The impact of sibling death on adolescent psychosocial development and psychological wellbeing.

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ABSTRACT

The sibling relationship can be a source of protection, support or fulfil the role of an ally (Marshall & Davies, 2011). In the event of sibling death during adolescence, the bereaved sibling is forced to cope with both the developmental crisis of adolescence and the grief associated with the loss of a sibling (Hogan & DeSantis, 1996). Hence, sibling loss has been identified as one of the most tragic and least understood events that can occur for an adolescent (Balk, 1991; Hogan & DeSantis, 1992). Although potential outcomes of adolescent sibling bereavement have been explored, researchers are yet to effectively investigate adolescent bereavement from a developmental perspective (Balk & Corr, 2001). This present research explored the individual experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and its impact on adolescent development and psychological wellbeing. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to explore adolescent sibling bereavement in fifteen individuals (10 females and 5 males) who experienced the loss of a sibling at least two years prior when aged between 14 and 25 years. For the purposes of the study, a sibling was defined as a biological or adopted sibling. A review of existing theory informed the construction of a semi-structured interview schedule used to guide the interview. The key areas of focus that emerged from the participants' stories were: the experience of traumatic loss; disenfranchised grief; impact on identity development; the family's response to loss; and loss as a crisis and growth. The themes identified in this study as influencing identity development were aligned to known developmental milestones such as separation from parents, development of intimate relationships and the identification and commitment to vocational choices. Commonalities emerged for individuals who were able to move forward and integrate their experience of loss as well as commonalities for those who continued to struggle. Conclusion: Adolescent sibling bereavement is often a traumatic experience that may be compounded by other contextual factors and may lead to the complication of the grief process. The loss of a sibling during adolescence has the capacity to impact the surviving sibling's identity development; however, an ongoing relationship with the

deceased may be able to facilitate sibling identification and/or differentiation. This research extends

on the understanding of what helps or hinders the psychological development of bereaved

adolescent siblings at the critical juncture of loss and growth.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

DECLARATION

I declare that this report does not incorporate, without acknowledgment, any material previously submitted for a degree in any University, College of Advanced Education, or other educational institution; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text. I further declare that the ethical principles and procedures specified in the Faculty of Health, Arts and Design Guidelines on Research Ethics have been adhered to in the preparation of this report.

Jan-Louise Godfrey

PERSONAL STATEMENT

My brother, Andrew, was six years older than me and when I was 12 he seemed so mature. He had a car, a job, a girlfriend, the freedom to do what he wanted and dreams for the future. He and my father worked together to restore my grandmother's car so that he could embark on the fun things that 18 year olds do. My parents respected him and listened to what he said. Andrew was my protector, my mentor and my friend.

Andrew was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis when he was 19 and used a walking stick to prop himself up during his speech on his 21st birthday. Eventually, he had to leave work and stop driving. His relationship with his girlfriend, whom we all adored, also ended. Andrew's last years were spent in an aged care facility as my family was unable to provide the constant care that he required. He died at 24, just after my 19th birthday.

After Andrew's death, life went on as before. I lived and travelled as much as I could, perhaps still searching for him in some way. Although my friends were supportive, I felt that they could never understand what I had lost. Andrew's name was mentioned from time to time but little was spoken of the distressing events that preceded his death or about the loss we felt as a family.

Thirty years later, I wonder what his life would have been like had he lived and how my own might have been different. This study is a tribute to the memory of Andrew and serves as a way to bring meaning to a life cut short, through the contribution of a better understanding of adolescent sibling bereavement.

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CHAPTER 1. ADOLESCENT SIBLING BEREAVEMENT

1.1   Research Context

The death of a child is considered one of the most difficult experiences encountered by families (McGoldrick & Walsh, 1991). Society tends to view the loss and grief experienced by parents as surpassing that experienced by a sibling (Rosen, 1986) and expects that bereaved siblings should be there to support their parent(s), foregoing their own needs for comfort and support (Balk & Hogan, 1995). The adolescent's new found maturity and independence may promote expectations from others concerning their capacity and resources to assist those in perceived greater need than themselves (Rosen).

An artefact of Western society in the twenty first century is the marginalisation of exposure to death, particularly that of young individuals.   Historically, the Western view of death was influenced by a need to repress feelings of grief after overwhelming losses experienced in the aftermath of WWI (Devita-Raeburn, 2004). Prior to this time, Western cultures acknowledged the lifelong impact of loss (Devita-Raeburn). Today, the culture of Western society is often reluctant to discuss death and has seen the decline of traditions and rituals that enabled families to cope more adaptively to loss (Charles, 2000).

Adolescents and children are often protected or distanced from the topic of death and this may impact their understanding and experience (Dickens, 2014). In Australia, the death of individuals aged 25 and under represents a small percentage of overall deaths (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011) but the impact of these deaths reverberates throughout the lives of many. According to the ABS, the leading cause of death for those aged 15 to 24 years is attributed to motor accidents or suicide, and such deaths are considered avoidable. As a result, siblings of those who die in this age group or younger, many of whom would be adolescents, become bereaved of a brother or a sister and are forced to cope with the crisis of sibling loss. The non-normative occurrence of sibling death in adolescence presents challenges for surviving siblings as they endeavour to find their own personality in the absence of a crucial counterpart and in the midst of grief (Dickens, 2014).

The experience of adolescent sibling loss is one of the most tragic and least understood life events (Balk, 1991; Hogan & DeSantis, 1992). The death of a sibling not only highlights life's fragility but marks the end of what is expected to be one of our longest relationships in life (Fletcher, Mailick, Song & Wolfe, 2013; Perkins & Harris, 1990; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). The grief response from adolescent sibling loss can be enduring, the effects of which can continue into adulthood (Hogan & DeSantis, 1996) and although the physical death has occurred, the sibling relationship often continues (Devita-Raeburn, 2004).

Generally, bereavement in adolescence has the capacity to impact aspects of life such as social relationships, productivity, self-image, confidence and maturity (Balk, 1990). The death of a sibling during adolescence presents unique challenges in the form of bereavement tasks that need to be resolved at a time when developmental challenges such as identity development, achievement of autonomy, separation from parents, defining career choices and formation of intimate relationships also require navigation (Balk, 1995; Balk & Corr, 2001; Erikson, 1968; Fleming & Adolph, 1986; Noppe & Noppe, 2004). The event forces the bereaved sibling to cope with both the developmental crisis of adolescence and the grief associated with the loss (Hogan & DeSantis, 2004). Hence, although adolescence presents opportunities for growth and development, there is also a heightened risk for dysfunction (Weisz & Hawley, 2002).

The experience of sibling bereavement in adolescence has the potential for long term effects on maturation as it presents a life crisis for which few adolescents have been prepared (Balk, 1990; Rask, Kaunonen & Paunonen-Ilmonen, 2002). Factors such as the suddenness and type of death, family cohesion, the age of the surviving sibling at the time of the death and the relationship with the deceased sibling can all impact the response to a sibling's death (Maercker, 2007). Maercker suggests that surviving siblings may be at risk of complicated grief due to the emphasis of support being directed towards the parents rather than the surviving sibling.

The grief reactions of adolescents to the death of their sibling include shock, guilt, confusion, sadness, fear, numbness, avoidance and anger (Balk, 1983; 1990). Studies have noted behavioural

responses to adolescent sibling bereavement. Raphael (1983) reviewed the relevance of the theory of care-eliciting behaviours (Henderson, 1974) in the context of bereavement. Raphael suggests that adolescents may express their loss induced distress by acting out instead of directly through grief and mourning.   Adolescent acting out behaviours may be represented by promiscuity, anger, delinquent acts, school refusal, stealing, risk taking behaviours, drug taking and testing authority systems (Raphael). These forms of behaviour may be driven from bereavement-generated stresses in order to seek care and relieve tension (Raphael).

Longer term outcomes related to sibling death in adolescence have been associated with increased personal vulnerability toward death, negative impact on sense of self, anxiety, depression, anger, guilt, loneliness, peer isolation, post-traumatic stress symptoms and suicidal ideation (Moos & Moos, 1986; Horsley & Patterson, 2006). Therefore, the consequence of poorly managed grief in the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement has the capacity to impede developmental success (Balk & Corr, 2001).

1.2   Purpose

Despite the potential influence of siblings and the impact of sibling loss, the topic of adolescent sibling bereavement has not attracted as much interest from researchers when compared to other significant relationships such as parenting, marriage or marital relationships and peer relationships or friendships (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson & Crouter, 2001).   Although there has been some recent, sustained and focussed attention levelled towards the phenomenon of adolescent bereavement, more is needed to link adolescent development with adolescent coping in order to understand this special population's recovery from bereavement and loss (Balk, 1991; Balk, 1996).

The aim of this study is to explore the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and its impact on psychosocial development and psychological wellbeing as the adolescent transitions into early adulthood. The research interrogates data derived from interviews that explored the lived experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and the way in which adolescents process grief. The

broad questions directing the study were: what model of grief/coping best aligns with the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement as described by participants in the study? In what way(s), if any, does the experience of losing a sibling in adolescence interrupt psychosocial development? Specifically, what influence does the sibling relationship and subsequent sibling loss have on identity development in adolescence? What are the family characteristics that impact adolescents' experience of grief resolution for surviving siblings? Lastly, what enables some individuals to cope better than others when confronted with adolescent sibling bereavement?

1.3   Definition of Key Terms

The following terms were used in this study.

1.3.1   Psychosocial Development

Psychosocial development is a broad term used to refer to the psychological and social development of individuals. The term has been more commonly used within Erikson's (1963) model of personality growth and development which focuses on the interaction between individuals and their physical and social environments (Reber & Reber, 2001).

1.3.2   Psychological Wellbeing

Within literature, there is a lack of consensus concerning the definition and related components of psychological wellbeing (Gonzalez, Casas & Coenders, 2007). For the purposes of this study, psychological wellbeing is defined to encompass Ryff and Singer's (2008) six basic elements: self-acceptance, positive relationships, autonomy, mastery of one's environment, having a purpose in life and experiencing personal growth. The concept of psychological wellbeing is not operationalised or measured in this qualitative study and therefore is an approximation of the above components.

1.3.3   Bereavement, Grief and Mourning: A Distinction

Grief, mourning and bereavement are often used interchangeably (Worden, 2009). Definitions of these common terms in thanatology, the study of death and dying, are provided to aid understanding. Grief is to indicate the experience of the loss of a loved one through death (Worden)

and the emotional response to that loss (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 1993). Mourning or coping denotes the process that a person works through in adapting to that loss (Worden) and the actions and manner in expressing grief (Stroebe et al.). Bereavement represents the situation of having lost someone significant (Worden).

1.3.4   Adolescents

For the purpose of this study, adolescents were defined as men and boys, and women and girls between 14 and 25 years of age.

1.3.5   Surviving Sibling

For the purpose of this study, a surviving sibling was defined as the full or adopted brother or sister of the child who died.

1.4   Research Methodology

Qualitative research offers the opportunity to explore a person's experience of a situation that may not be able to be replicated in a laboratory setting (e.g. severe trauma, physical or mental abuse, drug use) (Bell, Staines & Michell, 2001). This approach to research can be suggestive rather than conclusive and often presents hypotheses for future controlled studies in which variables can be isolated and explored (Bell et al.).

The qualitative research approach utilised in this study was interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). IPA provides the opportunity to explore how people perceive and make sense of their world (Smith & Osborn, 2003). The IPA methodology was used to explore the impact of sibling bereavement on adolescent development and psychological wellbeing through an idiographic mode of inquiry rather than testing a predetermined hypothesis. Sample selection, data collection and data analysis were based on IPA methodology.

1.5   Significance of Study

This thesis utilised theories of grief, trauma, coping, adolescent development and family systems together with the review of literature on the influence of siblings in identity development.

Retrospective data was collected on the lived experience of sibling loss, and the influence of the family environment on an adolescent's ability to cope with both life crises of development and significant loss. A key outcome of the study is to provide further insight into the influences that aid and/or hinder sibling bereaved adolescents in their navigation of grief, coping, development tasks and transition to early adulthood.

This thesis might aid a better understanding of the factors that contribute to the complication of adolescent grief processes and the factors that support resiliency and recovery in the experience of sibling loss during the critical development phase of adolescence.

1.6   Description of Thesis

In an effort to illustrate the complexity of adolescent sibling bereavement, the following *Review of Literature* chapter provides a brief overview of some of the key factors that contribute to the understanding of this tragic phenomenon. Accordingly, the *Review of Literature* proceeds with a brief background of the existing literature relating to aspects likely to play a role in the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. Firstly, a brief overview of the significance of sibling relationships and sibling loss is provided followed by theories of psychosocial development by Erikson (1963) and Marcia (1966). Theories of grief, trauma and coping are explored together with an overview of models that explore the experience of adolescent grief and coping in the context of sibling or other significant loss. The impact of sibling bereavement on adolescent development tasks is explored as well as other factors that may influence adaptation to loss. Lastly, the *Literature Review* explores adolescent sibling bereavement in the context of the family, and the concepts of growth and vulnerability following a life crisis.

CHAPTER 2.   REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1   The Sibling Relationship and Loss

The sibling relationship is unique. It can be a source of protection, support or fulfil the role of an ally (Marshall & Davies, 2011).   Siblings not only share bedrooms, holidays and family milestones but biological and familial characteristics, values and experiences (Marshall & Davies; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). They may take on the role of companion, confidante, combatant, and provide the means for social comparison (McHale, Updegraff & Whiteman, 2012). The sibling relationship is supposed to last a lifetime and carries the assumption that together, they will care for their parents in later life (Dickens, 2014).

The sibling relationship has been described as egalitarian in status and affected by variables such as age, gender and family environment as well as other characteristics (Robinson & Mahon, 1997). The role of a sibling and characteristics within a sibling relationship vary substantially across both time and context (McHale, Updegraff & Whiteman). The sibling relationship may not always be considered a positive experience and can be characterised by conflict and rivalry (Lempers & Clark-Lempers, 1992). The quality of the sibling relationship can impact peer relationships, adjustment and influence problematic behaviour (Steinberg & Sheffield Morris, 2001). It is shaped by factors such as individual characteristics, cultural norms and values (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson & Crouter, 2011).

The role of siblings has been described as the building blocks of the family but despite their contribution to family structure and dynamics, the role of siblings has been largely neglected by family scholars (McHale, Updegraff & Whiteman, 2012). Additionally, sibling relationships are thought to influence individual development throughout the lifecycle (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson & Crouter, 2001). Hence, the uniqueness and longevity of the sibling relationship is such that the loss of a sibling can lead to the potential disruption of a life course trajectory for surviving siblings (Fletcher, Mailick, Song & Wolfe, 2013). Therefore, a more comprehensive understanding of

the influence and dynamics of sibling relationships and the impact of siblings on families is needed to comprehend the experience of sibling loss.

2.1.1 Siblings and Identity

Sibling relationships in childhood and adolescence have been heralded as key to a child's cognitive and social development (Cicirelli, 1980) and have the potential to influence and shape individuals throughout their lives (Branje, et al., 2004; Davies, 2015). The way brothers and sisters work out ways of living together help to lay the foundations for getting along with others and to form successful intimate relationships in adulthood (Szasz & Taleporos, 1984). During childhood and early adolescence, more time is spent outside of school hours with siblings than with parents or peers (McHale & Crouter, 1996). Hence, this relationship offers the continuity and accessibility unrivalled by other relationships during childhood and adolescence.

> Siblings, early in life, can acquire meaning for one another and become locked into a complementarity in which a vital part of one's sibling's core identity becomes fitted to deep parts of the other's core identity (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 30).

Bank and Kahn (1997) offer a theory of sibling relationships based on many years of research, that highlights the complex interplay brothers and sisters exert on each other's lives in childhood and the family environment which is also influenced by gender and birth order. The authors define the sibling bond as "a connection between the selves, at both the intimate and public levels, of two siblings: it is a fitting together of two people's identities. The bond is sometimes warm and positive but it may also be negative" (Bank & Kahn, p. 15).

The intertwined sibling relationship influences both personality and identity development (Bank & Kahn, 1982). The lateral nature of the sibling relationship enables the comparison of similarities and differences in the construction of self and the way that identity is reciprocally learned (Bank & Kahn; Davies, 2015). Therefore, focussing on the differences between siblings creates a comparison and a conceptualisation of one in relation to the other (Davies).

Early work by Adler and the theory of individual psychology placed sibling relationships as integral contributors to family dynamics and personality development (Adler, 1956). Adler stated that sibling rivalry for family resources strongly influences personality and in an effort to reduce competition, siblings may choose to differentiate, develop different qualities and find their individual niche (McHale, Updegraff, Helms-Erikson & Crouter, 2011).

Within the existing literature, the influence of the sibling relationship has been cited by McHale, Updegraff and Whiteman (2012) as uniquely influencing development and adjustment during adolescence. A review of research by Wong, Branje, VanderValk, Hawk and Meeus' (2010) outlines two processes of identity development thought to be at play in sibling dyads: sibling identification and sibling differentiation. Sibling identification describes the way in which siblings learn new behaviours via interactions with their siblings, where they observe and imitate behaviour (Bank & Kahn, 1976; Wong, et al.). The opposite process, sibling differentiation, describes the way in which an adolescent or emerging adult endeavours to distinguish themselves from the other by demonstrating their uniqueness (Sulloway, 1996).

Early research by Bank and Kahn (1997, p. 84) outlined identification patterns that describe sibling relationships captured within three main groups below: *close identification* (each person feels great similarity and little difference with a sibling); *partial identification* (each person feels some similarity and some difference with a sibling); d*istant identification* (each person feels great difference and little similarity with a sibling). The authors also suggest patterns of close identification contribute to three predicted sibling relationships: *twinning* (a fused relationship); *merging* (creates a blurred relationship); and *idealising* (hero worship).

Some researchers suggest that sibling differentiation is thought to encourage warmer and less conflictual relationships but research findings have been mixed (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter & Cumsille, 2003; Whiteman, Bernard & McHale, 2010). Sibling differentiation has been defined as "a process whereby siblings diverge in their development, finding different domains within which to pursue competencies and interests in an effort to carve out separate niches, create independent

identities and garner a share of parental attention and love" (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter & Cumsille). Sibling differentiation and its relationship with personality, parental relationships, gender role orientations and academic achievement has been explored in research in an effort to understand the role of sibling relationships in development (McHale, Updegraff, Helms Erikson & Crouter, 2001).

A three-wave longitudinal study conducted by Wong, Branje, VanderValk, Hawk and Meeus (2010) of 498 sibling dyads investigated the role of siblings in identity formation in adolescence and emerging adulthood and found that earlier born siblings tended to adopt more mature identity formation behaviours than younger siblings. The authors suggested this may be due to higher levels of responsibility within the family and that older siblings are more likely to imitate their parents' behaviour. Their research suggests that same sex sibling dyads tend to be more influenced by the identification process than opposite sex sibling dyads (Wong, et al.). Additionally, the study revealed that the identification processes tend to be more prominent when siblings have a greater age difference as may be the case with earlier and later born siblings with a number of years age difference between them. Differentiation processes, however, are typically more strongly adopted by individuals who have younger siblings (Wong, et al.). The authors suggest that siblings closer in age endeavour to differentiate themselves from each other whereas those born more than two years apart do not exhibit as strong a need to do so as they already feel different.

The above research has implications for those whose sibling dies in adolescence as it remains unclear how the process of identification or differentiation is affected by death i.e. does the identification process continue despite the sibling's death?

Siblings are intrinsically linked in their search for identity, using one another as a touchstone and a way of understanding the world around them (Bank & Kahn, 1982). The sibling relationship is both significant and unique, their identities intertwined in a shared history and the loss of one is essentially a loss of part of themselves (Davies, 2002; Devita-Raeburn, 2004). Whether strongly identified or differentiated, siblings learn about themselves in the context of the other and act as catalysts for development.

2.1.2 Sibling Loss

A number of literature reviews on child and adolescent sibling bereavement have been published over the last twenty years. The research in the area of sibling and adolescent bereavement increased during the 1980s with a focus on comparing child or adolescent responses to the loss of a parent or other significant person in their life (Hogan & DeSantis, 2004). Data largely involved samples of pre-adolescents or post-adolescents or was based on the perceptions of sibling or adolescent responses to grief by others (Hogan & DeSantis).

During the 1990's, a number of seminal literature reviews were undertaken to enhance the understanding of adolescent bereavement and adolescent sibling bereavement (Balk, 1991; Robinson & Mahon, 1997; and Walker, 1993). Davies, a key researcher in the area of sibling bereavement evaluated studies of childhood bereavement since the 1970s and focussed on "mediating variables"[1] such as individual characteristics (i.e. age and gender of surviving child); situational characteristics (i.e. terminal illness; illness duration, time since death and where the sibling died) and environmental characteristics (parental grief, shared life space, communication and cohesion within the family) that impact outcomes of bereaved siblings (Davies, 1999).

Robinson and Mahon's (1997) paper on "Sibling bereavement: A concept analysis" analysed empirical literature in order to identify the unique characteristics of sibling loss. The review endeavoured to encompass the diversity of available research and sought studies that represented variability in age as well as cause of death. The paper presents a model that compared sibling bereavement with other losses. It described sibling loss as a unique phenomenon in which critical attributes were at play that influenced changes in self-perception and the world view for bereaved individuals in the wake of their sibling's death. The critical attributes thought to influence this experience were family attributes (such as shared experiences/history, shared biology not necessary, lack of choice in relationship), an altered sibling system and separation by death.

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[1] While Davies (1999) refers to "mediating variables", these effects are better described as moderating variables, see Baron and Kenny (1986).

The authors suggest that sibling bereavement differs from other losses (i.e. loss of a parent, loss of a friend) in three main ways. Firstly, that the loss of a sibling manifests a multidimensional bereavement reaction which encompasses grief with physical, psychological and/or behavioural components. Secondly, the response to sibling bereavement involves a change in self-perception and may include shifts in one or more personality characteristics. Lastly, the researchers identify a change in world view as a key dimension to the unique experience of sibling loss. A change in world view may be represented by an increased sensitivity towards others or an increased vulnerability. The above three components are said to exist only within the context of the sibling relationship and subsequent loss (Robinson & Mahon, 1997).

2.1.3   Adolescent Sibling Loss

Connected by similar histories, siblings are intricately intertwined and when one dies, the remaining sibling loses part of themselves (Devita-Raeburn, 2004). The experience of sibling loss in adolescence occurs at a time of significant change from a physiological, relational, cognitive and psychosocial perspective (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). This developmental stage presents surviving siblings with the additional challenge of managing the process of grief when confronted with the loss of a sibling (Lohan & Murphy). Additionally, the concept of death becomes a confronting reality when an adolescent experiences the loss of a sibling. The loss can be destabilising as the adolescent's capability to think abstractly enables them to imagine life threatening situations and this realisation may bring home a sense that they are, in fact, not indestructible or unique when personal mortality is realised (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1999).

