comparison, he hypothesizes that farmers and pastoralists, with delayed return systems, have more prolonged grief for particular kin (e.g., lineage-based kin).

Euroamerican research is of limited use for understanding loss and grief in small-scale cultures. Western research is based upon the adolescent's experiences of loss of one or two family members or friends, or adolescents who have not experienced loss but are given fictitious situations of death within the family. I call this hypothetical grief, because they have not actually experienced the loss of a loved one, and they then are asked how they would feel and respond to this hypothetical situation (Swain 1979; Orbach et al. 1994; Mitchell 1967).

Adolescents were selected for study because they can cognitively fully understand death, according to Piaget and others (Nagy 1989; Piaget 1963; Koocher 1973; Baker et al. 1996; Cook and Oljetenbruns 1998). Other developmentalists, such as Erickson (1963) and Bowlby (1972) suggest that adolescence is a particularly difficult time in terms of identity development, balancing attachment, and exploratory or autonomy-seeking behavioral systems. Presumably, a loss experienced at this point would be especially traumatic and would resonate throughout the life of the individual. Not all researchers agree on this (Hogan et al. 1984,1994; Pollock 1986; Mufson 1985; Walker 1993).

The chapter utilizes an integrated evolutionary approach (Hewlett and Lamb 2001) to interpret the data. An integrated approach predicates that it is essential to understand the ecology, psychology, and culture of grief. The potential adaptive design of grief is hypothesized, whereby grief is seen as a "cry for survival" and a time when corollary social networks of kin and other caregivers are established and a reorganization of attachment figures takes place.

METHODS

Three methods were utilized: informal interviews with individuals regarding their feelings and experiences with loss, free listing of all deaths remembered, and a ranking of the individuals who caused the greatest feelings of loss and grief. Twenty Aka and twenty Ngandu were asked to participate in the study. Demographically the sample consisted of 13 Aka males, seven Aka females; 12 Ngandu males, eight Ngandu females; nine younger (10–15) Aka adolescents and 11 older (16–20) adolescents; 11 younger Ngandu adolescents and nine older Ngandu adolescents. In order to check reliability and validity of the data and obtain some sense of changes over time, 15 [seven Ngandu (three females and four males) and eight Aka (two males and six females)] of the 40 adolescents were reinterviewed six months after the initial interviews and were asked to again list the two or three individuals who caused them the greatest feelings of loss and grief. Reproductive histories of the adolescent's parents were also obtained to understand the number, age, and gender of siblings as well as the mortality and morbidity experienced by the family.

Finally, I spent time living and traveling with the adolescents and talking to them about death and loss in a variety of subsistence and social contexts. The interviews were conducted via two research assistants, both from the village, who spoke DiAka and French.

Setting

This research was conducted in the rural southern region of the Central African Republic in and near the village of Bokoka, where the Aka foragers and Ngandu farmers make a living from the same dense tropical rainforest. The forest camps of the Aka are located throughout southwestern Central African Republic (CAR) and the northeastern part of the Republic of Congo (ROC), with an approximate population of 20,000 and population density of less than one person per square mile (Hewlett et al. 2001). About three hundred Aka live in association with approximately five hundred farmers in the village of Bokoka. Ngandu adolescents were interviewed in the village. The Aka were interviewed in both the forest and the village camps. Three Aka bands are associated with Bokoka and each band has a forest trail from the village to forest camps (Hewlett et al. 1988).

During the dry season, the Aka generally live in patriclan camps consisting of 25–35 individuals, subsisting in the forest by net hunting, with the entire family regularly participating, and for the remainder of the year

living in the village camps. The Aka have lived in the forest for at least two thousand years and have a semisymbiotic relationship with the Congolese farmers, spending the wet season in the village working on the Ngandu farms. They have minimal political hierarchy, high gender and intergenerational egalitarianism, weak patriclans, and flexible resident patterns. The Aka share with many people on a daily basis, and to further promote egalitarianism, the Aka avoid drawing attention to themselves, avoid ranking each other, and have a great respect for autonomy and individuality (Hewlett et al. 1996:654).

The Ngandu farmers also live in patriclan-based villages where they practice subsistence farming of manioc, corn, plantains, peanuts, and a variety of other crops. The Ngandu have strong (relative to Aka) age and gender inequality. Men and elderly individuals often receive more than others. Violence against women is not unusual and deference and respect of older siblings, parents, and individuals is expected. Sharing with family members (especially patriclan members) is encouraged, as households that accumulate and do not share are targeted for sorcery (i.e., jealousy sorcery). The Ngandu promote social unity and conformity rather than autonomy and individuality (Hewlett et al. 1996:654).

The comparison between the Aka and Ngandu adolescents' views and feelings of grief are potentially interesting because they live in similar natural ecologies; hunt, trap, and gather in the same tropical forest; and have similar mortality (infant mortality is 15–20 percent, juvenile mortality is 30–40 percent), and fertility rates (TFR 5.6–6.2). It is an important point to note that the community of individuals the Aka and Ngandu encounter throughout their lifetimes are similar in number. The regional community or "exploration range" (Hewlett et al. 1988), that is, the geographical area individuals explore during their lifetime searching for a mate, visiting friends and family, hunting, and acquiring subsistence knowledge, is the final social unit. This exploration range for the Aka is approximately 50 kilometers, and includes an area where the Aka can meet and get to know about seven hundred individuals. About 2500 Aka live in the Bagandou region (which includes Bokoka). The Ngandu live in villages consisting of 50–500 related (including clan affiliation) individuals. Therefore, the number of individuals the Aka and Ngandu adolescents get to know throughout their lifetime is approximately the same.