Theorists have suggested that adolescent sibling bereavement "profoundly and irrevocably alters the pathway toward an adolescent's identity formation" (Hogan & DeSantis, 2004, p. 176). In response to this loss, siblings must redefine themselves in the absence of their deceased siblings who may have been primary reference points (Balk, 1991; Bank & Kahn, 1982). Researchers are of the opinion that "having to cope with the situational crisis of sibling bereavement creates an altered pathway through the developmental tasks of adolescence" (Hogan & DeSantis, p. 194).

Despite the significance of the sibling relationship, the understanding of the phenomenon of adolescent sibling bereavement rests on scant empirical data where the focus of grief research has been largely directed toward understanding the adult grief response to the loss of a child or spouse (Balk & Corr, 2001; Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Although potential outcomes of adolescent sibling bereavement have been explored in literature, researchers are yet to effectively investigate adolescent bereavement from a developmental phase or critical life task perspective (Balk & Corr).

2.2   Adolescent Development

An important area of exploration for this study is that of adolescent development, therefore, an overview of the phases or tasks of adolescence is provided below. Adolescence has been identified as a critical development stage and a launching pad for adult personality. To illustrate the breadth of processes, phases or tasks undertaken in this stage, theories of adolescent development must be outlined.

Adolescence has been defined as a chronological period between puberty and early adulthood, a time when individuals explore possibilities with the aim of making commitments (Marcia, 2002). This transitional period requires the navigation of, and adaptation to, a multitude of developmental challenges (Balk, 1996). It has been heralded as a time of transformation from a biological, psychological and social perspective (Weisz and Hawley, 2002). Piaget (1954) considered adolescence a time of cognitive change and development as adolescents reach the stage of "formal operations" and are able to think systematically, engage in abstract thinking and make logical deductions based on hypothetical information.

As a function of adolescence, young people engage in endeavours crucial to their ongoing development. The developmental phases of adolescence are aligned to chronological ages which are broad and rough generalisations (Balk, 2009b) and encompass early (ages 10-14 years), middle (15-17) and late (18-23) adolescence. The typical challenges presented at different points of adolescence are: emotional separation from parents; competence, mastery and control; and intimacy and commitment (Balk).

The development of a sense of identity and the ability to foster self-esteem are cornerstones for adolescent emotional development (Noppe & Noppe, 2004). The definition of identity, central to the development phase of adolescence, has been described as both intrapsychic and interpersonal (Goth, et al., 2012). Marcia (1980, p. 159) defines identity as "an internal self-constructed, dynamic organization of drives, abilities, beliefs and individual history". Jackson and Bosma (1992) noted that adolescent literature struggles to provide a unified and clear understanding of what is meant by identity.

The adolescent development theories of Erikson (1963; 1980) and Marcia (1966) are offered in this section. Erikson's ego-psychological perspective presents an overview of development statuses within adolescence followed by the subsequent work and extension of theory by Marcia (1966). The overview of adolescent development theory serves to illustrate the intricacy of this development phase and the psychosocial transitions required for wellbeing.

2.2.1   Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development

Erikson (1963), a chief theorist of psychosocial development and identity formation, outlined an eight stage model for social and emotional development. Erikson believed that there was a series of psychosocial stages or crises throughout the course of a lifespan (Oltjenbruns, 2007). Erikson's (1980) development theory encompassed eight stages of ego development requiring the successful transition through the stages of: conflicts of trust, autonomy, initiative, industry, identity, intimacy, generativity and ego integrity. Each of the eight stages represents a crisis in ego growth and provides a chance to move forward, to remain static or to regress (Erikson, 1980). Successful transition through the eight stages has been associated with better psychological and social health (Wilt, Cox & McAdams, 2010).

Erikson believed the crystallisation of identity commenced in childhood and the era of late adolescence was critical for the ongoing construction of identity when identifications of childhood gave way to a new constellation greater than the sum of its parts (Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia, 2010; Marcia, 2002;). It is at this time that notions of self are sifted, shed or altered to form a new

identity configuration (Erikson, 1968). Specifically, identity formation occurs after negotiating the

phases of trust, autonomy and initiative during childhood and typically occurs in adolescence

(Erikson, 1963). Identity formation is the fifth psychosocial task of "identity versus role confusion"

within Erikson's psychosocial theory and identified as the key development task of adolescence

(Erikson, 1972; 1980).

According to Erikson (1959), the major developmental task of adolescence is the resolution

of the crisis of "identity" versus "identity diffusion". The central features of optimal identity

formation are the ability to explore possibilities and make commitment, both critical in the process

of making identity commitments. Successful resolution of this stage is dependent on the

adolescents' separation from their parents and the formation of their own self-image independent

from their family (Erikson, 1959).

Identity development theory has largely been based on research conducted with males and

organised into a staged process (Erikson, 1963, 1968; Marcia, 1966). Criticisms of Erikson's theory

are that it is vague, unsystematic and largely supported by anecdotal evidence (Moshman, 2011).

Researchers within the field of emerging adulthood argue that Erikson's model of psychosocial

development may be out of date due to shifts in the timing of life events such as leaving home and

parenthood (Arnett, 2000). Typical markers that herald the end of adolescence are cited as

separation from home and financial independence (Balk, 1995; Balk & Corr, 2001). Given, these two

events now occur later than in the era in which Erikson's theory was developed, it could be argued

that adolescence now extends further into what has been termed 'emerging adulthood' (Cote,

2006).

2.2.2   Marcia's Extension on Identity Formation

Marcia's identity status model was based on Erikson's theory of identity formation and

outlines the observable phenomena linked to Erikson's underlying processes of ego growth (Kroger,

Martinussen & Marcia, 2010). Marcia (1966) operationalised Erikson's ego identity formation in

studies using structured interviews and an incomplete sentence form. Marcia (2002) proposed that

all life stages are important but adolescence is particularly significant for two reasons. Firstly, it is the transition from childhood to adulthood and secondly, it is when the fourth personality structure – identity, is added to the previous structures of ego, self, and superego (Marcia, 2002). Marcia (2002) believed that crises and commitment play a role in the evolution of identity formation.

Marcia (1989) expanded on two key processes of identity formation, namely, exploration and commitment, stating they were crucial dimensions of identity development. Exploration is defined as the extent to which an adolescent investigates alternatives in relevant identity domains (Marcia). Commitment indicates the level to which adolescents make choices and are committed to these choices in terms of important identity domains (Marcia). Marcia suggested that the level of exploration by adolescents (described as "crisis" in Erikson's work) and commitment determined the status of adolescent identity formation. The processes of exploration and commitment are linked to Erikson's "identity versus role confusion" psychosocial task (Arseth, Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia, 2009).

Marcia, Waterman, Matteson, Archer and Orlofsky (1993) map the identity formation process of later adolescence in four ways that individuals might resolve the issue of identity and identity diffusion through the process of exploration and commitment. The four clearly differentiated identity statuses that signify a progression toward a mature identity are: *identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium* and *identity achievement* (Marcia, et al.). The authors believe the process of identity formation falls along a continuum with diffuse at one end and identity achievement at the other. Marcia (1989) described the model's progression within the four identity statuses as determined by the degree of 'exploration' and 'commitment' applied to areas identified as core issues for male identity development (sex roles, occupational choice, religion and political ideology).

Individuals entering adolescence usually fall into one of two categories, *identity-diffused* or *foreclosure* (Kroger, Martinussen & Marcia, 2010). *Identity-diffused* individuals are characterised by a lack of commitment toward religious beliefs, sex roles, politics or vocation and are yet to

experience an identity crisis (Marcia, 2001). *Foreclosed* individuals are unlikely to have experienced

a crisis but have generated commitments towards a vocation and ideologies that may have been

internalised from parents, society or another influence (Marcia). *Foreclosed* or *identity-diffused*

individuals may move into identity crisis, referred to as a *moratorium*, where individuals are actively

involved in considering possibilities and seeking to make commitments (Marcia). During the

moratorium period, individuals are no longer children and are yet to become an adult, rather, they

explore alternatives and struggle to locate their future selves (Marcia).

Ideally, the adolescent emerges from the *moratorium* stage to *identity achievement* as they

resolve their identity crisis through the processes of exploration and commitment (Marcia, 2002).

The optimal and most typical path to the formation of identity follows the sequence of *foreclosure-*

moratorium-achievement (Marcia, 2001). A less optimal path would be that of an individual entering

adolescence as diffuse, unable or unwilling to make commitments, and unable to find adult direction

(Marcia). This scenario may occur if the adolescent is exposed to disequilibrating factors (i.e.

disruption to their childhood social and psychological contexts) that may affect their ability to

determine direction (Marcia).

2.2.3   Further Considerations

Marcia's identity status paradigm has been embraced by identity theorists as an accepted

way in which to assess Erikson's (1968) concept of identity formation (Kroger, Martinussen &

Marcia, 2010) and has inspired much research on identity development in adolescence over the last

30-40 years (Berzonsky, 1997; Van Hoof, 1999). Contention exists from some identity researchers

who suggest that there is minimal overlap between Marica's identity statuses and Erikson's theory

(Cote & Levine, 1987; Van Hoof, 1999; Schwartz, 2005) and that Erikson's interpretation of identity

crisis and formation was a process that spanned the life-cycle not simply a task within adolescence

(Cote & Levine). Despite criticism, there has been minimal developmental research in recent years

to rival that of Erikson and Marcia (Moshman, 2011).

In the vacuum of alternate models of identity development, researchers have tended to hone, refine and expand on Marcia's (1966) model, typically focussing on and extending the separate dimensions of exploration and commitment. A meta-analyses by Kroger, Martinussen and Marcia (2010) reviewed 124 studies on the developmental patterns of identity status change, almost all of which utilised Marcia's Identity Status Interview. Their meta-analysis of cross-sectional categorical assessments of identity status changes revealed a large number of individuals had not progressed to *identity achievement* by the point of young adulthood (i.e. as of the age of 23). The authors suggest that both individual and/or situational factors may interrupt progression towards *identity achievement*. This supports research that suggests that the developmental phase of *identity achieved* is not always attained in late adolescence and may be influenced by the challenges adolescents experience and/or the lack of support in their environment (Kroger, 1997). A below optimal level of accommodative challenge and environmental support in the developmental context may impact the adolescent's progression towards *identity achievement* (Kroger, 2007).

It has been suggested that challenges provide the adolescent with a new life experience that requires a response and the adolescents' ability to meet such a challenge relies on their resilience, openness to new experiences, ego strength and identification with parental figures (Kroger, 1997). To date, the dynamics that trigger change within each identity status is unclear. Kroger (2002) suggests that fluctuations between identity statuses occur throughout the lifespan in response to internal or external events, signifying the lifelong journey of identity exploration.

2.3   The Experience of Grief

The experience of profound loss through death means that life is forever changed (Attig, 1996). Grief has been recognised as both universal and unique to each individual's experience, and represents an individual's emotional and psychological response to bereavement (Germain, et al., 2013; Silverman, 2000; Vardanega & Johnson, 2002). It has been described as "the quintessential mind-body problem" (Genevro, Marshall & Miller, 2004, p. 494), an assault that is holistic and

encompasses physical, cognitive, emotional, behavioural and spiritual responses (Balk, 2011; Corr, 2013; Hall, 2014; Thompson, 2012).

Grief has been described as highly individual and chaotic rather than following a uniform and predictable pattern (Attig, 1996). Many grief theorists suggest that the normal process of grief may last from one to two years, and is influenced by factors such as individual differences, the nature of the relationship with the deceased, physical and emotional health, age and environmental factors (McKissock & McKissock, 2012; Regehr & Sussman, 2004). Expression of grief helps bereaved people learn to live with loss and includes a wide array of feelings as bereaved individuals make meaning of their loss (McKissock & MicKissock; Vardanega & Johnson, 2002).

The effects of loss may be far-reaching and a significant loss may create feelings of increased vulnerability; threaten an individual's meaning or beliefs or present challenges to identity (McCarthy, 2007). Grief is recognised as a normal human response to loss rather than a pathological condition, where an individual must learn to live without the deceased person (Balk, 2011). The experience of normal grief encompasses a widely variable and extensive list of behaviours and feelings that follow a loss (Worden, 2009). Common grief responses as described by theorists such as Worden (2010) are feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, emancipation, relief and numbness. Physical responses may include sensations associated with acute grief reactions such as hollowness in the stomach, tightness in the chest and/or throat, over sensitivity to noise, depersonalisation, breathlessness, weakness, lack of energy and dry mouth (Worden, 2010). From a cognitive perspective, the bereaved may experience disbelief, confusion, preoccupation, sense of presence of the deceased, hallucinations (visual or auditory) (Worden). From a behavioural perspective, the bereaved may experience sleep disturbances, appetite disturbances, absentminded behaviour, social withdrawal, dreams of the deceased, avoidance of reminders, searching for the deceased, sighing, hyperactivity, crying and treasuring objects that belonged to the deceased (Worden).

The experience of grief is not only influenced by feelings of loss but the way in which others respond to the expression of that loss. Grief theorists have noted the transactional nature of grief in the way that others respond or fail to respond to the person who is mourning (Neimeyer, 2014). Bereaved individuals may adapt to particular circumstances and regulate their grief if they feel that their expression of feelings of loss will not be supported (Stroebe & Schut, 2001a). Therefore, grief has been identified as a dynamic regulatory process that is influenced by family, community and societal meanings ascribed to death and loss (Neimeyer, 2014). The use of language or clichés by others in response to expressions of grief may prevent or control the expression of feelings by bereaved individuals (McKissock & McKissock, 2012). Hence, the experience of grief following loss is multifaceted, intensely emotional, individually expressed and culturally bound (Vardanega & Johnson, 2002).

Normal grief may include the minority of individuals who do not experience (or report not experiencing) grief following loss (Bonanno, 2001). Some researchers speculate that this may not be indicative of absent grief or a delayed grief reaction but a response to the end of a difficult situation (e.g. end of an abusive relationship) (Genevro, et al., 2004). Research suggests that most people will recover from bereavement after some weeks or months of mourning, whereas, others may continue to mourn acutely for a significantly longer period of time (Bonanno, Wortman, Lehman, Tweed, Haring, Sonnega, Carr & Nesse, 2002). Therefore, the utility of 'one-size-fits-all' model for grief is erroneous as the mourning experience is often dependent on many factors, including unique factors to the individual (Hall, 2014). However, time may be a helpful measure in determining when grief becomes complicated.

2.3.1 Complicated Grief

More recently, the field of bereavement research has sought to understand the potential risk factors associated with what is termed complicated, traumatic or pathological grief (Burke, Neimeyer, Young, et al., 2014). Research suggests that bereavement can precipitate the development of psychopathology such as anxiety and depressive disorders and prolonged grief

disorder (PGD) (Spuij, Reitz, et al., 2012). It is estimated that only a small, though significant, percentage of individuals who experience grief fall into the category of complicated grief and they are also at greater risk of adverse health effects (Genevro, et al., 2004). Indicators of complicated grief have been defined as: an inability to accept the death, denial, persistent intrusive thoughts; longing to be with the deceased (Dickens, 2014).

Research by Dickens (2014) investigated the prevalence of complicated grief and post-traumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents following the death of a sibling and cited risk factors such as coping strategies of the parents, time since death, family support systems and relationships, developmental age at the time of death and finding meaning in life after the death. Other risk factors identified for complicated grief are the suddenness and type of death (Maercker, 2007), an ambivalent relationship with the deceased, presence of concurrent stressors (Rando, 1993; Raphael, 1983) and the bereaved person's avoidance of feelings connected with the loss (Eisma, et al.2013). Gamino, Sewell and Easterling's (2000) study of pathogenesis of grief responses, identified risk factors of grief intensity such as: the event of a traumatic death, the perception of the death being preventable, and the young age of the deceased. Their study also found that previous mental illness and other losses increase the intensity of grief experienced by individuals. Therefore, some people may possess an underlying vulnerability toward traumatisation.

One of the challenges for practitioners when determining whether grief has become complicated is the inconsistent and imprecise terminology used to define it and the potential bias of the evaluator in determining whether the mourner has failed to progress in the resolution of their grief (Rando, 1993).

2.3.2   Disenfranchised Grief

Disenfranchised grief has been described as the grief a person experiences when the loss cannot be acknowledged or publically mourned (Doka, 2008). This type of grief projects a belief that an individual does not have the right to be a bereaved person and may be socially unaccepted or unsupported in their grief (Doka). Disenfranchised grief reflects the belief of others that someone's

loss is not as impactful or significant as another person's loss and therefore the sense that their grief

is not supported inhibits how they express that loss (Doka).

2.3.3 Anticipatory Grief

Anticipatory grief has been defined as the forewarning of loss that allows for the potential

therapeutic preparation of grief (Rando, 1983, 1988). Although Davies (2001) argues that the death

of a loved one can be experienced as sudden even in the context of terminal illness. Rando (1986, p.

24) described anticipatory loss as:

> the phenomenon encompassing the processes of mourning, coping, interaction
>
> planning, and psychosocial reorganization that are stimulated and begun in part in
>
> response to the awareness of the impending loss of a loved one and the recognition of
>
> associated losses in the past, present, and future.

In the situation where individuals anticipate the death of a significant loved one, the

experience may be complicated by the impact of the loved one's long term illness. Shapiro (2008)

suggested that the potential positive benefits of anticipatory grief may be out-weighed by the

overwhelming demands experienced when confronted with the terminal illness of a loved one.

Further, research suggests that caring for, and the subsequent death of, a terminally ill child

adversely impacts the availability of parental resources for bereaved siblings (Fanos & Nickerson,

1991).

2.3.4 Re-Grief

Another form of grief described in literature is that of re-grief. As an individual matures and

moves through later life stages, the context and understanding of the loss also changes and the

individual re-grieves the loss from a more mature vantage point (Oltjenbruns, 2007). Some

individuals may "get stuck" in their grief unable to resolve it, others may process this grief from a

new and developmentally appropriate perspective (Oltjenbruns, 2007). The process of reviewing

and reinterpreting an experience from a previous life stage can provide insight, new meaning or resolution of an earlier conflict (Oltjenbruns, 2007).

Additionally, bereaved individuals can re-experience grief at different points in time when their sense of loss has been triggered (Rosenblatt, 1996). For bereaved siblings, it is thought that the loss of a sibling endures a lifetime and survivors report that they still talk to, think about and miss their sibling (Webb, 2010). It is common for bereaved siblings to experience renewed or intense grief at significant points in their life they would have shared with their brother or sister i.e. graduations, weddings, having a child, career transitions (Davies & Limbo, 2010; Webb).

2.4   Trauma in the Context of Loss

A death is considered traumatic if it occurs without warning; if it is untimely; if it involves violence; if there is damage to the loved one's body; if it was caused by a perpetrator with intent to harm; if the survivor regards the death as preventable; if the survivor believes that the loved one suffered; or if the survivor regards the death, or manner of death, as unfair and unjust (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015, p. 1).

Three core assumptions that people hold and which normally remain unchallenged except when shattered by a traumatic event such as the loss of a loved one are: that we are worthy; that the world is benevolent; and that we live in a world that makes sense (Hall, 2011; Janoff-Bulman & Berg, 1998). Making sense of a traumatic event is a central component of recovery and enables the bereaved to re-integrate their experience within a broader meaning (Janoff-Bulman & Berg, 1998).

A traumatic incident may only last a few seconds but that can be long enough to potentially traumatise an individual affecting his or her emotions, identity and sense of the world (Matsakis, 1994). One of the potential outcomes of experiencing a traumatic event that has been widely researched is the shattering of an individual's assumptions about the world and the self (Corr, Nabe & Corr, 2009). Davis (2005, p. 137) states "loss and trauma events often represent severe threats to

how people perceive themselves and how they perceive the world". Such a shift in perception has the capacity to dash hopes, destroy confidence and plunge people into enduring despair (Davis).

Trauma and grief are based on divergent and independent theories and oftentimes approached using different treatment modalities (Regehr & Sussman, 2004). Conjecture exists from researchers of both domains about the lack of consensus concerning basic concepts and definitions (Stroebe, Schut & Finkenauen, 2001). Grief literature has focussed on the mourning process and the relational aspects of adjusting to the loss of the deceased, whereas trauma literature explores the responses (e.g. neurophysiological) to horrifying and life-threatening events (Regehr & Sussman, 2004). The sudden and violent loss of a significant person may affect an individual's sense of justice, and set the scene for the individual to experience trauma and grief concurrently (Regehr & Sussman, 2004). Other aspects that may render a death traumatic include the survivor witnessing the death; the survivor's own life was threatened; and the experience of multiple deaths (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015). It has been suggested that deaths due to suicide, homicide or accidents are more likely to lead to trauma symptoms than other losses (Bonanno & Kaltman, 1999). Some researchers have conflated the two areas of grief and trauma to define a new category termed "traumatic grief" to be outlined later in this section (Regehr & Sussman, 2004).

Trauma and grief are not mutually exclusive as aspects of both experiences can overlap i.e. intrusive thoughts and memories (Raphael, 1997).   In the context of grief, memories tend to focus on the deceased and may be either positive or negative (Raphael). In the case of trauma, memories may be focused on the specific traumatic or horrifying aspects of the event (Raphael). Raphael states that the anxiety experienced by traumatised individuals tends to centre on a sense of fear or threat whereas bereaved individuals tend to feel anxious about the separation from the deceased.

The reaction to psychological trauma differs to that of grief or bereavement and is more related to reactions to the "death encounter" such as threat to life, exposure to horrific or shocking death or injury (Raphael, 1999). Those exposed to a traumatic stressor may experience normal reactions such as initial shock and numbness and potentially a level of dissociation (Raphael).

Affected individuals may re-experience the traumatic event (i.e. intrusive thoughts, memories, dreams or nightmares) together with intense fear connected to the initial experience. Raphael further describes avoidance phenomena such as numbness, avoidance of reminders, shutting out of emotion and heightened arousal which may impact mood, sleep, concentration and alertness. These symptoms may settle for some people and others may develop ongoing patterns of pathology leading to diagnoses such as posttraumatic stress disorder (Raphael). It is therefore important to be able to delineate between a bereavement reaction and that of a traumatic stress reaction.

The question as to why some people experience the negative effects of significant loss and trauma while others are more resilient and, in fact, may even be transformed by the experience has been the source of much research (Davis, 2005). Davis (p. 138) offers three approaches to explore the experience of the stress response associated with trauma: a personality approach (focuses on pre-existing individual differences that influence negative responses to stress e.g. diathesis-stress models), a coping approach (explores the moderators of trauma and loss such as coping behaviour e.g. Lazarus and Folkman's 1984 transactional model of coping) and psychological issues approach (explores the psychological issues evoked by trauma and loss and recognises that every person's experience is unique).