The Aka and Ngandu, neighbors in this rural southern region, have frequent social, economic, and religious interactions, but have very distinct modes of production and social relationships. As a result, Aka-Ngandu comparisons may provide insights into how social structures and relationships influence the manifestation of individual patterns of grief, as the context of grief influences the experience of grief.

RESULTS

Informal Interviews

The following section tries to place Aka and Ngandu deaths into personal and cultural context. Emphasis is placed upon how individuals viewed and coped with the deaths of particular family members. Beliefs and practices regarding burial and the afterlife are also provided.

The Ngandu. The Ngandu were interviewed in the village, generally one on one. The interviews in the village took on a particular note of poignancy, as there was at least one death per week during the field study, and several times two deaths in one week. Each night in the village one could hear the "grief wailing" of the bereaved accompanied by drumming, singing, and dancing. Women were frequently observed walking alone down the main road of the village crying and loudly sobbing, "announcing," the death of a loved one. People would then follow behind the women as they walked. Twice the body of the deceased (both times a child) was carried by the mother as the procession made its way through the village.

For the Ngandu adolescents the interviews seemed to echo the theme that, as one 13-year-old female noted, "life became hard" after the death (*kwa*) of a loved one (her father) because he had provided "many things and he had loved me a lot and now [my] mother cannot give me these things." Another 13-year-old female spoke about the grief she felt for an Aka man who had died because he had "provided koko for the family and now that he is gone I don't eat as well." A 17-year-old male mentioned his grandfather's death as being particularly difficult as he "was nice and he gave to everyone." After the death of a parent or grandparent, the adolescents all indicated that they had family to care for them, so no child was left on his or her own. Life just became more difficult, as there was less food, clothes, or medicine.

One 12-year-old boy had lost both his father and mother within one week (four years prior to the interview). He said he was looked after by his mother's younger brother, "He is like a father, he gives me food and I live with him and we go fishing." I then asked if he had someone who was "like a mother" and the young boy began to cry and said, "no one is like a mother to me, I miss my mother and still feel very sad because my mother and father are gone." Often their lives did seem to change after the death of a loved one, for the reasons mentioned, but what seemed to console these adolescents was that they were given "clothes, some money, and some medicine" to help ease their grief. As one 13-year-old said, "I was made happy again because after his death [older brother of her mother] I was given clothes and money." Another 13-year-old female noted that her

grief was greatest after the death of her father's brother because "he had given me many things." Another 19-year-old said that her grief was "diminished because I got a lot of beautiful clothes [the deceased's clothes]." A 19-year-old male also noted that the death hardest for him was the death of his uncle, who had "been nice and gave to everyone." One young girl whose grandmother had died "because she was just tired of life" was given a pot to cook with, to earn money, which she noted had helped to diminish her feelings of grief, but changed her life as now she had to begin working. For the older adolescents it was when they were given "clothes and money," which then enabled them to "find a husband [or wife], get married and have a baby" that their grief was "forgotten."

Several expressed the feeling that it was family who consoled them, and many noted that it was "doing things [hunting, cooking etc.]" and mainly "getting clothes, food, medicine, and money" and "just living" that got them through the experience of loss. The grief felt over the loss of a loved one seemed to be tied into the grief over the loss of what that person had provided for the adolescent. Equally so, the diminishment of grief for the bereaved adolescents was often noted to be after they had received clothes, and so forth, the material possessions of the deceased, which were distributed after the funeral. The expression of grief was for the most part seemingly experienced during the grief gathering or funeral, the *matanga*.

The male adolescents said that men did not cry very often, that "crying was for women and children." They did note, however, that they felt as deep a sadness as the women, they just did not cry. They expressed the notion that it was not important for the adolescents to know the cause of death of their loved ones. They did, however, know exactly how each person listed had died, (i.e., whether from natural illness, *ekila* (breaking a taboo), or sorcery, *likundu*. They did not experience, or at least express increased anger, if the death occurred due to sorcery, *ekila*, or illness and noted the ones who died due to sorcery as being those who had "not given much" or had accumulated without sharing, as being the targets of what was described as "jealousy sorcery."

All the adolescents, the younger as well as older, were very much aware of what death "meant," that is, that death was final. As one 13-year-old noted, "When you die it is finished." However, there was a recurrent theme of the loved one returning as a spirit to watch over the family. This is consistent with a general cultural belief in ancestor spirits. A 13-year-old said that after his grandfather died,

> He came into my room at night and saw that I needed money so he left money for me. The spirit gives things after death, if someone you love dies and they see you suffer and have need they come at night and give what's needed.

If the deceased was a child under the age of ten, the child would "return," that is, be reincarnated and born again. The child would often return to the same family, but not always. The family would recognize their lost one by some physical or personality trait that they had had in their previous life (e.g., scratch or birthmark). Infants (less than one year old) were immediately wrapped in palm leaves and buried, right next to the outer wall of the house. The mother would then spread the earth from the grave on her abdomen to help insure the child's quick return.

A few of the adolescents expressed fear at the thought of their own, or a loved one's death, but the majority did not fear death. As one 16-year-old expressed, "Death is for all the world, young and old." A 19-year-old said that she had no fear of death because "there is a certain time for death for me and that is all." Many expressed this same sentiment, regardless of their age. A 12-year-old noted that she had no fear of death as "many people die and I see this, the body and lots of death and I know death so I do not fear." One 15-year-old however, noted that he was in fact afraid of death because "with death, it is finished and what happens to the people who die is a mystery, and for this I am afraid."

There was no sense of a timely or good death (i.e., only the old or "bad" should die) versus a bad (suicide, murder) death. However most expressed that they felt "saddest" when an adult dies (regardless of age) because they cannot return, while a child up to the age of ten can come back. For the most part the *ame* or spirit that was good (shared with others, was "nice") "flew up to God," sometimes but not often described as "heaven," while the bad spirits (those who had been sorcerers and had eaten people) went "into the forest to cry." "Heaven" was described as being like a large village, exactly like the one they lived in, but without sickness, hunger, death, or sorcery. The bad spirits also included the children of sorcerers as young as two or three, who are born with the "sorcerer's substance" (an extra organ that was described as initially pale, round, with mouths circling it, which would become redder, larger, and with more mouths, the more people the sorcerer ate) in them and who had begun to eat people with their father (or mother) sorcerer. They were "bad children" who did not return (become reincarnated) but rather flew up to God, who threw them back down to earth where they would "cry in the forest." No one mentioned that the bad spirits went to a hell, or purgatory but rather to the forest, where they cried at night because "they felt bad about not being with family and God." Many of the adolescents did note that the bad spirits could continue to cause problems for the people, scaring them and causing sickness, especially at night when they would walk about. For the adolescents, the forest at night was a frightening place. One 13-year-old female noted that "the forest is good, but has bad spirits and I am afraid of the forest."

The influence of the church could be seen in the ceremonies surrounding death. If the family was heavily involved in their religion then there would be no ceremonial wailing, singing, or dancing, but rather a quiet church funeral. If, however, the family was only moderately involved (or not at all) in the church, they would set the body on a table in the yard of the family, mats would be laid about for people to sit upon, and family, friends, and acquaintances would come to view the deceased and grieve. The grief wailing would often begin in early evening and continue for much of the night. The men would drum and sing, with women joining in the singing. The men would also dance, the *mambo*, but the women generally would not. This would also continue late into the night. Food would be served or people would leave to eat and then return. Children would be present and families would come and go throughout the evening. The greater the prominence of the deceased, the longer the grief gathering would continue, with family and friends coming from some distance to participate. For deceased children, there would be no grief gathering as such, mainly immediate family and, depending on the age of the child, playmates or those children who had helped with the care of the younger child, would attend. The body, the *kwoui*, would be washed by a close female relation, laid out in nice clothes, wrapped in a clean sheet, placed in a wooden casket, and interred, *loungozo*, close to the house. Children are washed and dressed in nice clothes first. For those who were not strongly affiliated with a religion, there would also be a one-year ceremony, the *salaka*, honoring the memory of the deceased, with singing, dancing, drinking, and eating. As a young adolescent noted, the one-year ceremony is to "see family and we dream of him [her deceased cousin] and we have a ceremony to remember and dream of him again." For those belonging to the church this would not take place, but occasionally a quieter Catholic mass would occur, one year later, to remember.

The Aka. The Aka were interviewed in both the village and forest camps. Often the entire camp would listen to and respond to the interview questions, but when possible the adolescents were asked the more personal questions privately. For the Aka adolescents the recurring themes that seemed to emerge were the sense of the finality of death, the sadness of loss experienced, and the thought that it was family who comforted the grieving adolescent, "My family consoled me and happiness came again." When in camp, the Aka are always in close physical contact, often sitting as close as space allows. This physical closeness was a source of comfort in grief also, as many adolescents noted that their mother, father, or other kin would "hold" them as they grieved. One young girl noted that she was sad when her mother's older brother died as he had loved her a lot and was

"happy and good with all the children." After his death her life changed because she felt

> sad and I had a feeling of love for the others and I was afraid that they would die too. I was sad for a long time and then I sang and danced again, but at first it was hard because my mother and father said that with death it is finished, it is goodbye for all my life.

She further noted, "I cried a lot and after the burial the people in camp listened to me and held me and after awhile the sadness lessened. I understand that death is for all the world, and with death it is all finished." One 12-year-old female noted, "After the death, I was afraid for a long time. I did not eat well or sing and dance, and I cried for a long time, but then my mother held me and helped to find good food for me and amusing things to do, then the sadness diminished." Another young adolescent, a ten-year-old male, felt deep grief when the brother of his mother's father died, because,

> I loved him a lot and he went with me into the forest to hunt and walk and when a person dies, it is finished for their life, all is finished. The spirit, *yingo* soars to *Komba*. It does not matter if it is a baby or adult who dies, I feel the same sadness and my father consoles me. The person I love a lot I grieve for the most. When I am sad I keep crying, but the death is finished and the sadness decreases, but I still love the person.