Researchers suggest that the inability to find meaning in loss can trigger a prolonged process of grieving (Bonanno, et al., 2002). Conversely, some individuals do not search for meaning following loss and seem to adjust well to loss and trauma (Bonanno, et al.). It is important to note that not all those who experience trauma will develop psychopathology and bereavement related symptoms progressively settle in intensity rather than develop into traumatic stress reactions (Raphael, 1999). Studies support that the majority of individuals who experience a catastrophic event will not experience a traumatic stress response and if they do, symptoms remit within one month (Regehr & Sussman, 2004). Van der Kolk (2003) states the impact of trauma may be influenced by an individual's development phase as those with a stronger identity tend to have

better outcomes. Hence, the process of constructing or reconstructing identity in adolescence may complicate the loss experience for sibling bereaved adolescents.

2.4.1   Traumatic Grief

Traumatic grief has been described as encompassing enduring symptoms of both trauma and grief, where grief symptoms are compounded with those of trauma symptoms (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015). It is thought that the symptoms of traumatic grief (also known as traumatic bereavement) are more intense and enduring when compared to those of natural death, and survivors may struggle with this experience for many years or, potentially, the remainder of their lives (Barle, Wortman & Latack). In the situation of traumatic bereavement, unprocessed trauma is thought to block the mourning process (Barle, Wortman & Latack). It is thought that complications of the grieving process may prevent some individuals from reorganising their attachment to significant others (Range, 2007).

Individuals who have experienced traumatic grief may present with a wide range of mental health disorders such as but not limited to: post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, major depression, borderline personality disorder, anxiety disorder, phobias and somatic symptoms (Kauffman, 2007). Traumatic grief is thought to disrupt the individual's experience of oneself and the continuity of time which both hamper self-healing efforts (Kauffman).

Worden (2009) suggests that traumatic bereavement occurs in either of the two following situations: there was something about the death that was traumatic (i.e. a violent death) or the mourner's experience of the death demonstrates symptoms related to trauma (i.e. a conflicted relationship with the deceased). Conditions identified by Worden (1991) as potential complicating factors within the grieving process are that the loss is either socially unspeakable, socially negated or occurs without a social support network.

Worden (2009) notes that symptoms of trauma should be addressed before individuals can process their grief. Often it is the impact of the loss that is recognised when working with those who may have experienced a traumatic loss rather than working with the individual in order to explore

the traumatic experience itself (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015). Maercker (2007) suggests that the psychoanalytic process of "grief work" enables individuals to work through the trauma associated with intense loss and effectively develop coping skills (Maercker, 2007).

Barle, Wortman and Latack (2015) reviewed research on the effects of traumatic loss and risk factors associated with the subsequent experience of traumatic bereavement of survivors. The authors identified a number of core issues that differentiate traumatic bereavement from the response to a natural death. The core issues faced by survivors of traumatic deaths were: the shattering of their most basic life assumptions; difficulty accepting the death; attempt to make sense of or finding meaning in their loved ones' deaths; questioning of their faith; feelings of guilt over the death; and rumination over whether their loved one suffered (Barle, Wortman & Latack).

Other risk factors associated with the development of traumatic grief are the type and suddenness of the death, whether the survivor witnessed the death, blaming self for the death and emotional attachment to the person who died (Dickens, 2014). For the young, the ability to find meaning may be derived from the systems of meaning in which they live (i.e. cultural and interpersonal contexts (Ribbens McCarthy, 2009). Researchers suggest that the inability to find meaning in loss can trigger a prolonged process of grieving (Bonanno, et al., 2002; Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010; Hall, 2011). Conversely, some individuals do not search for meaning following loss and seem to adjust well to loss or trauma (Bonanno, et al.). One question that is yet to be answered is "at what point does grief manifest as traumatic?" (Dickens, p. 120).

2.5   Is Adolescent Grief Different?

For an adolescent, death is an anathema. Everything emphasises life, change, growth. His body's development, the excitement of his developing thought processes, the enticing world of adulthood and power that is now so near: all these things make death seem impossible. The adolescent faces bereavement unwillingly, as though he has been assaulted by a confrontation with reality that has no place in his world (Raphael, 1983, p. 139).

The death of a loved one can create further upheaval for an adolescent at a time of life characterised by ambivalence, confusion and uncertainty, adding a further dimension of complexity not necessarily experienced by adults and children (Oltejenbruns, 2007). Generally, adolescents have not had to integrate death's reality into their life which highlights some of the differences between adult and adolescent grief (Corr, 1995). Balk (1983) posits that although both adolescent grief and adult grief were similar, after the death of a loved one the grief of adolescents seemed to be more enduring.

Bereavement, grief and mourning have largely been explored and defined within the context of the adult experience (Balk, 2011). The bereavement models often applied to adolescent experiences of grief and loss are yet to be empirically tested in the context of adolescent development. Typically in research, adolescents have been considered the extension of either childhood or adulthood (Adolph & Fleming, 1986).

It has been suggested that the expression of grief by children and adolescents is both similar and different to that of adults (Corr, 2013). Children and adolescents typically have limited exposure to death and when it arrives they are not always aware of the impact of death in terms of their own fears, ability to express their feelings and the finality of it all (Dickens, 2014). It is thought that during the stage of "formal operations", adolescents refine their concept of death and begin to ponder questions in relation to death itself (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1998). Adolescents learn to balance tensions in the cognitive, biological, social and affective domains and this may distinguish the way in which they perceive death when compared to children and adults (Batten & Oltjenbruns).

Adolescents' developing capability to think abstractly and manipulate thoughts and ideas facilitates an understanding of death, bereavement and the construction of a new meaning for both life and death (Batten & Oltjenbruns). Adolescent grief expression can be influenced by other factors such as the individual's additional life experience, enhanced communication skills, personal context as well as the challenges presented by normative development tasks (Corr & Balk, 1996). The experience of early, middle and later adolescents differs in terms of the challenges, conflicts and

issues presented, and these differences set the context within which adolescents must deal with bereavement (Balk, 2004). Although older adolescents are likely to be able to grasp the concept that death is universal and inevitable, this does not necessarily mean that all adolescents have the ability to engage with the issue of death (Corr, 1995). Young adolescents may endeavour to avoid or distract themselves from the strong emotions of grief (Christ, Siegel & Christ, 2002). Understanding death is not only dependent on cognition and formal abstract thinking but on other key elements of developmental understanding such as values, beliefs, emotions, personality and experiences (Corr, 1995).

Rosen (1991) reviewed significant issues relating to loss in childhood or adolescence and identified a number of aspects key to understanding adolescent bereavement. Firstly, recognition that the transition from child to adolescent is affected greatly by loss as during this phase of development, the adolescent is already experiencing a normal sense of instability and a heightened fear of death (Rosen). Adolescents must deal with the separation from their parents and the occurrence of a death during this period may impede the process (Rosen). Additionally, by their very nature, adolescents are likely to try to minimise any pain that their parents may be feeling and in their effort to do so, this may inhibit their desire to experience life in the way that helps to define their own identity (Rosen). Lastly, adolescents may feel the expectation to take the place or the role of the deceased parent or sibling (Rosen).

2.6   Overview of Grief and Loss Literature

Thanatology, the study of death and dying, was once an area dominated by psychiatry and clinical studies but over the last 20 years perspectives of researchers from varied disciplines such as medicine, philosophy, sociology, theology, social work and psychology, have begun to expand and deepen this body of knowledge (Balk, 2007; Genevro, et al., 2004; Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010). Hence, the area of bereavement is a comparatively young discipline and has resulted in a multidisciplinary research approach to its understanding (Stroebe, Stroebe & Hansson, 1993). The evolutionary study in this field has challenged the empirical validity of some of the long held core

assumptions and basic principles relating to grief and loss resulting in a more contemporary

understanding (refer Bonanno, 2009; Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996; Worden, 2009; Wortman &

Silver, 1989; Stroebe, 2001). A shift in grief and loss theory has been achieved through the critique

of seminal work by Freud, Lindemann and Bowlby, and the dialogue continues as researchers strive

to define contemporary conceptualisations of grief and mourning (Balk, 2014).

Although there has been tremendous growth in grief and loss research, it has not necessarily

translated into a strong foundation for grief theory and therapy (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001). The lack

of synthesis towards any one dominant theoretical paradigm is likely due to the variability of

perspectives offered by researchers and the inconsistent characterisation of core themes (Genevro,

et al., 2004). Additionally, theories may be culturally biased and therefore it is unclear whether

universality can be applied across all people, cultures and time periods (Walsh-Burke, 2009).

Predominantly, the field of bereavement was viewed through the lens of psychodynamic

tradition embracing Freud's notion that healthy grieving required "letting go" (termed decathexis) at

its core (Neimeyer, 2014).   As part of this process, individuals were encouraged to express their pain

so that they could "move on" with their lives, disconnecting with the one they had lost and

reinvesting in other relationships (Neimeyer, 2014). Challenges to these notions concerning grief

have resulted in a paradigm shift away from Freud's theory of "letting go" and towards theories

based on an ongoing relationship with the deceased such as Klass, Silverman and Nickman's (1996)

"continuing bonds".

According to Wortman and Silver (1989), assumptions about grief originated from leading

scholars and 'clinical lore' within the field of loss and bereavement and encompassed a cultural

understanding of the experience at a particular point in time. The authors' research identified three

typical patterns for individuals adapting to loss: (i) some individuals seemed to follow an expected

pattern of recovery; (ii) others did not show intense distress following loss; and (iii) others continued

to be in a high state of distress for longer than would be expected (Wortman & Silver, 1989). Their

research indicated the diverse variability in 'normal' responses to grief which may include the

absence of distress or even positive emotions following bereavement (Genevro, et al., 2004).

Therefore, the psychoanalytic model of grief resolution that suggests the bereaved should severe ties with the deceased may be inaccurate and, in fact, harmful for some mourners i.e. bereaved parents (Klass, Silverman & Nickman, 1996). This evolution represents a shift away from pathologising models of grief (Bonanno, 2004) and challenges the traditional views of mourning (Neimeyer, 2014).

This section reviews a number of bereavement models, both traditional and contemporary, that chart the journey from Freud's "letting go" to Klass, Silverman and Nickman's (1996) "continuing bonds". Although not comprehensive, the review illustrates significant shifts in thinking that highlight early conceptualisations of grief and loss from a clinical perspective through to generalised patterns of grief (stage and phase theories) as well as theories that accommodate the individual and unique experience of loss. Additionally, the applicability of grief process models derived from research with adults and children are held in question in terms of applicability for adolescents. Firstly, this section will review the experience of grief as a response to loss, followed by models of grief and coping.

2.6.1 Historical Theories of Grief and Coping

2.6.1.1 Early Psychoanalytic Grief Models

The first major body of work on grief was presented by Freud and contained his analysis of the requirements for recovery from bereavement (Balk, 2011). Freud's (1917/1957) concept of "grief work" presented mourning as a process where the individual severs ties with the deceased, works through the anguish associated with that loss and forms "an emotionally neutral mental representation of the person who died" (Balk, 2011, p. 7). The psychoanalytic model encouraged mourners to decathect or disconnect from the deceased or risk being pathologised if they were resistant (Jordan, 2000).

Another early influential grief theorist was Lindemann (1944) who stated that adults experience three grief states: shock and disbelief; acute mourning; and resolution. Lindemann

provides a comprehensive description of acute grief reactions. Engel (as cited in Worden, 2009) followed Lindemann and utilised the concept of pathology as a medical analogy for grief, comparing the psychological trauma of the loss of a loved one with the physiological trauma of being severely wounded or burned. Engel 's medical model suggested that grief is a departure from a state of health and wellbeing. He argued that just as healing restores health in a physiological sense following an injury, healing restores equilibrium and wellbeing in a psychological sense after a loss. Therefore, the process of mourning is similar to the process of healing and terms such as "healthy" or "pathological" are applicable within both contexts (Worden, 2009).

2.6.1.2 Phase and Stage Models of Grief

Bowlby was an influential object relations theorist of the twentieth century who conceptualised the "universality of loss and attachment behaviour" and defined a series of progressive responses experienced by an infant towards the loss of its first love object (Fleming & Adolph, 1986, p. 99). Bowlby's (1980) theory of attachment and loss suggests that recovery from bereavement consisted of four phases: *feeling numb; craving and searching for the one who died; falling into disorganisation and despair*; and *reorganisation*. The mourner attempts to work through the phases hopefully to reach that of *reorganisation* in which they disengage from the deceased and the healing process can begin (Fleming & Adolph).   An individual may experience the overlapping of phases and/or oscillate between them (Bowlby). The basis for Bowlby's theory lies within the processes of instinctual human survival and the drive for safety and security as encapsulated in the form of attachment (Bowlby, 1977).

Bowlby's theory of grief was said to have strongly influenced other theorists such as British psychiatrist Colin Murray Parkes and Mary Ainsworth (Worden, 2009).   Similar to Bowlby, Murray Parkes' (1972) presented a phase theory for the mourning process which encompassed the phases of *numbness*, *yearning*, *disorganisation and despair,* and finally, *reorganisation*. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross' based her stages of dying which have also been applied to describe the mourning process, on

case studies and observations from practice in psychiatry (Thorson, 1996). Kubler-Ross' (1978) stages are *denial and isolation*, *anger*, *bargaining*, *depression* and *acceptance*.

Kubler-Ross' model has been a highly influential and although the theory has been largely discredited due to no empirical basis that people grieve in a linear stage by stage fashion, it still continues to be widely used (Thompson, 2012). Contemporary grief theorists warn against the use of grief stage models. Although there are common reactions, feelings and processes of healing; there are also variations across individuals based on their relationship with the deceased, coping capabilities and other individual differences that affect the experience of grief (Attig, 2011; Bonanno, 2009; and Neimeyer, 2000, 2001). Further, stage theories such as those suggested by Freud, Bowlby, and Kubler-Ross have been accused of oversimplifying the grief process and have been superseded by models that outline tasks that need to be worked through to resolve grief (Sveen, Eilegard, Steineck & Kreicbergs, 2014).

Despite the popularity of stage models, longitudinal studies of bereavement adaptation provide little evidence for the experience of emotions and cognitions at specific stages or phases of mourning (Neimeyer, 2014). Below are a number of perspectives on grief and mourning that conceptualise current thinking in the field of grief, bereavement and coping.

2.6.2   Contemporary Theories of Grief and Coping

During the latter part of the twentieth century, researchers challenged the traditional "grief work" proposing alternate ways in which individuals respond to death and loss (Balk, 2011; Carverhill, 2002). Wortman and Silver's (1989) seminal paper empirically challenged some long held beliefs proliferated in grief literature. The researchers explored assumptions such as: distress or depression following a significant loss was inevitable; failure to express distress was indicative of pathology; an individual needed to "work through" grief rather than "denying" or "repressing" their grief response; an individual recovers from their loss within a brief period of time; and once recovery from loss is achieved, the person then returns to normal functioning (Wortman & Silver). Additionally, theorists suggest "grief work" or working through grief is more aligned to the female

experience of grief as females tend to be more willing to disclose emotions when than males (Stroebe & Schut, 1995).

The notion of "letting go" was challenged by thanatology researchers who argue that ongoing bonds with the deceased reflect a healthier and more culturally inclusive model of grieving (Neimeyer, 2014). Both stage theories of grief and the central idea of decathexis have been challenged by theorists such as Klass, Silverman & Nickman (1996) in their theory of *continuing bonds*. Klass, et al. suggest that maintaining a bond with the deceased is healthier than the notion of detachment. The theory reflects a contemporary approach to grief and a shift away from the concept of "letting go" which was historically positioned as the pathway to successful mourning (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010).

2.6.2.1 *The Lived Experience of Loss*

Attig (1996) challenged both the stage and phase and medical models of grief suggesting the theories fail to address the active response that individuals can employ when faced with bereavement. The stage and phase and medical models suggest that there is an end point to grief where the individual either completes the stages or the wound recovers (Attig, 1996). Attig suggests these concepts, although accessible to the bereaved and those who support them, do not respect the individuality of experience but a false uniformity and predictability in the pattern of grief. Attig argued that the historical theories and symptomology of grief were based on large statistical studies, suggesting what is probable without the light and shade of variation and, therefore, do not reflect the unique grief experience of individuals.

Attig (2001) approached grief through the lens of existential phenomenology and central to this approach is the lived experience of relationships with the external world, with other people and oneself. Attig suggests that grieving involves re-learning these relationships after the loss of a loved one. As an active process, the bereaved must relearn their place in the world without the deceased and come to terms with places and objects that trigger feelings and thoughts of loss. Additionally, the bereaved reorient themselves in their social surrounds, their relationship with the person who

died as well as their relationship with others which may include new relationships (Attig). Lastly, the bereaved must re-examine their beliefs, values and meaning which can shatter assumptions and confidence in themselves and the world (Attig).

2.6.2.2 Worden's 'Task Approach' to Grieving

A grief theory based on developmental psychology is Worden's 'task' theory that illustrates various patterns of idiosyncratic grief as a mourner addresses tasks and adapts to loss (Worden, 2009). Worden suggested 'phases' of grief imply a level of passivity in the experience of grief whereas 'tasks' of grief signify that the mourner has agency and must action something in order to move forward. The model conceptualises grief as four tasks that incorporate a level of individuality and autonomy not generally found in the stage models (Doka, 2007). Worden's model allows for diversity of response in terms of timing and in the way a bereaved individual completes the tasks of mourning or chooses not to address certain tasks (Doka).

The *Tasks of Mourning* outlined by Worden are: 1. *to accept the reality of the loss*; 2. *to process the pain of grief*; 3. *to adjust to the world without the deceased*; and 4. *to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life*. Adapting to the loss of a loved one is considered a cognitive process that requires "restructuring of thoughts about the deceased, the loss experience, and the changed world within which the bereaved must now live" (Stroebe, 1992 as cited in Worden, 2009, p 39).

Additionally, Worden (2009) identified *Mediators of Mourning*[2] that represent the risks and protective factors in the context of an individual's grief response and are used to assess the accomplishment of the *Tasks of Mourning*. The mediators identified are: 1) *who the person who died was*; 2) *nature of the attachment*; 3) *how the person died*; 4) *historical antecedents*; 5) *personality variables*; 6) *social variables*; and 7) *concurrent stresses* (Worden). Some elements such as the attachment style of bereaved individuals, the nature of the relationship with the deceased

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[2] While Worden (2009) refers to "mediators of mourning", the effects of these variables are better described as moderators, see Baron and Kenny (1986).

(i.e. conflict or ambivalence), how the person died, can all pose challenges in adapting to loss (Worden). The model supports the unique experience of grief and states that the tasks of grief do not follow a uniform manner but can be non-linear and non-sequential.

Worden (2009) posits that the task model is more akin to Freud's concept of grief in that the mourner has agency in the grief process and actively adapts to loss rather than moving passively through phases. The influence of Freud's "grief work" was apparent in Worden's earlier grief model (1983) which encompassed the emotional withdrawal from the deceased and reinvestment in other relationships as the fourth task. In Worden's most recent model, the fourth task reflects the essence of a continued relationship with the deceased.

2.6.2.3 Continuing Bonds

The theory of *continuing bonds* positions that in death, relationships are transformed rather than relinquished and this enables the continuation of a relationship with the deceased person (Klass, et al., 1996). The idea of maintaining a connection with the deceased is central to this theory unlike the earlier interpretations of mourning (Klass, 2006). The sense of a continuing bond sustains an emotional connection and level of involvement for bereaved individuals (Packman, Horsley, Davies & Kramer, 2006). *Continuing bonds* is similar to the research within sibling bereavement literature by Hogan and DeSantis (1992, 1996) who use the term *ongoing attachment* and Devita-Raeburn's (2004) theory of *carrying*.

Continuing bonds theory describes an active role for the bereaved in maintaining a continuing bond as an internal representation or ongoing connection with the deceased individual (Klass, 2006). The conceptualisation of maintaining mental models of the deceased and the continuance of a relationship signal a shift away from the emotional disconnection to the deceased (Packman, Horsley, Davies & Kramer, 2008). The altered relationship with the deceased enables bereaved individuals to relearn the world that helps to accommodate and live with their loss (Packman, et al.). The theory allows for the negotiation and renegotiation of the meaning of loss as

time passes and the deceased remains a transformed or changed presence in the mourner's life (Klass).

Continuing bonds has been identified as a way of maintaining an ongoing relationship with the deceased through specific actions that provide spiritual proximity to the one who has been lost (Packman, et al.). The concept of continuing bonds has been conceptualised as a way to understand coping and adaption after loss (Packman, et al., 2006; Field, Gao & Paderna, 2005) Although the majority of continuing bonds research has been focussed on loss of a spouse, there has been some emerging research in the context of children's grief and parental loss (Packman, et al.).

Some controversy surrounds the theory of continuing bonds particularly concerning whether the type of bond with the deceased is adaptive or maladaptive (Neimeyer, 2014). This is largely due to the lack of empirical research and evidence to determine whether this theory is helpful and for whom i.e. those with a secure attachment style may fare better and those with an anxious attachment style may not fare as well (Worden, 2009). Field, Gao & Paderna (2005) applied continuing bonds to phases of Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory. For example, the authors impose Bowlby's protest phase within the model and describe that the mourner may attempt to re-establish physical proximity. The distress of separation may be represented by the following behaviours: an urge to search for the deceased person (i.e. visiting places that they were known to frequent); and maintenance the deceased possessions as they were prior to their death which is reflective of a hope that they may return (Field et al.). Another response described by the authors is the experience of paranormal phenomena near the time of death such as hallucinations of the deceased. The authors also describe the despair phase which occurs when bereaved individuals realise the finality of the loss and this may be characterised by attempts to avoid reminders (Field, et al.).

Field, et al. (2005) also utilised attachment theory to illustrate maladaptive expressions of continuing bonds. The authors suggest that excessive use of continuing bonds expressions to regain physical proximity indicates a bereavement adaption failure. Their research suggests that

expressions that continued to a later point after death, such as hanging onto the possessions of the deceased or excessive use of particular belongings for comfort, six months post loss were indicative of a failure to relinquish the goal of re-establishing physical proximity. These expressions may signal a pre-occupation with the deceased and represent an inability to accept the permanence of death (Field, et al.). More adaptive *continuing bonds* expressions were found in seeking comfort through evoking fond memories (Field, et al.).

In terms of attachment style, Field, et al. (2005) outlined that individuals with an anxious-preoccupied attachment relationship with their dead spouse were more likely to have had an emotionally dependent relationship and experienced deficits in emotional regulation when under stress (Field, et al.). Hence, such individuals may continue to experience intense distress over the loss of their loved one and exhibit ongoing maladaptive *continuing bonds* expressions (Field, et al.).

Further, an avoidant-dismissive attachment style may inhibit the mourner's ability to work through painful thoughts and feelings associated with the loss (Field, et al., 2005). Bereaved individuals with this attachment style may be limited in their ability to make use of *continuing bonds* expressions and, therefore, the ability to utilise these expressions as a coping resource is inhibited. (Field, et al.) Such an attachment style makes it difficult for bereaved individuals to modulate their distress when confronting loss (Field, et al.).