He further noted that it was when he "played with my brothers and sisters, I felt happy again and the sadness diminished." Almost all Aka adolescents mentioned that it was family, a mother, father, older sibling, or other kin who consoled them during their time of grief and that it was in the interaction with family that their sadness diminished. Also when I asked how they dealt with so much recurrent loss in their life, they all responded that it was being close and interacting with family that helped them to cope.

A 12-year-old female explained that when her father died, "I was afraid for the others, that they would die too and I stayed close to the people I loved because I was afraid." Her grandmother also "told me to stop crying or I would get sick." She also noted that her grandmother and mother comforted her and that she "speaks to my family to feel happy again." Another 11-year-old explained that she too stayed close to her family after a death in her family and that she too had been told that she "would get sick if I kept crying." A 14-year-old male noted that the sadness "stays and comes again and again," and that "when others get sick, I am afraid and I guard my brothers and sisters well." It is interesting to note that in contrast to the Ngandu, none of the Aka stated that their lives became harder after

the death of a loved one. They did, however, list the family members in camp who consoled them, gave them food to eat, and helped them to "be happy again."

For those who die, the spirit "soars" to *Komba,* God, if good, or gets thrown back to earth to cry in the forest if bad. For the Ngandu adolescents then, the forest at night became a frightful place, one filled with bad, wailing, revengeful spirits. However, for the Aka, the forest is seen at all times as "mother, father, provider, lover," in spite of the "bad" spirits who roam at night, and none of the adolescents expressed any fears regarding these spirits crying at night in the forest. A "bad" person then is one who does not share and who is often accused of being a sorcerer; conversely, a "good" person is one who "shares and is nice and happy to people." When people "soar to *Komba*," the place is described as being like a camp in the forest and, as with the Ngandu, without sickness, death, or sorcery: "All the camp is there, all the family is there." There is no Aka word for heaven or paradise, but rather, several of the Aka adolescents used the Sango word to describe their thoughts regarding an afterlife, (i.e., heaven). Of the 20 adolescents interviewed, approximately four seemed to have been influenced by the Christian notion of "paradise," God, and people being "punished" for their disbelief. All seemed to believe in the reincarnation of young children. As one 12-year-old male explained to me, "All the spirits are the same, the babies and the adults, but the ceremonies are for the adults because the babies return. They return to the same mother, but adults do not return." Regarding the funeral, another 12-year-old noted that

> the (burial) ceremony, *edjengi* is to say goodbye, this is the last moment on earth. This is for the person who dies, to say goodbye, it is in their memory. The burial place, *mbindo*, is close to the house, but when we leave, the place stays in camp. We visit the place of burial to remember the person.

The death of a young child or baby is often thought of as a temporary "goodbye," until that child returns, either to the same mother, or another women in the same camp. However, as one adolescent noted, "The sadness is still the same."

Regarding the causes of death, like the Ngandu, none of the adolescents questioned seemed to feel that knowing the cause was important in helping to diminish their grief, but again all knew the cause of death of each person they listed. However, for one young adolescent couple who had lost their first baby, it was important for the father to know the cause of death. The young mother said:

> My baby was killed by a poison dart, *ndoki*, because of jealousy. The baby had a fever and did not nurse and then died. There was a small ceremony

> and dance and after the dance we buried the baby. I cried a lot and my husband and mother consoled me. My husband cried a lot also and did not eat. He wanted to find who had caused our baby to die. My parents came and helped me, I cried a lot, it was my first baby, but my parents said to not cry a lot, it causes sickness to be so sad and cry a lot.

This was the only person who said that it was important to know the cause of death, although, as noted, all adolescents interviewed knew the exact cause of death for each person listed.

As with the Ngandu, the causes were broadly listed as sorcery, *ekila* (of which there are many types), accidents (e.g., falling from trees) and sorcery (for a more complete study of causes of death see Hewlett et al. 1986). A 14-year-old explained what happens after a death in camp:

> When a person dies, the men, women and children all cry a lot. They all stay in a group and talk about the person and then begin the funeral and dance to *edjengj* (the forest spirit). The women wash the body and the men find the bark, *dikoko*, to bury the body in. The men arrange the burial place, *mbindo*, and put the body into to the ground and cover it with dirt. After the burial there is a little ceremony, they dance, they sing, they cry. This is on the same or the next day. It is short, they dance for two or three days and then it is finished.

Another 19-year-old explained in much the same way,:

> The person who died is arranged like a person who is asleep, on the bark. The parents, people of the camp, and patron of the Aka dance a long time, the *elimo* (the *makondi* and *edjengi* were also given as funeral dances). Before they bury the body they dance and after sleeping and eating they dance again. The dance is special for the person who died and the song is special, *bolingo baizela*, and after the funeral, the song and dance are different. You dance in memory of the person.
>
> The ceremony is the same for younger people and adults, but not for babies because babies return. If it is a bad person (a sorcerer) then you cannot dance, *bajengi*, or you can dance a dance that is significant, "We are now free and peaceful and thank you for dying because now there is no fear." The name of this dance is the same but it is a dance of thankfulness from freedom from fear, it is a dance of liberty. The same day that the bad person dies they start to bother the camp and cry in the night.

As with the Ngandu, there was no sense of there being a "timely," "good," or "bad" death, justified by old age or the accusations of murder. The one-year ceremony, the *peli*, is a "little ceremony of the time of their death and when the date arrives of their death, there is a lot of feeling, of emotion for that person. The people dance, eat, and sing together. It is for

the memory of that person." It is also a time, as with the Ngandu, that signals the end of the grieving time for widows. Women who lose their mates, around the time of the one-year ceremony, shave their heads, wash, put on clean garments, and have a close female relative rub them with a special oil. They are then ready to marry again. During my first field study, in the rainy season, far in the forest there was a large "memorial ceremony" in which many camps gathered to sing, dance, eat and drink, and remember their lost loved ones. This apparently occurs only when someone (or several) people of prominence have died.

An older Aka male ended the interview by saying, "Life is not always good with so much death, it is difficult sometimes, but it is good to be alive . . . but then there is death and life is finished." Another male Aka felt that "I can live in the forest, I eat well, I have family, life is good."

Free Listing

Twenty Aka and twenty Ngandu adolescents were asked to free list the names of (a) adults and (b) children, family, or friends who had died during their lifetime. Overall, the 40 adolescents remembered the loss of 953 individuals or 24 individuals per adolescent. The adolescents were more likely to remember the loss of adults than they were children (an average of approximately 16 adult deaths versus 8 child deaths, $t = 5.4$, $p = .000$), and, not surprisingly, older adolescents remembered the loss of more individuals than younger adolescents (25 versus 20 individuals), but the differences were not statistically significant. Adolescent males remembered the loss of more individuals than did females (26 versus 20 individuals), but again the differences were not statistically significant. Figure 15.1 illustrates the intercultural variability in number of deaths remembered in the ethnic groups and the propensity of Ngandu adolescents to remember about 30 percent more individuals than do Aka adolescents. The *X* axis represents numbered individuals (1–20) and the *Y* axis represents the number of deaths each of these individuals remembered. (For example, Aka number 1 remembered five deaths, and Ngandu number 1 remembered 12 deaths.)

Ethnicity/mode of production and its interactions with gender helped to explain some of the variability. Figure 15.2 summarizes some of the differences between the two ethnic groups. Ngandu adolescents remembered more deaths overall than Aka adolescents (30 individuals versus 18.0 individuals; $t = (3.82$, $p = .0004)$. Aka and Ngandu remembered the loss of a similar numbers of females (seven females for Aka and eight females for Ngandu), but significant differences existed in the number of male deaths they remembered. Ngandu adolescents remembered the loss of twice as many males by comparison to Aka adolescents (22 males remembered for

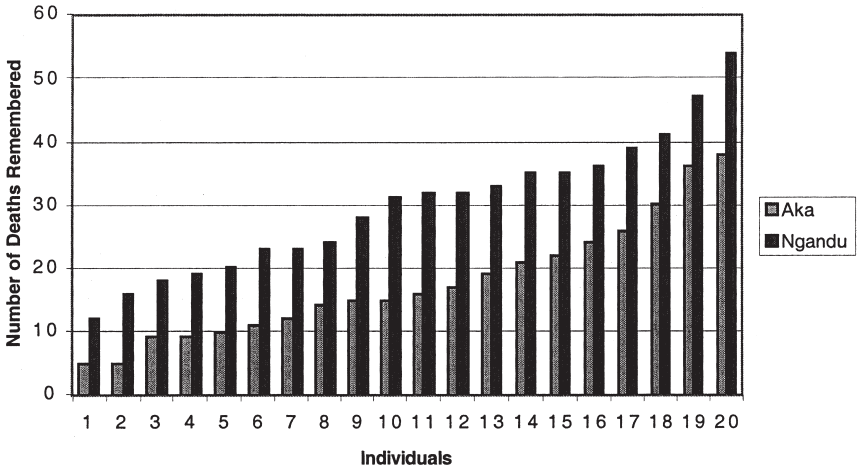

Figure 15.1. Number of Deaths Remembered by Aka and Ngandu Individuals.

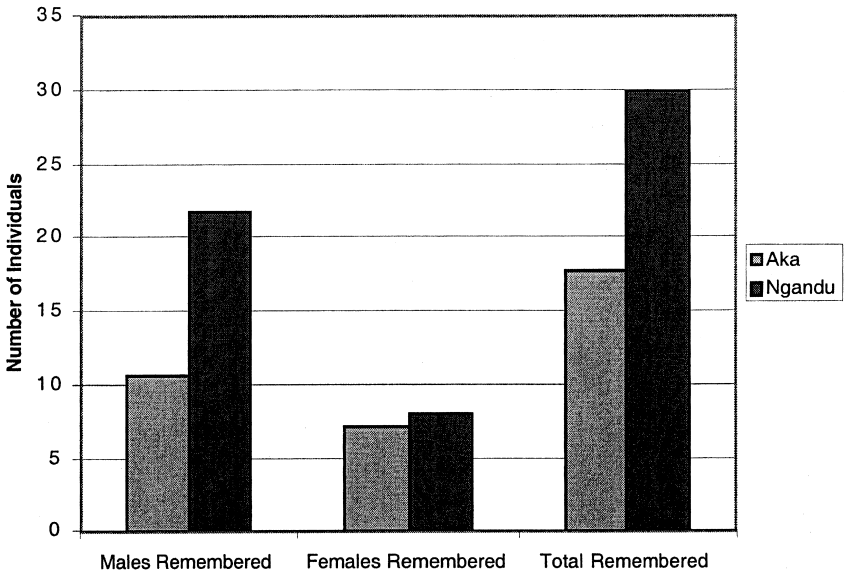

Figure 15.2. Number of Male and Female Deaths by Individuals.