Another aspect of *continuing bonds* that requires further interrogation is whether its application is more adaptive closer to the loss or farther from the loss (Worden, 2009). Additionally, Field (2006) explored conditions in which *continuing bonds* may be maladaptive in dealing with loss. One example of a detrimental condition provided was that of the quality of the relationship with the deceased, whereby if the attachment to the deceased was ambivalent, *continuing bonds* might evoke feelings of anger or guilt towards the deceased. However, the maintenance of a bond with the deceased loved one can be adaptive or pathological depending on progress in individuals' responses to bereavement, whether the they have been able to "make sense" of the death, and the nature of their attachment relationships (secure or insecure) (Neimeyer, 2014).

2.6.2.4 Meaning Construction Theory

When we experience a major loss, the expected development of this life story is

disrupted. Like a novel that loses one of its major characters half-way through the

book, future chapters must somehow be rewritten to both account for the loss in a

coherent way, and allow the plot to move forward with those that remain, perhaps

introducing new characters along the way. The revised plot may re-establish the

identity, strength or perseverance of the central character, or may depict the

unanticipated growth of the "hero" as he or she rises to the occasion (Neimeyer,

2000, p. 54).

Neimeyer (2000) viewed loss as an event that profoundly disturbs one's constructions about

life and shakes the foundations of one's assumptive world. No two individuals can be assumed to

experience the same grief in response to the same loss as individuals construct their own meaning in

the context of culture, gender and spirituality. Therefore, individuals' feelings and reactions to the

loss of a loved one are determined by the meaning associated with the loss (Stroebe & Schut,

2001b). This approach allows for complexity, flexibility and diversity of individual grief responses

(Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010).

Meaning construction theory is a cognitive model that focuses on the narrative through

which people make sense of their lives after loss and this enable individuals to retain a relationship,

although different, with the person (or thing) they have lost (Thompson, 2012; Balk, 2014). *Meaning*

construction in the context of bereavement positions that survivors attempt to find or create

meaning in their life and identity as well as in the death of their loved one (Servaty-Seib & Taub,

2010). This constructionist theory views grief as an active process where bereaved individuals must

navigate a period of accelerated decision making (Neimeyer, 2000).

Meaning reconstruction in the context of bereavement outlines that the survivor

endeavours to find or create meaning in their life and identity as well as in the death of their loved

one (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010). A framework for understanding meaning reconstruction has been

offered by Neimeyer and Anderson (2002) and encompasses three core dimensions: sense making (ability to find some form of explanation for the death), benefit finding (ability to identify personal, philosophical and/or spiritual benefits) and identity reconstruction (reorganisation of sense of self and re-author their lives). The bereaved individuals' ability to find significance in loss has been suggested to predict greater longer term wellbeing (Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010).

Although meaning systems are thought to enable adjustment to life transitions via resilience and adaptation, searching for and being unable to find meaning in the death of a loved one may promote greater intensity and duration of grief (Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010). The ability to "make sense" of the death may be especially difficult in the case of suicide, homicide and fatal accidents and this inability has been found to mediate the impact of the loss on the survivor's adaptation (Currier, Holland & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, 2014). Failing to make sense of the death challenges personal equanimity, plants seeds of self-doubt and creates feelings of turmoil (Balk, 2014).

2.6.2.5 Bonanno's Trajectories of Grief

Bonanno's (2009) research emphasises the highly individual nature of grief and the multidimensional experience that follows different patterns across time.   Bonanno (2009) stated that humans are wired for grief and our reactions assist our acceptance and accommodation of grief so that life may go on. Bonanno (2009) notes a positive side to the grief experience in its capacity to facilitate an existential element to life. Bonanno (2004) was the first researcher to use pre-loss data in studies that explored trajectories of grief (Bonanno, 2004).

Longitudinal research by Bonanno (2009) identified three common grief reaction trajectories: chronic grief; recovery; and resilience. Bonanno found fifty percent or more of bereaved adults fell within the resilient category and did not experience an extended and/or distressing period of coping (Balk, 2011). Resilient individuals, although they appeared to cope effectively with loss, they experienced diverse reactions as they worked to move through their grief (Bonanno). Approximately forty percent of bereaved adults fell within the "recovery trajectory" and experienced a prolonged period of difficulty before returning to normal functioning within a two-

year period (Bonanno). Bereaved adults who fell within the "enduring grief" trajectory, approximately ten percent of bereaved adults, experienced an intensely complicated and unending response to grief that required professional intervention for recovery (Bonanno).

Bonanno , et al.'s, (2002) research on spousal grief suggested the most common grief pattern was that of resilience, although those with the highest levels of distress typically had high levels of dependency prior to their spouse's death. Findings also suggested that chronic depression was more likely if the relationship was conflictual and chronic grievers tended to report greater processing of the loss together with searching for meaning when compared to individuals who were chronically depressed (Bonanno, et al., 2002). Bonanno's trajectories of grief have been based on research with adults and the applicability with different populations is yet to be explored (Balk, 2011).

2.7   Adolescent Coping

2.7.1   Coping

The previous section on Contemporary Theories of Grief and Coping offered a number of models that endeavour to understand how bereaved individuals experience grief, respond to and cope with the loss of a loved one. This section is dedicated to exploring coping models that have been applied in the context of the adolescent experience of loss. Specifically, the section defines coping and explores models that focus on thoughts and behaviours that facilitate coping of bereaved adolescents.

Coping has been identified in bereavement literature as instrumental to making a difference in loss-related adjustment and recovery although how people cope with loss, their adjustment and recovery is not as clear (Folkman, 2001). Coping mediates the distress connected with loss as individuals endeavour to process and integrate this life experience (Balk, 2014; Corr, 2013). Successful coping enables healthy adjustment to the loss but does not indicate that the person ceases to mourn the loss or that the grief will never be revisited (Corr, 2013).

The most widely used definition of coping is that of Lazarus and Folkman's (1984, p. 141) adult model of stress, cognitive appraisal and coping which defines coping as ''. . . constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person''. Within the context of bereavement, coping represents a dynamic process involving the stressors associated with loss and the cognitive strategies utilised in coming to terms with the life event (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). It has also been suggested that the influence of coping on adjustment and recovery may be relatively minor when compared to other factors such as the timing and nature of the death, bereaved individuals' personality and history.

Folkman (2001) suggests that the relative dearth of research on coping in bereavement may be due to the lack of theoretical models of coping in this context. Folkman (p. 563) states "a number of theories identify phases of grief the individual needs to pass through or adaptive tasks that the bereaved individual needs to address (e.g. Bowlby, 1980; Glick, Weiss, & Parkes, 1974; Kubler-Ross, 1969), but for the most part, these theories do not posit the thoughts and behaviours that people use to cope with bereavement related demands". It is thought that those who ruminate and talk about negative aspects of the loss do not do as well as those who refrain from this type of disclosure (Folkman, 2001). Additionally, those who confront positive aspects of the loss tend to do better towards recovery as do those who find positive meaning in the experience of bereavement (Folkman, 2001).

In an effort to illuminate the adolescent coping process, the models below have been utilised on adolescent populations in the context of grief and, therefore, may offer further understanding of adolescent coping.

2.7.2   Dual Process Model of Coping with Loss

The *dual process model of coping with loss* (Stroebe & Shut, 1999; 2010) offers a cyclical approach to grief as opposed to the stage or phase linear type models (Neimeyer, 2014) and is a theoretical model that specifically relates to coping (Folkman, 2001). The model identifies two types

of stressors associated with the experience of loss: loss-oriented and restoration-oriented (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Individuals must cope with the primary stressor, the death of a loved one, as well as the secondary stressors such as the consequences of the loss (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010). Stroebe and Schut (1999) describe the oscillation of individuals between tasks of mourning, at times consciously avoiding distress and at other times, continuing on with everyday life.

Loss-oriented stressors focus on the grief process associated with separation (e.g. yearning, reminiscing), the meaning of loss and relocation of the deceased where bereaved individuals are able to withdraw from the deceased but the bond is continued (Stroebe, Schut & Stroebe, 2005; Worden, 2009). This process involves looking back on the loss, what has been lost and its significance, and can be characterised as sadness, anger or other responses (Thompson, 2012). The restoration-oriented stressors focus on adjustments to secondary consequences of the loss and involve concepts about self and the world, such as mastery, identity change, other psychosocial transitions and changes (Worden, 2009; Rask, Kaunonen, Paunonen-Ilmonen, 2002). This is more about the individual looking forward as they embark on rebuilding shattered assumptions about themselves and the world (Thompson, 2012; Worden, 2009).

The model suggests that individuals cannot attend to the two different stressors at one time and oscillate between them, confronting one and avoiding the other (Worden, 2009). The model suggests that as the individual recovers, they will spend more time in the restoration orientation than the loss orientation (Thompson, 2012). Bereaved individuals are involved in the process of repeatedly revisiting the loss and the associated emotions, coupled with the reorganisation of their relationship with the deceased as they embark on the new roles and responsibilities required within their changed world (Neimeyer, 2014). The *dual process model of coping with loss* provides a model that allows for various ways interpersonal coping processes affect grief and accommodates cultural differences of bereaved individuals (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

The *dual process model of coping with loss* is one that is linked to the psychanalytic philosophy of "grief-work" and states that for healing to be undertaken, the bereaved must confront

the pain of the loss. Stroebe and Schut (2010) posit that the transition from normal to abnormal grief may be influenced by the individual's ability to confront and reflect on the loss. It has also been suggested that healing is not assisted by ruminative thoughts of the death and such an approach focuses on negative emotions and facilitates cognitive avoidance (Eisma, et al., 2013; Stroebe & Schut, 2010). As such, rumination regarding a distressing aspect of the death or concerning the meaning of the death have been associated with levels of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema, Parker & Larson, 1994).

Stroebe and Schut (2010) argue that for those who experience a traumatic bereavement, their inability to move between loss orientation and restoration orientation may impede coping. Such individuals may experience extreme symptoms of intrusive thoughts and avoidance as they endeavour to cope with the loss (Schut & Stroebe, 2010). The model also highlights potential pathology wherein bereaved individuals may be unable to distract themselves from their grief or avoid grief as opposed to an inability to confront the loss (Neimeyer, 2014). However, it remains unclear as to the optimal balance and timing of loss-oriented and restoration oriented stressors for adaptive coping (Carr, 2010).

As with grief research, definitions of coping have been largely derived from adult models of coping and then applied to children and adolescents (Compas, Connor-Smith, Saltzman, Thomsen & Wadsworth, 2001). In an effort to understand the process of coping during adolescence, Rask, Kaunonen, Paunonen-Ilmonen (2002) conducted a study to explore adolescent coping after the loss of a loved one. The study administered the Hogan and DeSantis' Hogan Sibling Inventory of Bereavement (HSIB) and two open-ended questions with a sample of 89 adolescents. The results from the study were compared to, and supported, Stroebe and Schut's (1999) *dual process model of coping with loss* model and indicated that the factors that assisted participants to cope with loss were associated with both loss-orientated and restoration-orientated coping.   The loss oriented coping activities identified were: crying alone and with a friend, and reminiscing about the deceased (Rask, et al.). Restoration-orientated coping activities were: keeping busy and interacting with

friends (Rask, et al.). Hence, the dual process model of coping with loss appears to support coping

processes in studies with bereaved adolescents and may, therefore, warrant generalisation with this

population when designing grief interventions.

2.7.3 Fleming and Adolph's Development Task Model

The adolescent bereavement model presented by Adolph and Fleming (1986) may be a

useful way to conceptualise the possible affective, behavioural and cognitive responses experienced

in the context of bereavement. The authors suggest that the adolescent bereavement model

incorporates development phases or critical life tasks with the process of grief. The model "reflects

the distinct and differing maturational levels of adolescence, one that offers insight into what

happens to adolescent development when the conflicts of grieving collide with those of ego

development" (Fleming & Adolph, p. 102-103).

The authors outline the impact of grief on the tasks and conflicts of normal adolescent

development within the three maturational phases of adolescence: *early* (11-14 years – phase one),

middle (14-17 years – phase two) and *late* (17-21 – phase three). The model overviews the unique

development needs of bereaved adolescents as they cope with the loss of a significant person

(Lohan & Murphy, 2002). The developmental tasks and conflicts to be achieved or resolved within

the three phases are as follows: *early* - the separation from parents to determine their own identity;

middle - the development of a sense of mastery and competency; and *late* – the challenges of

interpersonal closeness and intimacy (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Fleming and Adolph suggest that

the loss of a profound relationship in adolescence has the capacity to interfere with the process of

"growing-up" by short-circuiting developmental changes and putting the adolescent "on hold" in a

particular developmental phase.

The model identifies five core issues which bereaved adolescents attempt to resolve at each

phase: *predictability of events*; *self-image*; *belonging*; *fairness/justice*; and *mastery/control* (Fleming

& Adolph, p. 104). These core issues provoke phase specific responses from a behavioural, cognitive

and affective perspective which reflect the adolescents' development period and create new material for the process of individuation (Fleming & Adolph; Cait, 2004).

Table 1.

Fleming and Adolph's Development Task Model

Phase	Development Task	Conflict
I - Early (11-14 years)	Emotional separation from parents to determine own identity	Separation versus reunion (abandonment versus safety)
II - Middle (14-17 years)	Development of a sense of mastery and competency	Independence versus dependence
III - Later (17-21 years)	The challenges of interpersonal closeness and intimacy	Intimacy versus commitment Closeness versus distance

Fleming and Adolph's model (1986), attempts to match age-appropriate development tasks with grief responses as adolescents move through both maturation and grief phases. The authors provide examples of adolescent thoughts, feelings and behaviours for each of the five core issues within the context of bereavement. The responses reflect the adolescent's developmental phase and the development tasks with which they grapple (Fleming & Adolph). The theory presents a way to explore the impact of loss on the bereaved adolescent's developing personality (Fleming & Balmer, 1996). For example, consider an 18 year old adolescent who has experienced the death of his or her brother (phase three of adolescent development). In response to the core issue of self-image, a cognitive response may be "I am alone … no one has experienced what I have, so no one can really understand me"; a behavioural response may be that of withdrawal from others; and an affective response may generate feelings of rejection (Fleming & Adolph, 1986).

Although Fleming and Adolph's (1986) model was developed over 30 years ago, it is one of only a few models that endeavour to present the grieving process of adolescents in the context of developmental tasks. Aspects of the model have been cited by researchers to support findings

associated with the core issues at the different phases of development (Balk & Hogan 1995; Cait, 2004; Worden, 1996). For example, Worden (1996) applied Adolph and Fleming's model to illustrate outcomes for adolescents in the longitudinal Child Bereavement Study. Worden's findings supported difficulties with the resolution of core issues such as the predictability of events, development of a self-image and gaining a sense of belonging.

Fleming and Adolph's (1986) framework is somewhat outdated as it refers to the historic conceptualisations of grief superseded by contemporary theories over the past 30 years. Adolph and Fleming's model identifies the tensions and conflicts of bereaved adolescents from cognitive, behavioural and affective perspectives within the three maturational phases of adolescence: early, middle and late. The model remains attached to the notion of "letting go" or "disorganisation" and, therefore does not incorporate the sentiments of 'ongoing attachment' or 'continuing bonds'.

Worden (1996) applied Fleming and Adolph's mode to illustrate outcomes for parentally bereaved adolescents in the longitudinal Child Bereavement Study. Worden's findings supported difficulties with core issues to be resolved as outlined in the model such as difficulties in: predictability of events; development of self-image and gaining a sense of belonging.

2.7.4 Ongoing Attachment and Continuing Bonds

The phenomenon of ongoing attachment describes the bereaved sibling's maintenance of spiritual proximity with the deceased (Balk & Hogan, 1995) and maintains the ongoing presence of the deceased sibling in their life (Hogan & DeSantis, 1992). Hogan and DeSantis (1996) conceptualised *ongoing attachment* as an enabler in transforming bereaved siblings into resilient survivors.

Research by Hogan and DeSantis (1996) focused on the processes of bereaved adolescents' internalisation of their deceased sibling and the meaning they derived from that connection. Culture, cause of death, circumstances surrounding sibling death, the nature of the sibling relationship and belief in the concept of the afterlife were all factors that impacted interactions between the constructs of *grief*, *personal growth* and *ongoing attachment* (Hogan and DeSantis).

Hogan and DeSantis (1996) stated that adolescent sibling bereavement can be a process that is not time bound but continues with the adolescent anticipating a reunion in heaven or the afterlife. This enduring emotional attachment of adolescents to their deceased sibling has been coined by the authors as *ongoing attachment*. Their model reflects a move away from the commonly held belief that "normal" bereavement should be resolved and adopts a contemporary grief approach that incorporates on ongoing relationship which is similar to that of *continuing bonds*.

Hogan and DeSantis' (1996) sibling bereavement theory of *ongoing attachment* was based on the constructs of *grief*, *personal growth* and *ongoing attachment* constructed through the triangulation of quantitative and qualitative approaches of a sample of 157 adolescent bereaved siblings. The authors endeavoured to identify characteristics of the adolescent sibling bereavement process and suggested that surviving sibling death during adolescence is an existential experience.

In this model, the construct of *grief* comprises six categories: a permanently changed reality of self and family; physical effects; increased vulnerability, cognitive interference; desire for a reunion with a sibling; and coping behaviour. The construct of *personal growth* was defined by Hogan and DeSantis (1996) as personality changes in the following five categories: permanently changed reality, increased sense of other, increased resiliency, increased faith and ability to receive and give help.

Another of the constructs introduced in the study, *ongoing attachment*, builds on earlier research by Hogan and DeSantis (1992) and challenges the notion that "normal" bereavement is resolved at a particular endpoint (Hogan and DeSantis, 1996). The researchers suggest that adolescent bereaved siblings may maintain a continuing, ongoing attachment to their deceased sibling (Hogan & DeSantis, 1996). The construct of "ongoing attachment" was conceptualised as "the silent variable that mediates the construct of grief and the construct of personal growth" (Hogan & DeSantis, 2004, p. 192). The researchers identify the following categories within the construct of ongoing attachment: regretting the way they had treated their deceased sibling; endeavouring to understand the death; keeping in touch; reaffirming their ongoing relationship; the

dead sibling influencing their life; and anticipating a reunion. The authors suggest that sibling survivors either become 'resilient survivors' who find meaning in their life or 'vulnerable survivors' who struggle unsuccessfully to find meaning after the death of their sibling. Hogan and DeSantis' model focuses on personal growth as a central construct of adolescent sibling bereavement (Robinson & Mahon, 1997).

Further, research by Packman, et al. (2006) investigated the concept of *continuing bonds* in the context of the sibling relationship and the impact of sibling bereavement. Their research also investigated the impact of sibling death on the family's recovery and adjustment, specifically in relation to family communication and cohesion. The authors suggest that ongoing attachment has capacity to facilitate trauma for bereaved siblings. This may be due to the relationship surviving siblings had with their brother or sister or the sibling's cause of death (Packman, et al.). Ongoing attachment may evoke disturbing thoughts or emotional distress as the sibling relives the context of the death unable to change how they may feel about it. Conversely, the authors also state that the sibling bond may continue after death and provide comfort for the survivor (Packman, et al.).

Limited research has been undertaken to investigate the utility of *continuing bonds* in the bereavement process for adolescents (Wood, Byram, Gosling & Stokes, 2012). Questions remain whether the above model is adaptive or maladaptive for adolescents as most of the research has been focussed on adult populations (Sirrine, 2013). Research by Sirrine (p. v) on *continuing bonds* appears promising as common *continuing bonds* expressions noted for bereaved adolescents and bereaved caregivers were "attempts to maintain connection or closeness to the deceased, recalling memories about or unique characteristics of the deceased and talking about the deceased".

2.7.5 Extensions to the Theory of Ongoing Attachment

Cait's (2008) study explored the notion of *constructing an on-going relationship to the deceased* in a qualitative study of 18 female participants who experienced the loss of a parent in adolescence. Results of the study found that participants utilised memories of their relationship with a deceased parent to further extend on that relationship. Cait suggested that the loss of a

parent can disturb the adolescents' sense of self and as they mature, they endeavour to find a way to integrate their parent's death into their life. Cait states that the continuing relationship with their deceased parent is retrospectively constructed and influenced by the following: the individual's development; meaning making abilities; and the role that the deceased and their death now played in their lives. Cait found that when individuals learned about aspects of their deceased parent, they integrated this information into their memory to extend on the relationship they had with their parent prior to their death.

Cait (2008) introduced the term *titrated grieving* to describe the participants' experience of grief intensity after the loss of their parent which helped to counterbalance their ability to cope. *Titrated grieving* enabled the women in the study to participate in activities that permitted them to learn more about their deceased parent and this then contributed to shaping their identities (Cait). For example, losing a parent as a 12 year old may limit the understanding of who their parent was as an adult but as the child matures and learns more about their deceased parent through relatives and friends, the stories help them to understand who their parent was and this, in turn, changes the way they understand their parent's death as well as aspects of themselves. Cait also discussed the experience of re-grief that occurs when individuals reconnect with the death at different stages of their lives.

Cait's (2008) research is a variation on the conceptualisation of *continuing bonds* in the investigation of the impact of loss specifically on identity development in adolescence. Although Cait's study explored the experience of adolescent females who had lost a parent, parallels can potentially be drawn with adolescent sibling loss and the impact of this experience on identity development.

2.7.6 Search for New Meaning

A study by Forward and Garlie (2003) examined the bereavement process of six adolescents who experienced the sudden death of a male sibling. The qualitative study analysed data using grounded theory and identified a core variable of the grief process for adolescents experiencing

sibling loss labelled the *search for new meaning*.   The *search for new meaning* encompassed the

way adolescents process grief in terms of the following: how the tragedy fits into their life; how it

has irrevocably changed them; and how they learned to move forward knowing their sibling was

gone forever (Forward & Garlie)

Their preliminary model for the search for new meaning outlines five interrelated stages: (a)

finding out; (b) avoiding reality (numbness, keeping busy); (c) facing reality (working through the

pain, loneliness, being different); (d) turning a corner (transient stage with two paths: acceptance of

death or giving in to grief); and (e) finding new meaning (accepting the pain, continuing the bond,

redefining self) (Forward & Garlie, 2003). The authors state the process is not linear and that the

individuals might move between phases until they are ready to move forward. Within each stage,

the adolescent focus on the search for new meaning as a psychological process.

Forward and Garlie (2003) compared their preliminary model to Hogan, Morse and Tason's

(1996) experiential adult theory of bereavement in which the authors analysed data from 34 adults

who experienced the death of a child, parent or sibling. Hogan, et al. (1996) suggested that

regardless of the relationship of the survivor to the deceased, the cause of death or the untimeliness

of death, there was a consistent pattern in the bereavement process which followed six phases:

finding out; facing realities; becoming engulfed with the suffering; emerging from the suffering;

getting on with life; and the experience of personal growth. Forward and Garlie suggest the findings

of their study and the subsequent preliminary adolescent bereavement model were similar to that

of Hogan et al.'s and supported that grief reactions in adolescence were similar to those of an adult

rather than of a child. Additionally, the authors believed the death of a sibling is more intense and

enduring than first thought.