Ngandu versus 11 for Aka; $t = (5.1, p = .000)$. Both Aka and Ngandu adolescents remembered significantly more adult than child deaths, (12.5 adults versus 5.5 children for Aka; ($t = 3.70$, $p = .000$); 19.6 adults to 10.3 children for Ngandu ($t = 4.8$, $p = .000$]).

Table 15.1 examines the role of gender and ethnicity in remembering the death of someone of the same or opposite sex. Ngandu adolescent males and females remembered similar numbers of males and females, Aka males and females remembered a similar number of male deaths, but Aka adolescent males were more likely to list more female deaths than were Aka adolescent females ($t = 2.09$, $p = .05$).

Table 15.2 examines the impact of age for remembering a male or female death. As expected, older Aka and Ngandu adolescents recalled more deaths of both males and females than did younger adolescents. The Ngandu pattern of remembering more male than female deaths is also found in both younger and older adolescents.

Ranking

The 20 Ngandu and 20 Aka adolescents were asked to name the two or three deceased individuals who caused them the greatest sense of loss and grief. Aka adolescents named 39 individuals (mean of 2.1 individuals per adolescent) and Ngandu named 40 individuals (mean of 2.0 individuals

Table 15.1 Number of Female and Male Deaths Remembered by Gender and Ethnicity

	Number of Adolescents	*Mean Number of Female Deaths Remembered*	*S.D.*
Aka			
Males	13	8.1	4.2
Females	7	5.1	2.4
Ngandu			
Males	12	8.2	5.5
Females	8	8.0	3.7
	Number of Adolescents	*Mean Number of Male Deaths Remembered*	*S.D.*
Aka			
Males	13	11.8	7.1
Females	7	8.4	4.0
Ngandu			
Males	12	24.1	7.1
Females	8	18.2	4.2

Table 15.2 Females and Males Remembered by Age of Informant[a]

	Number of Adolescents	*Mean Number of Female Deaths Remembered*	*S.D.*
Aka			
Younger adolescents	9	6.2	3.8
Older adolescents	11	7.9	3.9
Ngandu			
Younger adolescents	11	7.2	5.1
Older adolescents	9	9.1	4.3
	Number of Adolescents	*Mean Number of Male Deaths Remembered*	*S.D.*
Aka			
Younger adolescents	9	10.1	6.5
Older adolescents	11	11.1	6.5
Ngandu			
Younger adolescents	11	20.2	7.9
Older adolescents	9	23.8	6.4

[a] Older adolescents ranged in age from 16 to 20, younger from 10 to 15.

per adolescent). Both Aka and Ngandu were most likely to mention biological kin (i.e., not kin by marriage or friends) as causing the greatest amount of grief. Ninety percent of the individuals listed by Aka and 85 percent of individuals listed by Ngandu were biological kin. Consistent with the patterns described in the free listing, Ngandu adolescents were much more likely than Aka adolescents to list males rather than females (41 percent by Ngandu versus 15 percent by Aka). Table 15.3 shows that the biological kin remembered among the Aka came from both sides of the family, whereas the biological kin remembered among the Ngandu were primarily patrilateral relatives.

It is also worth noting, in terms of attachment theory, that Aka and Ngandu may or may not have placed lost parents on this short list of individuals causing the most grief. One Aka adolescent's mother died when he was eight years of age; she was listed as second on the free list and not at all on the shorter list. A Ngandu adolescent male listed his father on the free list as fourth, and not at all on the ranked list. It was also clear that being first to be listed on the free list did not necessarily mean this death caused the greatest grief. An Aka male's father was listed as fourth on the free list and first on the short list. Another Aka listed his father second on the free list and first on the ranked list.

In order to try and check the reliability and validity of the short list, 15 adolescents were asked the same questions six months after the initial in-

Table 15.3 Types of Biological Kin (%) Remembered as Causing the Greatest Amount of Grief

	Patrilateral	*Matrilateral*	*Both (i.e., brothers and sisters)*
Aka	31	33	36
Ngandu	63	34	0.03

terviews. Among Ngandu, the first person listed (save one adolescent) remained the same. Three Ngandu adolescents changed their lists to reflect the deaths that had occurred in the past six months, where one woman had lost her baby, another two a younger sibling. A similar pattern existed for Aka. Four Aka adolescent lists remained exactly the same, while the other four slightly altered their list to reflect deaths in past six months.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Universalistic and particularistic points that emerge from the qualitative (i.e., interviews) and quantitative (i.e., listing, ranking, and statistical analysis) data are listed below.