Although Forward and Garlie (2003) recognise the limitations of their study in terms of size

and generalisability, they believe they identified three new aspects of adolescent sibling

bereavement. These newly identified aspects are: the ambivalence adolescents feel in the

knowledge that they are different from their peers due to the loss of a sibling; the adolescent's

propensity to hide their pain from their parents in an effort to minimise their parent's pain and subsequently their own; and seeking support from a peer who has experienced a loss as the primary support person. The latter finding challenges previous research that suggests bereaved adolescent siblings seek support from family members as a main source of support, particularly mothers (Mahon & Page, 1995).

2.8   Sibling Bereavement and Identity Tasks in Adolescence

The surviving sibling is now left to find his or her own personality in the absence of a member of their family of origin and in the midst of the grieving process; a process that may last for a life span (Dickens, 2014, p. 122).

Adolescents undergo fundamental changes in physical, cognitive, emotional, psychosocial and moral development during this stage of their life (Balk, 1990). Many theorists consider a search for identity to be the main focus of the adolescent years and this period is often portrayed as one of identity crisis (Balk, 1990). The situational crisis of losing a sibling during adolescence adds complexity to the developmental crisis of adolescence, the two destabilising events occurring at a time when they are search for their own identity (Balk, 1991; Hogan & DeSantis, 2004).

Researchers suggest that adolescent grief is difficult to define as similarities exist between each discrete phase of adolescent development and the conflicts that arise within the grieving process: activity-passivity, pleasure-pain, love-hate, and dependency-autonomy (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Therefore, it is difficult to determine whether bereaved adolescents are dealing with developmental tasks or elements of the grieving process as similarities exist in adaptation to loss, coping with a change in reality, and the navigation of the phases of separation and loss (Fleming & Adolph).

The adolescents' tasks of individuation, separation from the family of origin and identity development are processes essential for functioning as an adult (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). The developmental stage of life at which a surviving siblings experience the loss of a brother or sister interacts with the grief process and poses additional challenges (Lohan & Murphy, 2002).

Research supports variation in the approach of adolescents towards development tasks dependent on the age category within adolescence. For instance, Corr (1995) suggested that early adolescents may struggle to disengage emotionally and physically from parents and find it difficult to move away whereas mid-adolescents who are striving for independence may struggle with control and feelings of competence in the experience of loss. Those in late adolescence may be inclined to seek increased intimacy and re-establish deeper connections with peers and family (Corr, 1995). Below is an overview of research organised by development task in order to illustrate the impact of sibling loss at this point of lifespan development.

2.8.1   Separation from Parents

Identity development is a critical milestone for adolescents and for the bereaved adolescents this experience may be hampered by their desire to stay close to family during a time of intense pain (Rosen, 1991). Although there may be a desire to separate from parents from a developmental perspective, bereaved adolescents may feel drawn to stay at home and protect their parents thereby reducing opportunities for exploration and growth are reduced (Rosen). Therefore, grief can challenge the task of separating from parents and cause adolescents to fuse more closely with the family (Lohan & Murphy, 2002)

In the context of sibling bereavement, differing responses to separation from parents within early, mid and late adolescence have been noted by researchers. Fanos and Nickerson's (1991) quantitative and qualitative study investigated the long term effects of sibling death during adolescence. The study consisted of interviews with 75 participants whose siblings died in the 1960s and 1970s from cystic fibrosis. The quantitative component included 25 participants who were under the age of 19 at the time of their sibling's death. Participants completed anxiety and depression scales derived from the Hopkins Checklist and a measure for guilt developed for the study.

Participant age at the time of the sibling's death was statistically significant and results revealed that adolescents aged 13 through to 17 years (mid-adolescence) had higher mean scores on

anxiety, depression and guilt than the other age groups (9 through 12 years – early adolescence or 18 years old – older adolescence). The authors suggest that mid-adolescents who have lost a sibling may feel caught between concern for their parents and their own developmental needs (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). This may create an opportunity for resentment as they feel unable to separate from their parents and, in turn, experience feelings of resentment and anger that lead to feelings of guilt (Fanos & Nickerson).

Another potential outcome of adolescent sibling death is the overprotection of the surviving sibling(s). Parents who become overprotective of bereaved adolescents following their sibling's death may inhibit opportunities for adolescents to separate from the family and develop their own identity (Horsley & Patterson, 2006).

2.8.2   Autonomy, Independence, Mastery and Control

The identity task for middle adolescence is that of a sense of mastery and competency (Fleming & Adolph, 1986) also referred to by Bandura (1977) as building self-efficacy. During this phase of adolescence, the polar opposites of independence and dependence are to be successfully navigated (Balk, Zaengle & Corr, 2011). Bereavement may challenge adolescents' sense of invincibility and thoughts of "I can do anything"; this shift in awareness may thwart a sense of mastery and control (Adolph & Fleming, 1986; Shipkey,2008).

It has been proposed that self-concept underlies a confident self-image and a sense of mastery and control (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Self-concept has also been identified as a contributing factor for effective coping when confronted by a life crisis (Balk, 1990; Balk, 1991). It is therefore not surprising that the area of self-concept in grieving adolescents has been a focus of adolescent bereavement researchers (Balk, 1990).

Offer (1969) explored self-concept in his research with adolescent boys and found a distinct link between the development of self-concept and identity formation in adolescence. Further, Balk (1990) suggests that self-concept lies at the basis of all the key transformations required in adolescence: cognition, morality, physical development, emotional adjustment and psychosocial

development. The retrospective, cross-sectional study by Balk investigated self-concept and bereavement reactions of 42 adolescents who experienced the loss of a sibling. The time elapsed since death ranged from 4 to 84 months. The non-clinical community based sample was administered the Offer Self-Image Questionnaire for Adolescents (OSIQ-A) as well as interviewed about their reactions to bereavement and the impact on personal maturity, school work and relationships with peers.

The overall results of Balk's (1990) study inferred that psychological adjustment was not impaired by the experience of sibling death. However, results of cluster analysis suggested intragroup differences between high, average and low OSIQ-A scores. The low self-concept scoring group were initially depressed and afraid, had thoughts of suicide and were preoccupied with thoughts of their deceased sibling. Over time, the group reported higher levels of confusion about the circumstances of their sibling's death but were the lowest scoring group in terms of anger. The high scoring self-concept group were more likely to feel confused and less depressed initially but over time, were less likely than the other two groups to experience confusion, loneliness, fear or depression. Balk's study also provided distinct qualitative bereavement reactions from the interviews that supported quantitative results. Balk suggests the intragroup differences support the notion that self-concept is a factor associated with degrees of successful coping leading to increased maturity or vulnerability. Although the study suggests self-concept and adolescent sibling bereavement resolution interact, more research is needed in terms of longitudinal designs with control groups to investigate the trajectory of bereavement, self-concept scores and interaction effects (Balk, 1990).

Attributes such as a strong self-concept are thought to better enable adolescents to cope with the challenges of grief and loss. Research conducted by Hogan and DeSantis (1992) on adolescent sibling bereavement, explored the relationship between intensity of bereavement and self-concept scores and found evidence of an inverse relationship, where high self-concept scores were associated with low intensity of grief. Results of the study suggest that adolescents with low

scores on self-concept struggle with feelings of inadequacy and failing confidence, and may lack the resources to cope with grief (Hogan & DeSantis). Interestingly, self-concept and adolescent development studies in adolescence have largely focused on males and therefore, these concepts have remained largely untested with females.

2.8.3 Intimacy in Social and Sexual Relationships

2.8.3.1 Peer Relationships

Adolescence is a time when adolescents develop significant relationships with their peers. The death of a sibling during this developmental stage can set them apart from others causing them to experience feelings of isolation, anger and sadness (Davies, 1991; Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Fleming & Adolph, 1986). In response to feeling different from peers, adolescents may withdraw and isolate themselves (Davies, 1991; Hogan & Greenfield, 1991). This response also limits opportunities for expression of feelings and provision of support from others and may exacerbate their feelings of isolation (Balk, 1990; Birenbaum, 1989; Davies, 1988b; McCown & Davies, 1995).

Additionally, peers maybe unsure how to respond to a friend who has experienced the loss of a sibling and potentially underestimate the intensity or duration of their grief reactions (Balk, 1997; Balk & Vesta, 1998; Silver & Wortman, 1980, cited in Balk, 2001). Adolescents report that the insensitivity of others, rumours and gossip exacerbated the experience of their grief (Hogan & DeSantis, 1994). Balk (2009a) noted that bereaved adolescents advised they discovered who were their true friends following the death of their sibling. Some bereaved adolescents reported having to make new friends after old friends became weary of the intensity and duration of their grief (Balk, 2009a).

Davies' (1991) study explored the long-term effects of sibling loss via interviews with 12 adults who experienced the loss of a sibling when aged between 11 and 15 years. The author concluded that adolescents in the study felt different from their peers and responded by withdrawing from their friends. Peer withdrawal hindered their processing of grief as well as aspects of identity formation (Davies). Specifically, instead of tackling issues of identity, adolescents dealt

with role confusion by becoming angry and depressed (Davies). Another reported outcome of

adolescent sibling bereavement was the shift of perspective in their lives and felt an increased sense

of maturity (Davies).

Similar results were found by Martinson and Campos' (1991) study of thirty one siblings who

lost a sibling to cancer 7 to 9 years earlier. The authors observed that the adolescents reported a

sense of "feeling different" from peers and endeavoured to conceal their sadness as an attempt not

to appear different from others. Worden and Silverman (1996) reported similar findings in a

longitudinal study (The Harvard Bereavement Study) that investigated the impact of parental death

on 125 school-age children from 70 families over two years. The authors found that when compared

to children, adolescents often felt different from peers and felt that peers did not understand them.

2.8.3.2 Romantic Relationships

There appears to be a lack of empirical evidence that has explored the impact of sibling loss

in adolescence on romantic relationships. However, there has been some clinical evidence linking

sibling loss in childhood to relational difficulties in young adulthood. Results from research by

Charles and Charles (2006) that investigated sibling loss in childhood and attachment style,

suggested sibling loss may elicit different coping reactions to that of other stressors. The authors

found that the experience of sibling loss in childhood was more related to the coping style of *support

seeking* rather than *withdrawal*. The authors point out that in this scenario, the availability of

primary care givers to provide support to surviving siblings was often compromised due to their own

grief. Therefore, a crucial element of recovery and constructive mourning, that of rebuilding

relational bonds, might be arrested and this may impact the ability of surviving siblings to attend to

their own needs or that of another (Charles & Charles).

As mentioned earlier, research by Fanos and Nickerson (1991) explored the long-term

consequences of sibling bereaved adults, eight of whom were aged between 13 and 17 at the time

of their sibling's death. The study explored the long-lasting consequences of growing up with a

chronically ill sibling who died before adulthood. Qualitative results revealed six of the eight

adolescents aged between 13 and 17 relayed difficulties in establishing intimate relationships and were fearful of losing a loved one or a child. A fear of intimacy was expressed by six of the eight adolescent group participants with only one of the adolescents having married compared to 50% of the latency group (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). Further, a somewhat dated review of the literature on adolescent bereavement following suicide by Valente, Saunders and Street (1988) identified an avoidance of intimate relationships.

2.8.4 Education and Vocational Achievement

The prevalence and consequences of experiencing sibling death in childhood were explored by Fletcher, Mailick, Song and Wolfe (2013) in a study that compared two data sets in the United States of America, the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health) and the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study (WLS). The Add Health data set enabled the researchers to explore a large number of outcomes and the WLS provided the opportunity to explore whether cause of death matters (Fletcher, et al.). The analysis for the study found that the prevalence of sibling death before the age of 25 was nearly 8% of the population. The researchers reported that the death of a sibling in childhood was more impactful for females than males with the analysis indicating that level of schooling was reduced for bereaved sisters and that they were less likely to be never-married if their sibling died in infancy or as a result of a long term illness.

Additionally, research by Rosenberg, et al. (2015) explored the long-term psychosocial outcomes of 58 bereaved siblings with a mean age of 26 years who had lost their sibling due to cancer approximately 12 years prior. The authors reported that half of the bereaved siblings stated that their current educational and career goals had been impacted by the loss experience (Rosenberg, et al., 2015). Other research has acknowledged the impact of sibling death on adolescents' success at school citing the deleterious impact on concentration and altered study habits (Balk, 1981; 1983). Researchers identified that the death of a brother or sister during adolescence affected the amount of time surviving siblings studied and grades achieved, although the majority of siblings' grades and study habits returned to normal over time (Balk, 1981; 1983).

2.9   Factors that Influence Sibling Bereavement

Sibling bereavement needs to be examined in the context within which it occurs and recognition that the survivors' response is influenced by individual, the situational and environmental factors (Davies & Limbo, 2010). These moderating variables interact with each other and impact surviving siblings' response to the loss of their brother or sister (Davies & Limbo). Individual factors that have been identified as influencing variables are: gender, age, dependence, health status, coping style, temperament, self-concept, relationship with the deceased and prior experience with loss (Davies & Limbo; Calvin & Smith, 1986). Situational factors are thought to be: cause of death, duration of illness, place of death, time since death and involvement in the death and death-related events contribute to the sibling's response to the death (Davies & Limbo; Packman, et al, 2006; Parkes, 1975). In terms of environmental factors, these are noted as a shared life space, centrality, family environment, parent-child communication, parental grief and family functioning (Davies & Limbo).

The following section reviews research that identifies important potential moderators of adolescent sibling bereavement organised by personal, situation and environmental. The impact of family is addressed in a separate, following section.

2.9.1   Personal Factors

2.9.1.1 Pre-death Sibling Relationship

The nature of the pre-death relationship has the capacity to complicate the grieving process for surviving siblings. Whether the relationship was represented by warmth, ambivalence or rivalry sets the scene for the way in adolescents grieve as well as the role their sibling continues to play in their lives. The pre-death relationship of siblings has been highlighted as an important variable in outcomes for adolescents (Balk, 1983; Bowlby, 1980, Davies, 1988a). As suggested by Schaefer and Moos (2001), the significance and meaning attributed to the loss of a loved one is closely related to the quality of the relationships they shared.

The quality of the relationship that adolescents had with their deceased sibling can be predictive of their grief response (Davies, 1988a) as the more central the person was to the bereaved adolescent, the more intense the grief reaction (Davies, 1988a; Davies & Limbo, 2010). It is suggested that the closeness between siblings overrides the other variables such as age and gender differences (Davies, 2013; Davies & Limbo). Conversely, adolescents who had a strained relationship with their deceased sibling prior to their death reported feelings of ongoing regret and wished that their relationship had been closer and less conflicted (Hogan & DeSantis, 1992). Additionally, the sibling bond may be of greater importance if there is parental under-involvement (Bank & Kahn, 1982).

There is limited research focussed on the impact of relationship quality on bereavement outcomes for surviving adolescent siblings (Shipkey, 2008). Charles and Charles (2006) investigated the relationship between attachment style and coping for young adults who had experienced the loss of a sibling. Their study involved 34 undergraduate students aged less than 19 years at the time of their sibling's death. Quantitative data was collected on attachment style, coping, grief response and grief patterns. Results of the study suggest that the level of attachment between siblings impacts the coping capability of the surviving sibling. The study also found that sibling loss disrupted attachment to the primary caretakers as they endeavoured to cope with this loss and, ultimately, had the capacity to impede the surviving siblings' mastery of developmental challenges.

Other researchers have suggested that sibling relationships that fall within the dichotomous categories of either extremely close or distant and hostile typically experience more problematic grief-related adjustment responses (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Rosen, 1986). Additionally, research by Davies (1988a) dating back almost 30 years explored correlations between the closeness of siblings and behavioural responses to sibling loss in 34 children aged between 6 and 16 years of age whose sibling died from cancer. Findings suggest more internalising behaviours were associated with greater closeness in the sibling relationship i.e. withdrawal behaviours.

Although focussed on adults, a study by Robinson (2001) explored grief reactions using the Grief Experience Inventory with 102 adults who had experienced the death of a sibling due to AIDS. The author found a positive relationship between the level of closeness (measured using Gold's Typology Descriptors) and intensity of grief reaction for surviving siblings and no relationship between time since death and intensity of grief. The author reports that these results support previously research by Davies' (1988) study that siblings can act as attachment figures for one another.

2.9.1.2 Timing of the Loss

The timing of the loss of a sibling can have implications for the way in which the surviving siblings respond. Fanos and Nickerson (1991) found that many of the adolescent siblings in their study were just beginning to work through difficulties in their sibling relationships when the death occurred. The authors found that when the process of working through a competitive sibling relationship was cut short by the loss of the sibling, there was a perception by bereaved adolescents that life was unfair.

2.9.2.3 Gender

Research suggests that personal aspects such as gender may have a role in determining the way individuals respond and adapt to loss (Nyatanga, 2005). An early study by Raphael (1983) suggested that adolescent males and females responded to death differently with males more likely to behave aggressively, self-medicate with drugs and alcohol and test authority figures. Females, however, were more likely to reach out for support (Raphael). It has been suggested by Fleming and Balmer (1996) that adolescent females who experienced the loss of a sibling may be more prone to adjustment problems than their male counterparts. Worden, Davies and McCown (1999) found that females were more impacted by the loss of a sibling than the loss of a parent. The difference in grief responses by gender may be due to culture, interpersonal relationships or life experiences (Nyatanga, 2005).

Another consideration regarding gender and sibling loss is that the gender of siblings may influence the relationship that exists (Cicirelli, 1994). The relationship between sisters appears to be the closest, followed by brother-sister pairs and lastly, the relationship between brothers (Cicirelli). Further, Cicirelli suggests that the close bonds of sisters had a stronger influence on morale and well-being as sisters tend to support each other through major development tasks. This is supported by research by Worden, Davies and McCown (1999) which suggested that girls tend to be more affected by the death of a sibling, especially a sister. Further research in this area is required to understand in which ways and why gender influences grief responses.

2.9.2.4 *Age*

Age is a fundamental marker for development and intrinsically linked to developmental phases although it should be recognised that adolescents are not a homogeneous group due to a wide array of personal, familial, social and cultural factors that may impact individuals.

Researchers Fleming and Balmer (1996) applied the notion of life tasks and phases of development based on Fleming and Adolph's (1986) model and hypothesised that younger bereaved adolescents were less likely to talk to their friends about grief as they were more self-conscious in their presentation to others than older adolescents. The authors suggest that as older bereaved adolescents were more developed in their thinking and identity formation, this enabled them to discuss grief with their peers. Further, adolescent maturity suppressed ongoing denial as a coping mechanism for late adolescents and this lack of denial increased psychological distress (Fleming & Balmer). Hence, age at the time of a sibling's death may be a potential protective factor for younger adolescents although it is likely their expression and processing of grief may have been inhibited and revisited at a later stage.

Similarly, Balk (1996) postulates that older adolescents may not be able to utilise denial as a coping mechanism and this, in turn, increases psychological distress. Additionally, increased maturity in older adolescents may mean a fuller appreciation of the impact of their sibling's death (Deveau, 1990 as cited in Fleming & Balmer, 1996). In a study by Worden, Davies and McCown

(1999) in which responses to parental and sibling loss were compared in a sample of 75 children with ages ranging from 6 to 17 years found that younger children expressed their grief by seeking attention from their parents, whereas older children were more inclined to internalise behaviour expressed as withdrawal and/or sullenness.

Age related differences date back to previous research by Balk (1981) who found that older respondents (17-19 years of age) reported feeling more angry at the time of their sibling's death when compared with younger respondents (14-16 years of age) (Balk). Similar findings were reported by Balmer's (1992) study of 40 adolescents grieving the death of a sibling. The researcher found that older bereaved adolescents reported greater experiences of psychological distress (lower self-esteem and higher depressive symptoms) after their sibling's death whereas younger adolescents reported more physiological distress (Balmer, 1992). Balk (1981, 1983) found that older adolescents were angrier about their sibling's death, particularly if they were younger than them.

2.9.2.5 Attachment Style

Bowlby (1969) conceptualised attachment theory to describe the process of interpersonal relationships in terms of formation, maintenance and dissolution as well as adjustment after separation. Bowlby's notion was that the quality of the attachment bond with the caregiver influences attachment with others over the lifespan. Attachment styles are set-up in early life and are reflective of early child-parent bonding where the infant endeavours to maintain or re-establish proximity to a primary caregiver (Worden, 2009). Both infant attachment styles and adult attachment styles have been explored in research, the latter differs from the child-parent styles as adults can serve as attachment figures for each other in relationships (Worden, 2009). The adult attachment styles include secure attachment and four variants of insecure attachment: anxious/preoccupied attachment; anxious/ambivalent attachment; avoidant/dismissing attachment; and avoidant/fearful attachment.

Attachment is thought to be an integral component of establishing intimate connections for well-adjusted individuals (Bowlby, 1980) and predictive of coping strategies when confronted with a

stressful situation (Greenberger & McLaughlin, 1998; Mikulincer, Florian, & Weller, 1993; Ognibene & Collins, 1998). Stroebe (2002) suggests that individuals' attachment style influences their adaptation to bereavement. This notion is supported by Worden (2009) who suggests that securely attached people who have experienced the loss of an important attachment figure are likely to experience the pain and loss associated with bereavement, process this pain and go onto develop continuing bonds with the deceased person. However, those with an insecure attachment style may find it more difficult to cope with the loss of an attachment figure (Worden). Therefore, an insecure attachment style is important facilitator of adaptation to loss and may contribute to complicated mourning (Worden). Of the four insecure attachment styles, those with avoidant/fearful attachment are the least likely to adapt to the loss of an important attachment figure (Worden).

Due to the lack of research on adolescent sibling bereavement and attachment style, a study by Cohen and Katz (2015) is reviewed. The authors investigated the relationship between attachment style, coping flexibility, cause of death, levels of grief reactions and post-traumatic growth in 150 bereaved adult siblings. Results of the study indicated that secure siblings exhibited higher post-traumatic growth and lower grief than that of insecure siblings (Cohen & Katz). The authors suggest the findings are due to securely attached individuals possessing positive beliefs about themselves and the world, and being less prone to viewing events as threatening. An area for future study identified was the trajectory of adolescent bereavement after the loss of a sibling when the sibling relationship was characterised by secure attachments, anxious-avoidant attachments or anxious-ambivalent attachments (Balk, 2009a).

Attachment theory has largely focussed on the role of a parent as the primary attachment figure in typical parent/child relationships. In the situation of adolescent sibling bereavement, the relationship between the surviving sibling and their main attachment figure (i.e. parent) may be compromised as family's resources and ability to care for surviving siblings are withdrawn (Charles & Charles, 2006). The surviving sibling may then experience a secondary loss to that of their sibling as their caregiver no longer has the capacity to meet their emotional needs. Additionally, some

research suggests that other family members besides the mother can take on the role of a key attachment figure (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). In the case of adolescent sibling bereavement, a key attachment figure may have been the deceased sibling. Further research is required to understand the experience of the surviving sibling in this scenario.

2.9.2.6 Other Personal Factors

It seems likely that bereavement itself did not cause these adolescents to have ongoing problems but rather they brought predisposing conditions of vulnerability to the crises they were facing (Hogan & DeSantis, 1992 in Balk & Corr, 2001, p. 210).

Other factors such as health status, temperament, experience with loss, and understanding death and loss have been associated with personal factors that may influence recovery from loss (Crehan, 2004; Packman, et al., 2006; Rosen, 1991). A review of the literature by Valente, Saunders and Street (1988) revealed that unresolved bereavement may lead to ongoing mental health problems and psychopathology. Additionally, the authors indicated that adolescent bereavement has been linked to adult emotional difficulties. Hence, a person's mental health background and experience with previous losses may influence their resilience when confronted by the loss of a significant person. Unresolved issues from previous losses are likely to compound and exacerbate the current experience of loss

Due to lack of research in the adolescent sibling bereavement literature, studies in other areas of grief, such as parental grief, were explored. Lawrence Josephs' 1981 dissertation explored the differences found in bereavement reactions of adult women whose fathers or mothers died during their adolescence (as cited in Balk, 1996). Josephs found that women who experienced a disrupted childhood reported more guilt and depression following the death of their parent, and perceived the death of their parent as a negative influence (Balk). Whereas, women who experienced a normal childhood, although they found the loss of their parent painful, felt that the experience was behind them (Balk). Hence, Josephs believed that bereavement was not the trigger

for personality disturbances but rather these disturbances were reinforced with the death of a parent during adolescence.

2.9.2 Situational Factors

2.9.2.1 Sudden Loss versus Anticipated Death

The situational circumstance of a sibling's death has been identified as an important factor of the grief process for adolescents e.g. the type of death, whether sudden or not, the place it happened (Davies, 1995).

By its nature, sudden death occurs without warning or opportunity for preparation and results in abrupt change for individuals (DeMinco, 1995). Literature on adult grief suggests that sudden death results in more intense grief and of longer duration (Davies & Limbo, 2010; Parkes & Weiss, 1983). This is supported by a number of studies that suggest the bereaved individuals of those who die suddenly, especially young individuals, have more difficulty adapting to the death up to two years later than those who had prior warning (Worden, 2009). According to Raphael (1999), violent deaths such as those associated with homicide, suicide, disasters, may combine the bereavement effects with that of a traumatic stressor. Such a combination can lead to complications in resolving the loss (Raphael).

Dickens (2014) explored the prevalence of complicated grief and posttraumatic stress disorder in children and adolescents following sibling death. The author concludes that the type of death is one of a number of risk factors for complicated grief. Further that a child's death as a result of an accident or suicide provides little warning and has a greater impact on families than a death due to a chronic illness (Dickens).

The above findings support results from a study by Lohan and Murphy (2002) that collected data at four points over an eighteen month period from parents who observed the difficulties faced by their adolescent children after the sudden and violent death of their sibling. Issues described by both mothers and fathers about same-sex or opposite-sex children were: affective issues, struggling to make meaning, existential issues, social changes, avoiding and pushing the death away, the void

left behind, "filling the shoes", work problems, school problems, sleep problems, physical symptoms, cognitive changes, communication changes, family relationship issues, spirituality issues, pregnancy, and positive steps. A limitation of this study was the collection of data through observations made by others (i.e. parents of adolescents) and that these observations may have been inaccurate or biased.

The suddenness and preventability of a death are often referred to in literature concerning trauma and traumatic grief more so than expected death from a terminal or chronic illness. However, the Harvard Child Bereavement Study compared outcomes for children and adolescents who experienced the sudden death (40%) and expected death (60%) of a parent, and found both situations affected the adjustment of both the children and the family particularly in the first year of bereavement. In the second year of the study, moderators such as the poor functioning of the surviving parent were found to predict adjustment of the child (Worden & Silverman, 1996). Further, Kazak and Noll (2004) stated there was a lack of evidence to support that the sudden loss of a child is more distressing than an anticipated loss.

The complication of a child's long illness is the care and attention required by parents. Research identified that adolescents with chronically ill siblings may be at risk of neglect or abuse as their parents attempt to manage significant stressors in the family (Doka, 1993). The situation of having a seriously ill sibling can also have an isolating effect on the adolescents at a time when they are navigating the development stage of forming their own identity (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1998).

Fanos and Nickerson (1991) undertook a quantitative and qualitative study to explore the long term consequences of growing up with a chronically ill sibling who died before they reached adulthood. The researchers investigated the capacity of the parents to mourn the loss of their child while providing a nurturing environment for bereaved siblings. Of interest in the findings was the impact of care on the family while managing a child's chronic illness and the reorganisation of the family as it endeavours to cope with a child's protracted illness (Fanos & Nickerson). It was found that the impending death of a child alters the developmental environment within the family due to

the withdrawal of emotional resources from the well sibling, creating difficulties in adaptation for the surviving children (Fanos & Nickerson).

The quantitative component of Fanos and Nickerson's (1991) study found that adolescents aged 13 through to 18 years of age (adolescent) had significantly higher scores on anxiety, depression and guilt than those aged 9 through 12 (latency or preadolescent) and those aged 18 years of age (late adolescent). Fifty percent of the bereaved siblings expressed a sense of survivor guilt, some of whom experienced difficult times upon reaching the age at which their sibling died or achieving a developmental milestone which the sibling had just reached prior to their death or had not had the chance to reach (Fanos & Nickerson). In terms of anxiety, each member of the adolescent group expressed a global sense that things were about to go wrong and a subset expressed a vulnerability towards their own health and/or the fear of an early death (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). Other concerns raised within the adolescent group were worrying about loved ones, somatic complaints, and sleeping difficulties (Fanos & Nickerson).

The impact of the circumstances of death on the bereavement experience has been identified as a priority area for continued research (Genevro, et al., 2004). Literature suggests that anticipatory grief offers the opportunity for the preparation of the death. However, research suggests that in families with chronically ill children, anticipatory grief does not pose a benefit in terms of preparation, rather, parents hope for a miracle as siblings appraise the situation in positive ways (Davies & Limbo, 2010). Hence, when the death of a child occurs, it is often felt to be unexpected (Davies & Limbo, 2010).

2.9.2.2 Time Since Death

 In the normal bereavement process, symptoms of grief intensity tend to decrease as time passes, however, the presence of symptoms of grief after many years may be indicative of an individual's complicated grieving process (Rosner, Kruse & Hagl, 2010).

The enduring effects of adolescent sibling bereavement are highlighted in research by Hogan and Greenfield's (1991) study of 87 adolescents aged between 13 and 18 years who completed the

OSIQ-A and the Hogan Sibling Inventory of Bereavement (HSIB). Adolescents indicated that grief intensity and frequency reduced over time although the most removed in time continued to report some level of grief experience (Hogan & Greenfield). Adolescents who continued to experience high grief symptomology more than 18 months following the death of their sibling also exhibited dysfunctional patterns of self-concept (Hogan & Greenfield). The authors stated that this group is particularly vulnerable to long term negative outcomes.

Consistent with Hogan and Greenfield's (1991) research, Balmer (1992) suggested that time since death was a predictor of adjustment in sibling bereaved adolescents. Balmer (1992) used quantitative and qualitative measures to explore adolescent sibling bereavement in 40 bereaved and 40 non-bereaved adolescents. Balmer's longitudinal study compared adjustment of adolescent bereaved siblings with a control group on measures of psychological well-being, self-esteem, depression and academic performance. Results revealed that time since death was a significant predictor of adjustment in adolescents in the year following their sibling's death. At this time point, bereaved siblings reported increased psychological distress, lower levels of self-esteem, higher somatic symptoms and higher depressive symptomology than the control group. Adjustment scores for bereaved adolescents at years two and three years were similar to those of the control group (Balmer). Balmer identified a small percentage of bereaved adolescents were at risk of long-term adjustment difficulties. This group showed higher levels of depression, lower self-esteem and increased anxiety (Balmer).

Conversely, Fanos and Nickerson (1991) found no significant relationship between time-elapsed since death and grief reactions among sibling survivors. Similarly, results from Balk's (1981) study of 33 bereaved siblings indicated that time since death was not a predictor of grief intensity. Further, Davies' (1995) study investigated long term effects of sibling loss utilising data sets from two qualitative studies with bereaved siblings. One study included interviews at several data points with 71 siblings who experienced the death of a brother from cancer when they were between the ages of 3 and 16 years old. The interviews were conducted up to 7 to 9 years after the death of the

sibling. The second data set included interviews with 25 siblings whose sibling died from various

causes during their childhood or adolescence. Using content analysis, the study revealed that

bereaved siblings viewed the death of their sibling as an event that had shaped who they are as a

person and that they continued to think about their sibling, sometimes on a daily basis (Davies,

1995). Participants also reported that losing a sibling made them feel different from others and that

this feeling continued through to adulthood (Davies). Many of the sibling survivors reported that

they their loss was not understood by others and they experienced a deep sense of loneliness often

intensified at significant or important times in their life (Davies).

Robinson and Mahon's (1996) review of literature on sibling bereavement outlined shorter

term reactions to sibling bereavement such as feelings of guilt, anxiety and fear, and defined longer

term reactions as psychological growth and/or social withdrawal. As evidenced by the studies

above, some researchers suggest that reduction in adolescent sibling grief reactions over time has

been conflicting (Robinson & Mahon, 1996). Time since death has been viewed as an important

variable to consider in bereavement (Rosner, Kruse & Hagl, 2010) but it is also one aspect that varies

greatly in sibling bereavement retrospective studies where participants, either adolescents or adults,

are asked to provide information on their reactions to the loss of a loved one at a later point in time

(Adolph & Fleming, 1986).

Additionally, there is an array of potentially confounding variables that may influence

outcomes of adolescent sibling loss (Charles & Charles, 2006). It is likely that time since death is a

predictor for adaptation to loss when the experience of grief is not complicated (i.e. adolescents

have adequate support and resources for coping; personal factors such as mental health and

resilience are present; where relevant, trauma is addressed; family functioning enables the

integration of loss). Therefore, it is difficult to tease apart the many variables that exert influence on

loss adaptation for bereaved adolescent siblings.

2.10   Sibling Loss in the Context of the Family

Family systems theory provides a framework within which interactions between family members can be viewed as they adjust to the loss of a family member. This section provides an overview of family systems theory in the context of loss together with aspects of family functioning that help or hinder sibling bereaved adolescents in their adaptation to loss.

2.10.1 The Family System and Adolescence

Family systems theory provides a conceptual backdrop that illustrates the complexity faced by bereaved individuals coming to terms with loss (Rosenblatt, 1993).   Family systems theory conceptualises that all parts of the family are interrelated, comprising of individual members and patterns of relationships which, in turn, create the family structure (Shapiro, 2001). The theory emphasises how the loss experience of individuals is shaped by family rules and patterns, and how this loss is played out within the system of family relationships (Rosenblatt).

The family environment is complex as it provides a unique experience for each individual (Robinson & Mahon, 1997). Characteristics of each sibling, how they are perceived and are responded to, the sibling's developmental phase and that of the family as it moves through life stages, all contribute to each sibling's experience (Robinson & Mahon). Further, the quality of communication between parents and adolescents can facilitate healthy development of identity and self-esteem (Olson et. al., 1983).

Natural changes occur within the family system to reflect the stages of the family's life cycle from the initial partnering of the couple through to the arrival of children, the accommodation of adolescents, followed by the experience of "empty nesters". As families transition to a family with adolescents, a life-cycle change is experienced as they move from a centripetal to a centrifugal phase (Combrinck-Graham, 1985). As adolescents develop interests outside the extended family, parents endeavour to accommodate for their adolescents' increasing desire for autonomy. Such a developmental change within the family, followed by the adjustment to that change, can be

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described as first and second order changes that have the capacity to reverberate throughout the family (Combrinck-Graham).

Adolescent development can be aided or hindered by the second order changes that play out in the family system's adjustment. Transitions within the family's adjustment to changes within the family lifecycle have the capacity to rupture the manner in which a family functions particularly if there is a failure to accommodate for the development stage of an individual (Nichols, 2014). The family also requires flexible boundaries with the outside world in its connections with extended family, friends and other support systems (Silverman, 2000).

The increased independence of adolescent children creates opportunities for parents to spend time together as well as pursue their own interests. During this phase, a level of interpersonal distance may be experienced between parents and feelings of disconnection may be exacerbated by the different coping styles of parents. This pattern of relating may become fixed and act to reinforce the reactivity and distance between the parents particularly during a time of crisis.

2.10.2 Sibling Death and the Family

The equilibrium of the unit is disturbed by either the addition of a new member or the loss of a member. The intensity of the emotional reaction is governed by the functioning level of emotional integration in the family at the time or by the functional importance of the one who is added to the family or lost to the family. (Bowen, 1991, p. 82-83)

The loss of a family member has the capacity to forever alter the integrated system of relationships within that family (Traylor, Hayslip, Kaminski & York, 2003). According to Walsh and MGoldrick (2001, p. 8), "loss modifies family structure, often requiring major reorganization of the family system". Bowen (1976), a key contributor to family systems literature, asserts that the equilibrium of a family disrupted by the loss of a family member can be rebalanced depending on the family's level of emotional integration and the severity of change the loss causes within the family.

As part of the reorganisation process, the family must perform tasks such as acknowledging the reality of the loss, a shared experience and participation in ritualisation of the loss, realignment of the relationships and redistribution of roles within the system, and reinvestment in other relations and pursuits (Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004). Additionally, a lack of synchronicity between the grieving styles of family members has the capacity cause distance between them and place strain on relationships (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991; 2004).

Research supports that a key contributing factor for adolescents coping with sibling loss and adjustment is the family environment (Balk, 1983; Balmer, 1992; Shipkey, 2008). The family may hold protective factors such as coping strategies and resources that enable the bereaved sibling to build resilience and adapt to the death of a sibling. As suggested by Christ, Bonanno, Malkinson and Rubin (2003, p. 533), "individuals and families have many capabilities and abilities that allow them to respond to interpersonal loss and to emerge from the experience changed but not broken".

The family's grief process may be aided or hindered depending on the type of affect, openness of communication, and level of cohesion in the relationships between the survivors of the family (Shapiro, 2001). A family with a more open than closed communication allows for the expression of feelings, thoughts and ideas and has a sense of cohesion or closeness that promotes an environment that minimises behavioural problems from bereaved siblings (Davies, 1988b; Davies 1999). Open communication following the loss of a child also ensures surviving siblings do not feel overlooked and alone in their grief (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). Conversely, the silence that surrounds the loss of a child in the family is thought to insulate family members from confronting grief but also isolates them from each other, blocking their ability to work through the loss (Charles & Charles, 2006, Biggs, 2002).

The family context profoundly shapes the experience of individual grief and the grief of an individual has the capacity to profoundly affect the family (Rosenblatt, 2002). Therefore, the family plays a critical role in providing support and information for the surviving sibling(s) (Davies, 1991). In an environment where there is both open communication and family support, it is possible for the

bereaved adolescent to continue their development (Cicirelli, 1995). Conversely, highly enmeshed families may limit individual self-assertion as it represents a threat to family stability and therefore, is strictly controlled (Shapiro, 2001). In the context of adolescent sibling bereavement, the stifling of self-expression may disrupt the grieving process for surviving siblings.

Unfortunately, in the aftermath of the death of a child, the family is likely to experience a period of disorganisation as each member adjusts to the death of their son, daughter, brother or sister (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991). Differing perspectives can hamper the grieving process within the family as both parents and surviving siblings both negotiate the realities of the death (Sharpiro, 1994). Shared meaning making in families following the death of a loved one helps to facilitate communication and understanding as they attempt to make meaning of the loss (Nadeau, 2001). Meaning making within families helps the surviving members make sense of the experience, redefine order and gain a sense of control over events (Nadeau).

2.10.3 Parental Grief and Support

The parents' role in the child or adolescent's adjustment to the death of a family member has been noted in bereavement literature (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). It has been suggested that the central factor that influences sibling bereavement is the interactions between siblings and the significant adults in their lives (Davies, 1999). If support is not present, the surviving siblings may experience a double loss, the death of their sibling and the loss of parental support (Bank & Kahn, 1982; DeVita-Raeburn, 2004). In the case of sibling bereavement, the opportunity for a parent to help their child cope with loss is often overshadowed by the impact of their own grief as well as the many tasks they have to deal with such as maintain a marriage and respond to well-meaning friends and family (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Horsley & Patterson, 2006). As identified in a study by Hogan and DeSantis (1994), parental discord and parental grief were reported by sibling bereaved adolescents as hindering their grief.

Research suggests that the reaction of the parents to the death of the sibling is greatly affecting (Fletcher, Mailick, Song & Wolfe, 2013). Therefore, witnessing parental grief can be hugely

impact for surviving adolescent siblings. A study by Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2005) explored the impact of suicide on surviving siblings who were children or adolescents at the time of the death. The sibling study was part of a larger study which comprised of 128 parents and 70 siblings (aged 15 years or above) and collected both quantitative and qualitative data (Dyregrov & Dyregrov). The surviving siblings comprised of two samples, the first consisted of 11 adolescents aged 15-20 years at the time of their sibling's death and the second sample comprised of 59 siblings aged 21-43 who lived alone or with their own core family at the time of their sibling's death. The results of the study indicated that younger siblings living at home experienced more difficulties than the older siblings and parents. The explanation offered by the researchers was that older siblings could avoid exposure to their parents' despair and all the reminders of the dead sibling. Therefore, age, marital status and life circumstances were protective factors of sibling bereavement following suicide.

The grief of surviving siblings may be compounded by the intention of parents to provide adolescent siblings with privacy and independence, thereby exacerbating their feelings of isolation (Doka, 1993; Walsh & McGoldrick 1998). As well as feeling lonely and neglected, the bereaved adolescent sibling may experience distress due to their siblings' medical treatment and may feel guilty that they are healthy (Adams & Deveau, 1987).

Rosen's (1986) study of adults reflecting on their experience as bereaved adolescent siblings revealed they felt isolated and neglected when they did not share their feelings with others. If parental support is available, it is thought to be an important moderating variable of the surviving sibling's experience of death and adjustment to the loss (Packman, et al., 2006). Additionally, the grieving parent's ability to express and foster continuing bonds has a significant influence the recovery of the surviving siblings (Packman, et al., 2006).

2.10.4 Parental Discord

Lieberman's (1989) article on "All Family Losses are Not Equal" compared the loss of a spouse to the loss of a child and suggested that the loss of child often involves issues of guilt and responsibility, and that the marital relationship may suffer as both partners are profoundly affected

by the loss, unable to support each other. Liberman (1989) suggests that the marital relationship of parents who have lost a child bears the brunt of loss. The person who could once be relied upon during a crisis may be unavailable for support due to the intensity of their own pain (Liberman). Liberman's seven year follow up study of spousal responses to the loss of a child from a panel of 233 bereaved parents reported that although improvements were found in mental health, greater life satisfaction, higher coping mastery and less substance abuse, the marital relationship remained devastated (Liberman). Hence, couples who lose a child experience increased divorce rates and marital relationship stress (Lieberman). Inevitably, the state of the marital relationship as they endeavour to cope with the loss of a child sets the scene in which surviving siblings must grieve.

2.10.5 Prohibited Mourning

Children are happy to make the sacrifice of their own integrity so as to protect a parent's emotional well-being, since the parent's stability is essential to the child's own survival and capacity to proceed with ongoing development (Shapiro, 1994, p. 83).

Children's grief and fear may be compounded when witnessing the distress and vulnerability of their parents (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). In an effort to protect parents and avoid further distress, bereaved siblings may not mention the deceased sibling as they think this will upset their parents further (Forward & Garlie, 2003; Horsley & Patterson, 2006). They may feel that they need to supress their grief and "remain strong for their parents", sidelining their grief, leaving them to feel unacknowledged, ignored and invalidated (Horsley & Patterson).

Hence, bereaved adolescents may endeavour to camouflage their grief as a mechanism to protect their parents' well-being as well as the survival of their family (Hogan, 1998 as cited in Balk, 2009). In a situation where the bereaved adolescents are not provided with the opportunity to discuss their sibling's death and family support is limited, it may take years for them to work through their grief (Bank & Kahn; Cicirelli, 1995). The emotional isolation from parents may impeded the

integration process of grief and inhibit meaning making essential for constructive mourning (Charles & Charles, 2006).

A study by Demi and Gilbert (1987) indicated that children avoided thoughts about their deceased sibling in an effort to comfort their parents. Additionally, Rosen's (1984-1985) study of 159 older adolescents and adults, who had lost a sibling in childhood or adolescence, concluded that it was difficult for the bereaved sibling to adequately mourn and work through their loss as they felt these behaviours were prohibited. It was found that 62% of the families who participated in the study never discussed their bereavement (Rosen, 1986). Conscious attempts to keep their feelings and other responses hidden in an attempt to protect their parents were reported (Rosen, 1986).

Rosen (1986) coined the phenomena as "prohibited mourning" and attributed it to the societal belief that the loss of a child is the worst loss experience possible and thereby minimises the loss of a sibling. A protective posture is taken, whether externally or internally imposed, as the surviving sibling's grief is minimised or overshadowed by the grief of his or her parent(s) (Robinson & Mahon, 1997) and feel pressure to fulfil the lost dreams and goals of their deceased sibling foregoing their own (Rosen, 1991).

2.10.6 Role Changes within the Family

Family systems theory suggests that not all family members play an equal role in the family system (Rosenblatt, 1993). An adolescent may play the role of a scapegoat or add to the stability or instability of the family, both of which contribute to the dynamics of the family system (Raphael, 1983). The adolescent's role within the family may be altered in the aftermath of sibling death (Robinson & Mahon, 1997). One possibility is the role of the surviving sibling may undergo change as they feel the expectation to become a stand-in for the deceased sibling (Rosen, 1984-1985; Bank and Kahn, 1976).

Birth order has been suggested as a variable that influences sibling psychosocial development and therefore may be a factor in adolescent sibling bereavement. Research by Bank and Kahn (1976) proposed that children learned behaviour via observation and interaction with their

sibling(s). Younger siblings may look to older siblings as role models (Brim, 1958) affording them

feelings of admiration and intimacy (Buhrmester & Furman, 1990). Older siblings often inherit

positions of authority and responsibility in their relationships with younger siblings and it has been

suggested that younger siblings tend look up to and value interacting with older siblings (Buhrmester

& Furman). As sibling dyads age, they both grow more competent and development statuses

become similar, therefore, their relationship becomes more egalitarian when compared to their

younger years when developmentally they were in different phases (Buhrmester & Furman).

However, the loss of a sibling may propel an adolescent to take a different role in the family. For

example, through the death of an older sibling, they may become the eldest child and this may cause

a shift in how they perceive themselves and/or alter their behaviour.

In Australia, the death of a sibling can be especially significant due to the size of the average

family. Recent annual data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) reported that 60 per cent

of one or two parent families have an average of 1.9 children. Hence, the loss of a sibling may

significantly alter the structure of the family. In the study by Hogan and DeSantis (1994), siblings

who lost their only sibling and became an only child found it was a deeply lonely experience.