Universal Themes

1. Both Aka and Ngandu adolescents experienced and remembered many deaths. Aka adolescents, on average, could easily list 18 deaths that occurred in their lifetime, while Ngandu remembered about 30. One adolescent listed 52 deaths in his relatively short life.
2. Both Aka and Ngandu remembered almost twice as many adult as child deaths. This was not because they had experienced more adult deaths, as Aka and Ngandu juvenile mortality is about 40 percent. Further, the camp composition of the Aka is about 25-35 individuals, with 40 percent of the camp being children, and demographically the same composition of individuals surrounding the Ngandu adolescent is similar.
3. Younger (10–15 year-olds) remembered slightly, but not significantly, fewer deaths than older adolescents.
4. The majority of the individuals listed by Aka and Ngandu adolescents as causing the greatest feelings of loss and grief were biological kin. It was also biological kin who responded to the adolescents' expressions of grief.

Particularistic Themes

1. Aka and Ngandu remembered a similar number of female deaths (about eight), but Ngandu adolescents (both males and females) remembered significantly more males than Aka (22 male deaths, on average, for Ngandu, 11 male deaths, on average, for Aka).
2. Consistent with the patterns described in the free listing, Ngandu male and female adolescents were much more likely than Aka adolescents to list male deaths as causing more grief than female deaths.
3. The biological kin remembered among the Aka came from both sides of the family whereas the biological kin remembered among the Ngandu were primarily patrilateral relatives.
4. Aka male adolescents remembered more Aka female deaths than Aka female adolescents.
5. For the Ngandu, the grief felt over the loss of a loved one seemed to be tied to the grief over the loss of what that person had provided for the adolescent. Equally so, the diminishment of grief for bereaved Ngandu adolescents was often tied into their receiving the distributed articles of the deceased person. This was not the case for the Aka adolescents. It is interesting to note that in contrast to the Ngandu, none of the Aka stated that their lives became harder after the death of a loved one. They did, however, list the family members in camp who consoled them, gave them food to eat, and helped them to "be happy again." For the Aka their grief seemed to be tied more directly to the relationship they had with the deceased, which was not expressed as a provisioning one. That is, they did not express grief over the loss of what that person had given them, as the Ngandu had, but rather over the loss of that person in their life. Also what consoled them after their loss was simply being with family.
6. Both Ngandu and Aka adolescents reported that extended family responded to their sadness and grief, but in quite different ways. Many Aka adolescents indicated that physical comforting took place (e.g., "my mother, father . . . held me when I cried") and others described how family talked to and consoled them. For the Ngandu, the family responded and sadness decreased with acts of provisioning. When they were given the deceased's material articles, they felt their "sadness diminish."

Woodburn's Model

I found general support for Woodburn's hypothesis regarding distinctions between immediate and delayed-return cultures' views of death. Death rituals were longer among the Ngandu farmers (delayed return)

than for the Aka (immediate return). Among the Aka the body is buried quickly, generally the same or next day, whereas among the Ngandu the body would be laid out for viewing for a few days and rituals existed to remember the individual (adults only) for several years. The physical burial of Aka also involved less physical time and effort. Also, the Ngandu (both males and females) remembered significantly more males, patrilateral males, in particular, than did the Aka. This is consistent with Woodburn's prediction that farmers' grief should be greater for particular individuals (e.g., lineage members).

While some of the data support Woodburn's model, other data question his propositions. First, his descriptions give the impression that hunter-gatherers experience less ("temporary") grief than farmers/pastoralists. While Aka buried their dead quickly and listed fewer individuals, they remembered many dead family members and there was no indication that their felt loss was more "temporary" than the Ngandu. Second, both Aka and Ngandu knew a cause of death for each individual. Woodburn suggests foragers are not as concerned with knowing the cause as are farmers. Aka may not act as concerned as Ngandu, in part, due to the fact that so many Ngandu deaths are attributed to sorcery.

Explaining Diversity and Unity

Some studies, such as Woodburn's, emphasize cultural diversity, while others emphasize universal patterns of grief (Archer 2001; Badcock 1990; Bowlby 1970-1980; Parkes 1972). Here I examine factors that influence diversity and uniformity in feelings of grief in the Aka and Ngandu communities.

Three cultural-ecological factors are important for understanding the particularistic responses to grief: the nature of patrilineal descent and social organization, the nature of social relations, and immediate versus delayed systems of thought.

Strong patriclan social organization among the Ngandu provides a mechanism to defend and protect material (e.g., land and crops) and reproductive (e.g., spouse) resources. Consequently, the number, age, and sex of geographically close kin, especially males, is important (e.g., male-male alliances). The Ngandu accumulate goods and property (e.g., planted crops) that must be guarded from mobile Aka and other farmers. Also intra- and intergroup hostilities over women are not uncommon—polygyny is about 40 percent (Hewlett 1991) and many men do not have spouses, which leads to conflict and violence.