Children are quick to tap into the emotional stability or instability of parents, stepping-up to

support them as best they can whether in the form of household responsibilities or monitoring their

own emotional responses to what they believe their parents can tolerate (Shapiro, 1994). Sibling

bereaved adolescents may lose the emotional availability of their parent along with the loss of a

sibling (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Rosen, 1985). Research suggests that surviving siblings may also take on

a care-giving role for parents (Flesner, 2015).

2.10.7 Survivor Guilt

The manifestation of survivor guilt has been identified as a long term effect of sibling loss

that has a deleterious impact on the bereaved siblings as they attempt to strive towards adulthood

(Walsh & McGoldrick, 1998). White (2006) suggested that survivor guilt is preceded by ambivalence

in the sibling relationship and related to unresolved fights and/or relationship regrets. The

phenomenon of survivor guilt has been identified in studies dating back to the 1960's, namely, a study by Cain, Fast and Erickson (1964) who reviewed records of 58 children aged between two and a half to 14 years who were either outpatients or inpatients at a psychiatric clinic, and had experienced the death of a sibling. The study indicated that approximately fifty percent of siblings experienced feelings of guilt which remained active five years or more following the loss of their sibling (Cain, et al.). The bereaved siblings reported that they had felt somehow responsible for their sibling's death and were prone to ruminating over negative things that they had said, done, thought or felt about their dead sibling (Cain et al.). Although the participants were likely to have experienced a level of psychopathology, more recent studies have suggested that such an experience is prevalent in the bereaved sibling population (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Hogan & Greenfield, 1991)

Flesner's (2015) qualitative study of seven young adults who lost a sibling in adolescence identified feelings of guilt amongst surviving adolescent siblings characterised by a sense of feeling uncomfortable when enjoying life and questioning why they lived when their sibling died. Flesner noted that surviving siblings felt a sense of responsibility for the loss and felt they were not enough to make their parents happy. Additionally, the author observed that survivor guilt may manifest behaviourally whereby surviving siblings overachieve to prove their worth or took on caretaking behaviours for parents or peers.

Interestingly, study by Robinson (2001) investigated grief reactions of 102 adults who had experienced the death of a sibling due to AIDS. The results suggested that survivor guilt was not as prevalent as previous studies undertaken with children and adolescents (Robinson). Hence, the author suggests that survivor guilt may be more reflective of a development phase that a characteristic of sibling bereavement. Perhaps survivor guilt is more related to the development phase of bereaved siblings as they struggle to differentiate from their deceased sibling and strive to achieve an autonomous sense of self. This inability to conceptualise themselves as independent beings may impact self-esteem and raise the question, "why them and not me?"

2.10.8 Secondary Loss

The death of a child within a family can have many direct and indirect consequences. Surviving siblings may be confronted with a shift in the relationship with their parents who may not be available to meet their emotional needs at this time. Bowlby's (1980, p. 138) attachment theory model suggests that a lack of responsiveness from an attachment figure, such as a parent or primary caregiver, may trigger one of two forms of disordered grief ('chronic mourning' or 'prolonged absence of conscious grieving'). As a result, the bereaved sibling may try to gain their parents' attention and care or potentially disconnect from feelings of loss and avoid the grieving process (Bowlby). The two forms of disordered grief have the capacity to elicit enduring effects on the development of a bereaved adolescent sibling (Bowlby).

2.11 Growth versus Vulnerability

The dead sibling's legacy can be a force for sickness and stagnation or, under beneficent circumstances, can serve as an inspiration for maturation and creativity (Bank & Kahn, 1982, p. 271).

2.11.1 Growth Following Loss

A life crisis is a major life transition may threaten a person's psychological equilibrium but it can also present an opportunity for growth (Balk, 1996). Some research supports that a life crisis in adolescence can stimulate positive growth and development (Balk, 2009). Research with bereaved siblings indicated this population can experience an increased sense of personal maturity, resilience and psychological growth as they endeavour to cope with the trauma of loss (Hogan & DeSantis, 1994). Davies (1991) reported that adults who had lost a sibling in childhood evidenced increased levels of maturity and that their encounter with death had helped them face their own mortality.

Positive outcomes for sibling bereaved adolescents have been noted such as perceptions of being more mature than friends; increased sense of creativity; ability to manage stress; closer relationships with family members; change in priorities; and increased empathy, compassion and tolerance with both themselves and others (Balk, 1990; Balk & Corr, 2001; Davies & Limbo, 2010;

Hogan & DeSantis, 1994). Balk (1981) suggests that the experience of death can prompt the re-evaluation of ideals, increase a sense of responsibility and concern for others as well as stimulate the re-assessment toward the meaning of life.

Balk's (1983) early work suggested that the experience of losing a sibling during adolescence and, subsequently, coping with bereavement, can increase maturity when compared with non-bereaved adolescents. Balk's (1983) study compared self-concept scores of sibling bereaved adolescents with national samples of healthy and clinically disturbed adolescents using the Offer Self Image Questionnaire for Adolescents (OSIQ). The researcher's findings highlighted that bereaved adolescents scored significantly higher than their healthy, non-bereaved counterparts on moral values.   Hence, results from the study provide an indication that adolescents coping with the bereavement of a sibling can develop levels of maturity beyond that of normal peers (Balk, 1983).

Spirituality or religion is another area noted by researchers as influencing adaptation to loss for bereaved adolescent siblings (Silverman & Worden, 1996). The event and subsequent crisis of sibling loss can provide a platform for spiritual growth due to the uniqueness of the crisis Balk (1997). Balk identified three aspects of a crisis that facilitate spiritual growth: (a) it provides time for reflection; (b) the impact of the event on the person's life is permanent; and (c) the psychological imbalance created, cannot quickly be stabilised. Therefore, personal transformation may be the result of painful challenges that the death of a loved one creates (Schaefer & Moos, 2001).

A qualitative study by Batten and Oltjenbruns (1999) investigated the impact of sibling bereavement on spiritual growth and outlined a conceptual model to illustrate the developmental changes in cognitive capacity of four adolescents following the death of their siblings. The authors suggest that the crisis experienced by the adolescents in the study in response to the loss of their sibling triggered a catalyst for spiritual growth and the development of new perspectives. The authors noted changes to participants' perspectives regarding: themselves; others; a higher power; death and life; and their sibling relationship. These shifts in perspectives signified changes in life's meaning or spiritual growth (Batten & Oltjenbruns). Hogan's (1988) study found that bereaved

adolescent siblings reported amplified feelings of personal growth, increased religious beliefs as well as a heightened compassion and empathy toward parents as time since death increased.

However, the studies by Batten and Oltjenbruns (1999) and Hogan (1988) were undertaken in the United States of America some years ago and, therefore, cultural differences and greater religiosity of the American population may influence the generalisability of results for the study in the Australian context. The results do, however, pose key questions for practitioners assisting sibling bereaved adolescents in determining elements that enable growth and resilience versus stagnation during this critical time of development.

It has also been suggested that the loss of a sibling during adolescence prompts the need for bereaved individuals to re-define their identity and roles (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1999). The authors stated this finding supported the notion by Hogan and DeSantis (1992; 1994; 1996) that grief has the capacity to permanently change the reality of both self and family.

2.11.2 Sibling Loss and Vulnerability

Conversely, bereaved adolescents have reported feelings of fear, anger, guilt, confusion, sadness and loneliness (Balk, 2009b). The above can be described as normal manifestations of grief but may be considered maladaptive if they occur with severe intensity or over a long period of time (Webb, 1993).

The uncommon loss of a sibling in childhood or adolescence is said to create a ripple effect that may stretch far into adulthood and has the capacity to influence all future relationships (Dickens, 2014). Surviving siblings are at greater risk of behavioural and emotional difficulties following the loss of a sibling (Hogan & Greenfield, 1991).

Research into the effects of complicated grief experienced by sibling bereaved adolescents and children are in their infancy (Dickens, 2014). Complicated grief in bereaved siblings can be characterised by their "inability to accept the death, denial, and avoidance of reminders relating to the death, an irrational sense of longing to be with the deceased and persistent and intrusive thoughts about the deceased sibling by the survivor" (Dickens, p. 120).

Research suggests that those who experience significant loss or trauma have a higher risk for psychiatric disorders, tend to report lower levels of self-esteem, increased vulnerability, less interpersonal trust and lower psychological well-being when compared to those who have not experienced such an event (Davis, 2005). The effects of trauma can have a deleterious impact on individuals' ability to form and/or maintain intimate relationships, and if an intimate relationship does exist, it is likely to be fraught with turbulence and avoidance of intimacy (Kauffman, 2007; Van der Kolk, 1987). Kauffman adds that the experience of grief from a traumatic death can be socially alienating and this sense of isolation may impair the bereaved individual's ability to receive social support.

2.12   Conclusion of Literature Review

There is no doubt that the loss of a loved one is difficult at any point in one's life and is likely to present additional challenges for adolescents. Adolescent sibling grief may be complicated by the overt and covert messages from others suggesting that their grief is not as significant as the grief of others (Davies, 1995; Devita-Raeburn, 2004). Adolescents not only endeavour to transition through loss but transition through the developmental phases of adolescence and it would be a mistake to believe that grief in adolescence does not place them in harm's way (Balk & Corr, 2001).

This thesis has presented a number of models and perspectives that are thought to shape the experience of grief for adolescents who have lost a sibling. Many of the grief models often applied to adolescents have not been empirically tested in the context of adolescent development. Additionally, practitioners require the knowledge to recognise adolescents who are in need of an intervention and this knowledge should be built upon the understanding of patterns of adolescent grief responses (Birenbaum, 2000) rather than "clinically supported interventions that are either downward adaptions of adult treatments or upward development of child treatments" (Weisz & Hawley, 2002, p. 21).

Therefore, to understand adolescent sibling bereavement, and successfully support and promote the health and wellbeing of this special population, empirical research is required to

identify the "normal" bereavement process so that resilient and vulnerable grief pathways can be differentiated (Hogan & DeSantis, 2004). Currently, there is no accepted criterion that differentiates "normal" from "abnormal" adolescent sibling grief and it is challenging for practitioners to effectively diagnose dysfunctional adolescent grief or evaluate an intervention against criteria (Hogan & DeSantis). This leaves the diagnosis of functional or dysfunctional grief to the subjective judgement of the practitioners working with this group (Hogan & DeSantis).

Lastly, child and adolescent bereavement research has largely been dedicated to the way in which children and adolescents grieve and the meaning of their loss (Hogan & DeSantis, 1996). The focus of studies has centered on the variables and conditions that influence the bereavement process rather than their grief specifically (Hogan & DeSantis). This study explores bereaved adolescent siblings' experience of grief together the way in which they cope with bereavement during this critical development phase.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

3.1   Introduction

The methodology selected for this study was a qualitative approach. This chapter includes the rationale for selecting a qualitative approach and a description of the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method of data collection and analysis. This chapter discusses the theoretical orientation, sampling procedures, framework for the collection and analysis of qualitative data, and methods used to demonstrate validity of interpretation and protection of human subjects.

3.1.1   Theoretical Underpinnings of Inquiry

The qualitative methodology of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was chosen as an approach to explore and analyse the way in which participants make sense of the loss of their sibling during adolescence. Sample selection, data collection and data analysis were based on IPA methodology.

3.1.2   Characteristics of Qualitative Research

Qualitative research seeks the meaning rather than laws and its aim is not that of generalisability or external validity but a way of exploring multiple truths (Bell, Staines & Michell, 2001; Carverhill, 2002). This approach differs from quantitative research which focuses on the evaluation of specific hypotheses through objective measurement undertaken for the purpose of generalisability (Bell et al.). The qualitative research approach complements quantitative studies by providing insight into the socio-cultural influences that explain effects in studies of objective measurement (Yardley, 2000). The aim of qualitative studies is to explore meaning rather than measure frequency (Yardley). With qualitative research, "there is more of a focus on the possible transferability of findings from group to group rather than generalisation" (Hefferon & Gil-Rodriguez, 2011, p. 758).

Qualitative research has been identified as a valid approach to explore both adolescent development and the experience of grief. According to Kroger, et al. (2010), many researchers

endorse the phenomenological approach to broaden the understanding of the identity formation process. This methodology provides a way to add to existing research on identity status patterns and stability via the assessment of qualitative changes in the way in which adolescents frame the meaning of their experience during adolescence and early adulthood (Kroger, et al.).

To gain insight into the experience of grief, Neimeyer and Hogan (2001) argue that grief is a very individual journey and best explored initially via the utilisation of qualitative methods in order to generate theories to be later tested through quantitative studies. Servaty and Hayslip (2001) believe adult survivors of early loss are better equipped than recently bereaved adolescents to provide insight about identity development across phases of the lifespan. The authors state that data from retrospective studies better illuminate the impact of sibling loss on identity development as the perspective is that of an adult who has completed the task of forming an adult identity (Servaty & Hayslip).

3.1.3 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA's intellectual underpinnings are derived from health psychology and draw from fields of inquiry such as symbolic interactionism and phenomenology (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). IPA focuses on the process by which participants make sense of their world through their own experience, understanding, views and perceptions (Reid, Flowers & Larkin, 2005). IPA research states that the interview approach focuses on collaboration, ensures the participant is the primary expert of their story and that they have influence over how the interview proceeds (Brocki & Wearden). The researcher's role in analysing the data is to organise themes and connections that emerge from the data rather than attempt to fit the data into a pre-existing theoretical model (Smith, 1999). Additionally, themes from the research data are not necessarily selected on the basis of prevalence but with consideration toward the articulacy and immediacy of the description of the experience in that it exemplifies what others have attempted to say (Brocki & Wearden).

IPA moves from the descriptive to the interpretive as the researcher endeavours to make sense of the data provided by participants as they explore an understanding of their own world

(Smith & Osborn, 2003). Therefore, cognition is central to this in-depth analytic process and is augmented by drawing on empirical material to discover novel and diverse ways of understanding the topic (Smith & Osborn; Yardley, 2000).

3.2   Research Design

3.2.1   Overview

This study explored the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and its impact on psychosocial development and psychological wellbeing. The IPA design of the study allowed participants to describe their lived experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. Potential participants self-selected into the study by contacting the researcher in response to online and paper-based advertisements.

The researcher provided an overview of the study's aims and method to potential participants over the telephone, and scheduled a 60-90 minute in-depth interview with those who met the inclusion criteria and indicated they wished to participate. The interviews were conducted either at the home of the participant or in the Swinburne Psychology Clinic, Swinburne University, Hawthorn campus. The aim of the interview was to explore the lived experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and the impact of such on participants' development tasks as they transitioned through adolescence and towards early adulthood.

Contemporary grief theorists have utilised qualitative approaches such as IPA to explore individual differences of grief and the mourning processes that reflect the lived experience of the bereaved individuals to extend on traditional grief theories (Carverhill, 2002). Neimeyer and Hogan (2001) suggest qualitative methods can be used to access the profoundly subjective experience of dying and mourning and contribute to the theoretical knowledge of grief and loss. Neimeyer and Hogan note that the use of standardised, paper-and-pencil measures endeavour to capture how "well" a person is doing in response to loss via instruments that measure mental health function or a global measure of bereavement. They add that while this is relevant, important aspects of the loss experience are missed, namely, those most relevant to the counselling process.

Ethics approval was received from the Swinburne University of Technology Human Research

Ethics Committee (SUHREC) prior to commencement of the study (SUHREC Project Number:

2013/034) (Appendix A).

3.2.2   Participants

3.2.2.1 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The selection criteria were that the participants (1) had experienced the loss of a sibling at

least two years prior; (2) were aged between 14 and 25 years at the time of the death of their

sibling; (3) their sibling was either full sibling from their family of origin or an adopted sibling; and (4)

was willing to participate in the study. Participants who lost a sibling who were either a step-sibling

or half-sibling were advised that they were ineligible to participate in the study.

3.2.2.2 Recruitment

A purposeful sample was recruited in order to select information-rich cases to fit the study

(Coyne, 1997). The sample did not vary according to emerging theory but was selected for the rich

data it could provide on the phenomenon of adolescent sibling bereavement (Coyne). Recruitment

was facilitated via posters at Swinburne Psychology Clinic and mail outs to members of The

Compassionate Friends (Victoria) (Appendix B). The study was also advertised online via The

Compassionate Friends (New South Wales branch), BeyondBlue, RedKite and Support after Suicide.

Additionally, social media sites (Facebook and LinkedIn) were utilised to advertise the study.

Twenty two participants contacted the researcher, five either opted out of the study or did

not meet the selection criteria for inclusion and the remaining 17 participants who satisfied the

selection criteria were recruited. Two participants cancelled the scheduled interview due to

personal circumstances leaving 15 participants who completed the interview. Hefferon and Gil-

Rodriguez (2011) suggest that the sample size for an IPA study for a professional doctorate should

consist of four to ten data sets. Hence, the sample size for the study aligned with this

recommendation.

3.3   Procedure

3.3.1   Data Collection

3.3.1.1 Individual Interviews

An information letter (Appendix C) and consent form (Appendix D) were provided to each participant before commencement of the interview that outlined the purpose and requirements of the study. Participants were asked if they consented to the audio recording of the 60-90 minute interview and were asked to indicate their agreement on the consent form. All interviews were conducted by the author.

After participants signed the consent form, the interview process commenced with an opening statement to prepare participants for the interview. This statement acknowledged that some of the questions may trigger an emotional response and that the researcher would endeavour to acknowledge and address any residual feelings at the end of the interview. Demographic data was collected at the beginning of the interview and documented in section one of the demographic and interview questions sheet referred to as the Interview Schedule (Appendix E).

The interview followed a semi-structured Interview Schedule that guided the interview and explored in detail participant experience. Review of existing theory informed the construction of the interview schedule and included general questions, specific questions and some prompts. The interview schedule was constructed based on key areas such as: opening questions; the sibling relationship; sibling loss; grief; psychosocial development; and family functioning. The interview schedule was reviewed by a grief expert who is an educator and practitioner in the field of trauma, grief and loss. The expert provided input into the opening and closing statements/questions used to prepare and debrief participants as part of the interview process (Appendix F).

This form of interviewing provides the opportunity for the researcher and participant to explore participant experiences led by participant responses. The IPA methodology enables the researcher to modify questions and/or probe interesting and important aspects of their experience (Smith & Osborne, 2003). The interview schedule is not prescriptive but a suggested approach to

guide the researcher and allow for the iterative development of questions as research progresses. Examples of open-ended questions within the interview schedule are as follows: "can you talk about the relationship you had with your sibling?" "What comes to mind when thinking about your response to the death of your sibling?" Together with open-ended questions, reflective listening techniques were used to prompt participants and seek further information and clarification.

At the completion of the interview, all participants were thanked for their participation in the study and the researcher advised that sometimes people found it helpful to talk to someone (if they had not already engaged in a counselling process) about their loss and were provided with a resource document detailing information on available counselling services (Appendix G).

Data for this study were collected over approximately a one year period by the researcher.

The researcher used observation notes to record the non-verbal communication during the interview. To increase the accuracy of the data, observations were recorded as soon as possible following the interview. Additionally, the researcher captured her subjective impressions of the interview in a journal directly after the interview. Both sources of data provided additional data in the analysis process and were used to check researcher bias (Riley, 1990).

3.3.1.2 *Demographic Data*

Demographic data was collected at the beginning of the interview with each participant. Demographic information obtained included age, gender, education level obtained, occupation, religion/spirituality, ethnic background, whether the participant had previously accessed psychological support, the sibling's age at death, time since sibling's death, the participant's age at sibling's death and cause of sibling's death.

3.4   Data Analysis

The audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the interviewer. Data analysis was in line with IPA methodology described by Smith (1999), the aim the analysis was to "give voice" to participant experiences and the meaning derived from those experiences. IPA focussed on the lived experience of sibling bereaved adolescents as recounted by participants.

The analysis commenced with the transcript of the first interview, referred to as case one. The transcript was read and re-read in order to identify themes and clusters of themes or superordinate concepts. The resultant themes were checked against the transcript to ensure connection to the source material and a table of themes was developed for case one. The table comprised of themes, theme clusters and identifiers used to locate the original data source within the transcript. The themes of the first case were used to orient the data analysis of subsequent cases. As data analysis progressed, repeating patterns and emerging themes were identified with the aim of recognising convergences and divergences within the data. From an idiographic perspective, levels of analysis were utilised to identify patterns across cases while focussing on the context and individuality of experiences from which the patterns emerged (Smith, 1999).

3.5   Scientific Rigour and the Role of the Researcher

IPA as a qualitative research method tends to be subjective and this aspect is well recognised by researchers (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). Hence, there is an argument that reliability is an inappropriate criterion by which to measure qualitative research. An approach to the evaluation of qualitative research is the utilisation of four broad principles as described by Yardley (2000, p. 219) in Table 3 below.

Table 2.

Characteristics of Good (Qualitative) Research.

Sensitivity to context	Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participants' perspectives; ethical issues.
Commitment and rigour	In-depth engagement with topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis.
Transparency and coherence	Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method; reflexivity.
Impact and importance	Theoretical (enriching understanding); socio-cultural; practical (for community, policy makers, health workers).

These principles illustrate the researcher's ability to understand and interpret the experiences of participants.

The researcher evidenced the principle of sensitivity to context in her research on existing relevant theory and developed an understanding of IPA methods employed within similar topics. This enabled the researcher to interpret the data and link meaning to prior research. In terms of commitment, rigour, transparency and coherence, the researcher adhered to the determined protocols for data collection, analysis and reporting. The researcher's own experience of adolescent sibling bereavement provided a high level of engagement with the topic which was further developed through further immersion in the literature. The researcher's approach to rigour was reflected in the reading and re-reading of the data to produce a rich, diverse and complex understanding of the lived experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. This required a level of theorising based on prolonged contemplation and empathic exploration of the topic (Yardley, 2000). The researcher's ability to construct a version of reality based on the data is communicated in themes that represent the meaning of participant experiences.

To address transparency, the researcher has provided a personal statement disclosing her own experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and her motivations to embark on this study. This information highlights the potential for subjectivity in the interpretation of data which was addressed by ensuring mechanisms were put in place, namely, a journal to describe reflections. The journal promoted the researcher's awareness of her own assumptions and reflexivity in the analysis process. Additionally, the insertion of verbatim material in the results and discussion section and the inclusion of full transcripts in the appendices provide transparency for readers and the opportunity to evaluate the role of the researcher and the validity of findings (Fossey, Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002).

The impact and importance of the study is found in the analysis of themes that add meaning to the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and is intended to provide practical assistance to practitioners who work with sibling bereaved adolescents and adults.

3.5.1   Bracketing of Personal Bias

As noted by Starks and Trinidad (2007), within qualitative analysis the researcher is the instrument for analysis across all phases of the project. Mindfully and in an effort to mitigate the influence bias and increase validity, the researcher worked to maintain an awareness of her perceptions and motivations when conducting IPA particularly when interviewing participants and undertaking data analysis. Specifically, the personal background of the researcher and her own experience of adolescent sibling bereavement heightened her awareness that she may have preconceived ideas regarding the loss of a sibling in adolescence. Bracketing was utilised throughout the project in order to increase research rigour and to protect the researcher from the potentially emotionally challenging material she immersed herself in (Starks & Trinidad).   Bracketing has been defined as "the task of sorting out the qualities that belong to the researcher's experience of the phenomenon" (Drew, 2004, p. 215).