By comparison, Aka are mobile and intra- and intergroup hostilities are infrequent. Consequently clan organization is weak. As Woodburn suggests (1982a) patriclan organization leads to remembering a greater

number of specific others. In this case, Ngandu remember more individuals overall, in particular males who are important for resource defense. Aka on the other hand, remember both male and female deaths from both sides of the family, because it is important for them to be flexible in response to wild food resource availability. For the Aka, the number, age, and sex of geographically close biological kin, specifically male kin, are of less importance, as there is little need for resource defense (of accumulated goods, property holdings) and male-male alliances. This strong ideology of the Ngandu emphasizes deference and respect for elders, males, and ancestors. Ancestor spirits are shown a continued respect and deference, and they maintain an active place within the lives of the living. For the Ngandu, social relations continue beyond the grave; the commitment of a delayed-return system extends beyond death. The formal obligations and commitments extended to the living are equally important in being extended to the dead. Economic activity, social continuity, delayed production and consumption, and long-term planning and concern are bound in the sense of the patrilineal lineages, social commitments, and the importance of remembering those to whom you are bound and committed, even beyond the grave.

The Aka have, as noted, "immediate return" values and social organization (Woodburn 1982a: 205). This means that their activities are orientated directly to the present, in which they labor to obtain food and other resources that are consumed or used that day or in the immediate days that follow. There is a minimum of investment in accumulating, in long-term debts or obligations, or in binding commitments to specific kin or to other partners. Commitment, as Woodburn suggests, ends at the grave (Woodburn 1982a).

Another cultural difference that exists between the two groups is the material versus emotional basis of social relations. Several have written about the material basis of social relations in Bantu-speaking Central Africans (e.g., Levine 1992). Social relations cannot continue without a material exchange. For the Ngandu, the grief felt over the loss of a loved one seemed to be tied to the grief over the loss of what that person had provided for the adolescent. Equally so, the diminishment of grief for bereaved Ngandu adolescents was often tied to their receiving the distributed articles of the deceased person. For the Aka, their grief seemed to be bound more directly to the relationship they had with the deceased, which was not expressed as a provisioning one. What consoled them after their loss was simply being with family.

Diversity exists in the experiences and expression of grief, but as noted there are also several commonalities. Evolutionary psychologists are interested in identifying genetic or biologically based universals of the

human mind that evolved during the environment of evolutionary adaptation (EEA, i.e., the long period of human hunting and gathering) in response to recurrent adaptive problems. One recurrent problem faced by humans was the regular death of individuals who had assisted them in many ways (e.g., subsistence, defense, childcare, physical and emotional health). What is the adaptive design of grief?

Several common patterns found in the data from the study of Aka and Nagandu adolescents are (1) grief is a response to loss (obviously this is seen in other cultures as well as in nonhumans primates); (2) the expression of grief tends to illicit a response from others; (3) those responding tend to be genetically related to the grieving adolescent; and (4) the "soothing" of the grief expression and the practices of response in provoking the diminishing of the grief emotion follow specific cultural patterns.

Given the adaptive problem of recurrent loss, the grief response to that loss and the cross-cultural commonalities existing between the Ngandu and Aka might suggest that humans have "grief" modules of the mind that are in part the flip side to the attachment or proximity module as described by John Bowlby (1969). Infants cannot care for or protect themselves, so they seek the proximity of others by crying and reaching for these individuals (Hewlett et al. 2001:25). Infants who sought proximity, in the EEA, survived. In much the same way, perhaps the crying, mourning, and grief expressions following loss might represent an evolved psychology for the communication of need following the loss of an individual who enhanced survival. Like crying and fussing, expressions of grief may be helpful in communicating the needs of one who has experienced loss.

When survival is threatened, following loss and the physiological responses to this psychological assault, grief becomes an important emotion that elicits a response from others who may benefit reproductively from the individual experiencing grief. For the grieving person, the soothing of grief, the social interaction of compassion, leads to closer bonds with both existing figures and the establishment of new corollary social networks—all of which serve to enhance the survival of the individual. Grief is a "cry for survival."

The EP approach helps to explain and understand the four common features of grief:

1. Both Ngandu and Aka adolescents remembered many deaths.
2. Both Aka and Ngandu were very clearly attached to those individuals who died, but cultural themes (e.g., level of patriarchy, immediate or delayed return systems) helped to explain the number and gender of those remembered.
3. Family responded to the adolescents' expressions of grief.

4. Both Aka and Ngandu experienced the greatest grief over the loss of biological (genetic) kin, but again cultural forces influenced whether they were patrilateral or matrilateral biological kin.

There is, I suggest, a developed adaptive design to grief that enabled our hunter-gatherer ancestors, and enables ourselves, to survive loss, through a "cry of survival"—the expression of grief.

This chapter examined the nature of and responses to loss among two culturally distinct adolescent groups in central Africa: Aka foragers and Ngandu farmers. The study of grief in small-scale cultures may be important for identifying potential human universals of loss and grief and how various demographic and cultural contexts contribute to diversity in how grief is experienced. An integrated biocultural approach emphasizes the interactions between culture, ecology, and biology, and provides an opportunity to examine adolescent grief from a holistic perspective. Aka and Ngandu comparisons provide insights into how ecological, psychological, and cultural structures and relationships influence the manifestation of individual patterns of grief—the context of grief influences the experience and expression of grief.