The method of bracketing employed by the researcher was applied in the writing of memos through each stage of the project in an effort to reflect and examine her engagement with the content. Additionally, the researcher engaged with a grief expert to bring to light any preconceptions and biases prior to, during and following data collection in an effort to enhance clarity and engagement with the participants' experiences. This was augmented by contributions to a reflexive journal actively kept throughout the research project.

3.6   Protection of Human Subjects

All appropriate measures were taken to ensure adherence to the SUHREC ethical research standards. Additionally, confidentiality was maintained and participants were identified by pseudonyms. Codes were assigned to audio recordings, transcripts and demographic data. All audio recordings were erased at the completion of the study.

The research undertaken conformed to Swinburne University of Technology and external regulatory standards, including the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1   Introduction

This chapter begins with a description of the characteristics of the participants followed by the results of the interpretative phenomenological analysis of the study's interview data. The unique experience of each participant was considered separately as part of the IPA philosophy and a detailed description of the findings of the study are outlined. The results and discussion chapters are addressed in concert and identify the themes that emerged from the interview data. Quotes from the interviews with participants are included throughout the chapter to illustrate support for the themes associated with the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement.

4.1.1   Participants in the Study

Demographic information for each participant was collected by the researcher at the beginning of each interview and can be found in Table 3 (page 63). Pseudonyms have been used to protect participant confidentiality.

A total of 15 participants, ten females and five males, were interviewed for the study. All participants in the study had experienced the death of a sibling. Two participants were recruited from the same family (one male and one female) and were two and half years apart in age. The ages of participants ranged from 19 to 50 years with the mean age being 31 years. The mean age of participants at the time of their sibling's death was 17.6 years. The age of the deceased sibling at death ranged from 11 years to 27 years, with a mean age at death of 19.35 years.

All participants were Caucasian. Ten participants identified a religion/spirituality and five had no beliefs. Six participants reported they were married or in a de facto relationship, two reported they were divorced and seven reported being single.

At the time of the study interview, the amount of time that had passed since the death ranged from 2 to 35 years with the mean of time passed since death being 12.3 years. Eight of the 15 participants lost younger siblings and seven participants lost older siblings. Five females lost a brother and five females lost a sister. Four males lost a brother and one male lost a sister.

Ten participants reported that the death of their sibling was sudden or unexpected while five advised that their sibling's death was somewhat expected or anticipated. Five deaths were reported as a result of a motor vehicle accident, three deaths were due to cancer or cancer related illnesses and two siblings died due to unknown cardiac disease. The causes of the four remaining sibling deaths were reported as follows: a non-cancerous protracted illness, a drowning, a military accident and a suicide. Ten of the participants reported that they have no remaining siblings.

The average interview time was 84 minutes and the duration of the interviews ranged from 60 to 110 minutes.

Table 3.

Participant Pseudonyms, Demographic Information, Details of Deceased Sibling's Death and Number of Remaining Siblings.

Pseudo-nym	Age at inter-view	Age at sibling death	Gender	Ethnicity	Religious Affiliation	Education	Occupation	Marital Status	Age of deceased sibling at death	Pseudo-nym of Sibling	Gender of dead sibling	Cause of sibling's death	Time elapsed since sibling's death (years)	Sudden or anticipated	Number of remaining siblings
Harriet	38	23	Female	Caucasian	None	Currently studying	Student/ Mother	Married	27	Yasmine	Female	Cardiac disease	15	Sudden	Nil
Eric	27	25	Male	Caucasian	Christian	Degree	Engineer	Single	23	Adrian	Male	Car accident	2	Sudden	Nil
Nancy	29	25	Female	Caucasian	Christian	Degree	Pastoral Care	Single	18	Lionel	Male	Cancer	4	Anticipated	4
Anastasia	22	15	Female	Caucasian	Christian	Currently studying	Student	Single	18	Layla	Female	Cardiac disease	7	Sudden	Nil
Anita	28	15	Female	Caucasian	Christian	Degree	HR Advisor	Single	20	Leon	Male	Car accident	18	Sudden	Nil
Donald	50	15	Male	Caucasian	None	Secondary	Unemployed	Divorced	17	Neil	Male	Hit by car	35	Sudden	2
Linda	38	20	Female	Caucasian	None	Diploma	Office manager	Married	15	Yvonne	Female	Car accident	18	Sudden	Nil
Eve	23	18	Female	Caucasian	Christian	Secondary	Administration	De facto	16	Connor	Male	Suicide	5	Sudden	Nil
Elaine	46	17	Female	Caucasian	Spiritual	Secondary	Merchandiser	Divorced	19	Yardley	Male	Car accident	29	Sudden	Nil
Emily	19	14	Female	Caucasian	None	Gap year	Customer service	Single	11	Kiki	Female	Cancer	6	Anticipated	1
Marvin	21	17	Male	Caucasian	None	Currently studying	Student	Single	11	Kiki	Female	Cancer	6	Anticipated	1
William	40	19	Male	Caucasian	Christian	Degree	Volunteer co-ordinator	Married	26	Yves	Male	Military accident	21	Sudden	1
Anna	27	19	Female	Caucasian	Spiritual	Secondary	Online learning	Single	23	Lisa	Female	Long illness	7	Anticipated	Nil
Nellie	29	23	Female	Caucasian	Spiritual	Secondary	Property Manager	Married	18	Rory	Male	Cancer Treatment	6	Anticipated	Nil
Scott	27	22	Male	Caucasian	Christian	Degree	Nurse	Married	20	Aaron	Male	Drowning	5	Sudden	Nil

4.1.2 Participant Stories

The interview data captured the participants' subjective experience of the death of their sibling, their response to the death and includes reflections from the current day. The participants who experienced a sibling's chronic or terminal illness prior to their sibling's death also spoke of the impact of this experience in their interview.

Below are participant profiles that provide a brief overview of the circumstances of their siblings' death, what was happening in their life at the time of their siblings' death and their response to the death event. The profiles provide some insight into the relationships participants had with their deceased sibling at the time of death and the impact on the surviving siblings' day to day life following the death.

4.1.2.1 Harriet

Harriet is 38 years old, married and a mother of two small children and is currently completing a Bachelor's Degree. Harriet's mother died when she was 10 months old and her father re-married before she turned 3 years old. When her father's relationship with her step-mother ended, he drove off in his van when Harriet was aged 11 years and her sister, Yasmine, was aged 15 years. Both were placed in State care as their step-mother took her children (Harriet's three half siblings) to live overseas. Harriet stated that she and Yasmine were best friends with the same social group and lived together in shared houses after Harriet left State care at the age of 16 years. Yasmine died suddenly while travelling overseas as a result of undiagnosed cardiac disease, a similar death to her mother. Harriet advised that her world stopped when Yasmine died and she struggled with the loss, contemplated suicide and ultimately decided to find another way through her grief. Harriet described the experience of losing her sister as a life changing event that prompted questions concerning mortality and the meaning of life.

4.1.2.2 Eric

Eric is a 27 year old engineer who described his family background as Italian and Catholic. He lives with his parents and a brother who is approximately 4 years younger. Eric's second

youngest brother, Adrian, died in a motor vehicle accident two years ago at age 23. Eric described their relationship as a strong friendship and that they shared the same social group, similar interests and played in the same basketball team for 16 years. Eric advised that he has experienced the additional stress of an Inquest into his brother's death by the Coroners Court of Victoria. He advised that the Coroners Court Inquest had created problems within the friendship group as well as further contributing to the level of distress experienced by his family following the loss of their son and brother.

4.1.2.3 Nancy

Nancy is 29 years old and a pastoral care worker who lost her 18 year old brother, Lionel, four years ago following a six year battle with cancer. Nancy is the second eldest of five siblings and considers that her family is close although the loss of her brother is rarely spoken about with her family. Nancy relied on friends to help her through her brother's death but was disappointed with the support she received. Nancy feels that she is yet to confront feelings of grief and describes that aspects of her brother's illness and death remain in "the freezer".

4.1.2.4 Anastasia

Anastasia was 16 years old when her 18 year old sister died unexpectedly of cardiac disease. She felt very close to her sister and her sister's boyfriend, both relationships were lost as a result of her sister's death. Anastasia advised that she struggled to continue in her studies after her sister's death but has since worked towards the completion of a social work degree. Anastasia advised that since her sister's death, her family has struggled initially with her father's disengagement from life and then her mother's substance abuse. As an only child, Anastasia expressed that she finds it difficult to contemplate leaving home amidst of the scenario described as she feels she needs to be present to ensure her parents' relationship continues.

4.1.2.5 Anita

Anita was 15 years old when her 20 year old brother was killed in a motor vehicle accident. Anita reported that she felt disconnected from this loss for a number of years, expecting that he

would walk through the door and that his death was surreal. Problems in Anita's parents' relationship became evident after her brother' death as her father blamed her mother for allowing him to be a groomsman at his cousin's wedding as he was involved in an accident that resulted in his death on the way to the ceremony. Subsequently, Anita's father died five years following her brother's death. She still lives at home with her mother 18 years after her brother's death and finds it difficult to separate from her family.

4.1.2.6 Donald

Donald's 17 year old brother was hit by a car while a passenger on a bicycle 35 years ago when Donald was 15 years old. Donald felt that he dealt with his brother's death well although recognises that things were different in the 1970's and perhaps he would have benefited more from support at school and at home. Donald has a twin brother and believes this relationship was helpful in adapting to the loss as they discussed how they felt about their brother's death and that there was always someone that he could talk to who understood.

4.1.2.7 Linda

Linda's 15 year old sister died in a car accident when she was aged 20 years. Her mother was driving the vehicle in country Victoria when the vehicle collided with a tree. Following her sister's death, Linda embarked on an exchange year where she stayed with families across the USA and Europe. Linda described this time as being helpful in talking about her sister's death to host families but feels that this conversation has been lacking with her own family. Linda is now a mother and expressed that she has fears about her daughter's safety particularly when with her parents and the thought of her daughter being a passenger in the car with her mother creates a heightened sense of anxiety.

4.1.2.8 Eve

Eve's brother suicided when he was 16 years old and she was 18. Eve spoke about the close connection that she had with her brother which she believes was a result of her parents being unavailable. Eve described feeling traumatised by her brother's death and that the support of her

partner has helped her to confront feelings of grief and she feels she has commenced a healing process. Prior to this, Eve spent a number of years caring for her parents in the wake of her brother's suicide. She reports that her parents have experienced a number of significant mental health issues including agoraphobia, depression and suicidality. Eve spoke about her struggles in separating from her parents at a time when there was no one else to care for them.

4.1.2.9 Elaine

Elaine adored her older brother who died in a motor vehicle accident aged 19 when she was 17 years old. She and her brother lived separately at the time of his death as her brother, Yardley, moved out due to their step-mother's physical abuse. Elaine advised that she had a difficult relationship with her mother and then her step-mother. After confiding in her father about physical abuse, they both moved out, six months later her brother was killed in accident. Elaine spoke about not finding anyone in her life who she felt accepted her the way that her brother had and that she has searched for the level of understanding and closeness he provided ever since his death. Elaine expressed that her disrupted relationship with her brother has affected relationships with partners and she feels that even her father does not understand what she has lost with the death of her brother.

4.1.2.10 Emily and Marvin

Emily and Marvin arrived from interstate with their parents to participate in the study. Emily advised that she has found it difficult to cope with the loss of her younger sister when she was aged 14 and that she has felt that the family has moved on as represented by the silence surrounding her sister's death. Marvin, who was 17 years old at the time of his sister's death, advised that he was aware that his sister Emily was struggling with the loss of their sister but he did not know how to speak to her about their sister's death but was also very affected by this situation. Both Emily and Marvin conveyed their story of their sister's decline and the subsequent disruption to family life ending in an intense vigil surrounding their sister's life and ultimate death. Both expressed a desire to be closer to each other and the impetus to make the most of their lives.

4.1.2.11 William

William's older brother died in a military accident when he was aged 19 and his brother was 26 years old. William advised that at the time, his family had recently moved from rural Victoria to a much bigger regional city but did not have the social connections that helped to facilitate a sense of belonging and understanding at the time of the tragedy. William advised that his new friends could not fathom what he had lost and shunned his expressions of grief. Consequently, William felt that he could not rely on his friends for support and connected with his mother who was also battling the defence force in order to understand what had happened to her son. William spoke of the years he experienced depression following his brother's death and his inability to study and engage in life. He also reported experiencing depression and a potential eating disorder in his late adolescent years.

4.1.2.12 Anna

Anna advised that her older sister had experienced a protracted, undiagnosed illness, the severity of which became apparent just prior to her death. Her sister Lisa died at 23 years of age when Anna was 19 years old. Although her sister's illness encompassed a number of years, Anna felt unprepared for her sister's death and continued to struggle with the acceptance of her death some seven years later. Anna described their relationship as very close and had a strong connection with her deceased sister. Anna reported feeling traumatised by her sister's death and struggled with depression that she believes was exacerbated by her sister's death.

4.1.2.13 Nellie

Nellie was 23 years old when her brother, aged 18, died from complications of cancer treatment. She reported that her early life was fraught with difficulty and that she and her brother had a close relationship as they had supported each other. Approximately 12 months after her brother's death, her father died of cancer and Nellie has struggled to come to terms with both of their deaths. One aspect that she finds troubling is the anxiety she experiences concerning her daughter and that she may have a similar fate to that of her brother. Nellie reports that she does

not have a close relationship with her mother and realises that her marriage lacks a feeling of closeness.

4.1.2.14 Scott

Scott is 27 years old and has recently completed his studies and is working as a nurse in theatre. He spoke about the death of his younger brother at 20 years who was a sports identity and drowned while kayaking five years ago. Scott advised that his brother was a strong swimmer and that he wished that he had been with him on the day he went missing. Scott's brother's body was not found for two weeks and his disappearance and subsequent death attracted media attention due to his sporting profile. Scott reported that his family was coping with the loss although he feels the pressure to stay close to his parents which has been difficult to balance with a new wife.

4.1.3   Themes

Although the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement was captured via retrospective interviews, participants were able to describe their experience with clarity and detailed emotion. Even though the participants were removed in time, they spoke of the loss of their sibling with intensity and sensitivity, and were able to express the significance of this experience on their lives.

As a result of analysis of the data, the emergent themes were grouped under six main headings: the experience of trauma and disenfranchised grief; the experience of grief; coping with sibling loss in adolescence and beyond; loss as a crisis and growth; the family's response to loss; and death and the challenges of adolescence. Each main heading contains a number of themes which are discussed in the following section. In the interest of readability, utterances such as repeated words, stammering, and space fillers (e.g., "um," "like", "you know", "kind of") have been omitted. Ellipses are used to designate excluded material.

4.2   The Experience of Trauma and Disenfranchised Grief

4.2.1   The Trauma of Adolescent Sibling Loss

This section contains themes of trauma as described by participants in the study. Trauma themes were present in many of the recounted experiences of sibling death. In most cases, the

experience of trauma described by participants remitted shortly after their sibling's death. Although, a few participants reported that the experience of trauma continued for many years.

4.2.1.1 Initial Feelings of Shock, Disbelief and Trauma

Participants' responses to the death of their sibling were often described in terms of trauma from a psychological, behavioural or cognitive perspective in both the context of sudden and anticipated death of a sibling.

> For the first few weeks, it was just in my head all the time, it was just like a reel playing over and over again, seeing his body and stuff. (Nancy, pp. 8-9)

> I think it was just like there was this CD in repeat in my head, I was never going to see my sister again. (Anastasia, p. 15)

> Actually, I could probably say that the two or three weeks afterwards, a complete black-hole in my memory and then just spent the next year just cutting people out of my life … anything I didn't deem necessary or important, I just did what I had to do and stayed within. (Eve, p. 12)

> The impact, to tell you the truth, it never really hit me immediately. So, it took months and months for me to feel the impact I guess … even to this day, I still think he's coming home. (Eric, pp. 6-7)

> I don't remember heaps about after she died kind of thing, I think I must have changed but I don't remember really a lot of that year after she died. (Emily, p. 9)

> I think I did try like shut a lot of things out. It's weird, I remember so, so clearly a lot of things but then some things I try and block out … (Marvin, p. 12)

The loss of a sibling during adolescence was reported by all participants as a significant event in their life. Upon learning about their sibling's death, whether the death was anticipated or unexpected, the initial reaction was one of shock, numbness, disbelief and intense sadness. Some

participants experienced intrusive and reoccurring thoughts that they would never see their sibling again or experienced flashbacks. The experience of intrusive thoughts was reported by two participants who described thoughts playing over in their mind. Both participants reported the thoughts decreased over time. One participant experienced the unexpected loss of a sibling, the other, the expected loss of a sibling.

The disruption of memory was evident for a number of participants who experienced the sudden or unexpected death of a sibling as well as those who experienced the death of a sibling with a long-term illness. The content of forgotten memories was typically related to painful aspects leading up to the death of their sibling for those who experienced an anticipated death of a chronically ill sibling. In the situation where participants experienced the somewhat expected or anticipated death of a sibling, participants tended to report patches of time where they found it difficult to recall other events either leading up to or following their sibling's death. There was a sense of blocking difficult memories but being able to recall other events during the same period of time.

Participants, whose sibling died suddenly and unexpectedly, struggled to recall other events after learning about the death and for a period of some weeks following their sibling's death. The loss of memory post death persisted for a discrete period of time and encompassed all aspects of day to day life.

The existence of trauma was not influenced by the death being expected or unexpected as both circumstances generated trauma-related responses at the time of death and for at least a short-term following the death. In some cases, participants reported an inability to process the traumatic event for many years. It has been recognised that the occurrence of a traumatic event is not dependent on the event itself but the interpretation of the experience by those affected and that unprocessed trauma has the capacity to block the mourning process (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015; Regehr & Sussman, 2004).

The participants' initial reactions to the death of their sibling were described in terms such as shock and disbelief which are common reactions as outlined in Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory. Bowlby described the initial responses to the death of a loved one as that of shock or numbness followed by intense separation distress. Worden (2010) described normal reactions to grief as feelings of sadness, anger, guilt, anxiety, loneliness, fatigue, helplessness, shock, yearning, emancipation, relief and numbness. However, some of the participants reported that these reactions continued for some months and with intensity, particularly the participants who experienced the sudden death of a sibling. Participants also evidenced other reactions such as intrusive thoughts and arousal relating to the death event. Such reactions could be described as a deviation from the normal grief response and encompass what has been termed as a traumatic stress response (Raphael, 1999).

A death is considered traumatic under any of the following circumstances: it occurs without warning; it is untimely; it involves violence; there is damage to the loved one's body; it was caused by a perpetrator; it is perceived as preventable; there is a belief the loved one suffered; or the death is perceived as unfair or unjust (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015). Hence, the loss of a sibling in adolescence is likely to be identified as traumatic by the very nature of it being untimely. Many of the siblings involved in the study could attest to additional circumstances that would deem their loved one's death as traumatic i.e. suicide, drowning, accident, suffering, preventability of the death.

One way to determine whether the bereaved may be experiencing a normal grief reaction or that of a traumatic stress response is to determine the focus of the distress. Typically, reactions to bereavement focus on memories of the deceased, whereas a traumatic stress response focuses on memories of the specific traumatic or horrifying aspects of the death event (Raphael, 1999). Distress was evident in the participants' stories of the death event, particularly in the case of sudden death but also in the stories of participants who witnessed the suffering of their chronically ill sibling.

4.2.1.2 Trauma of Expected Loss

Participants acknowledged their sibling's fight with a life threatening illness and often held thoughts of recovery and, in some cases; actual recovery was evident prior to their sibling's death. In such scenarios, the death of their sibling was a shock even in the context of chronic or terminal illness.

> I think after that, my whole world kind of came crashing down because he was actually dead, whereas the whole time, he'd get sick or he'd get infections or he'd get this or get that, but he'd still be okay. And his strength really made us strong. So, I think after he died there was just that emptiness and just numb. (Nellie, p. 33)

> … she went up in an ambulance one afternoon because she wasn't feeling well at all and then mum and dad came back that morning and told me because I was at home by myself. That part was heaps sudden … they thought it was good and then that happened (her death) so that was unexpected. (Marvin, p. 4)

Five of the participants in the study experienced the death of a sibling due to a chronic or terminal illness. Although the death may have been expected or anticipated, trauma was often woven through the stories of these participants. The themes of trauma identified by participants span the experience leading up to the death of their sibling, particularly that of their sibling's suffering, and/or the response to their sibling's death. Although participants were aware their sibling suffered from an illness that was often protracted and life threatening, their death was often described as a sudden due to complications or the death appeared to be "out of nowhere". Participants expressed the shock and numbness of finding out about the death of their sibling.

Each of the five participants spoke of the initial period of diagnosis, the course of the illness, periods of recovery, relapse and ultimately, death. The time between onset or diagnosis of a long-term illness and death ranged between one and six years. In one case, diagnosis of the illness took approximately 18 months and the participant's sibling died six months later. Two of participants spoke of their sibling's initial diagnosis of cancer, followed by a period of remission and then either

the recurrence of cancer or other complications due to treatment (i.e. heart failure, stroke). In these two cases, their siblings' illness spanned multiple years (six and four years). All five participants spoke of the pain and suffering their sibling experienced as they cycled through phases of relapse and recovery.

Analysis revealed a lack of evidence relating to themes of preparation prior to the death of their sibling. During the period from diagnosis to when their sibling died, there was little evidence from the data that the grieving process for participants had begun prior to their sibling's death. One participant expressed feelings of relief following her sibling's death due to the thought that her brother's struggle was now over. One participant reflected that *"it was like he was a young man in the body of a 90 year old man … that his body just could not work anymore"* (Nellie, p. 11) which suggests a level of recognition of her brother's impending death but later described feeling numb after his death. The other four participants (two from the same family) spoke of hope in the months prior to their siblings' death.

The results of the study concerning participants who experienced the death of a chronically ill sibling do not support the anticipatory grief literature which describes the phase before death as affording the bereaved with the opportunity to gain acceptance of the death (Kubler-Ross, 1969; Rando, 1983). Rando suggests that prior to the death of a loved one, the bereaved have an opportunity to resolve conflicts, gain meaning, understanding and acceptance prior to the actual death, and ultimately prepare for the death at an emotional and psychological level. The results of this study indicate that such opportunities may have been impeded by the inability to accept or recognise that death was a likely outcome. Perhaps the models of anticipatory grief are more applicable to adults who have more control and information concerning the health of the seriously ill. Additionally, siblings are likely to be caught up in the chaos of a family dealing with crisis. It could also be said that the view of treating medical practitioners as well as societal beliefs, do not promote discussion of the likely death of a child or adolescent. Hence, children and adolescents are distanced from death and this impacts their understanding and experience (Dickens, 2014).

Literature suggests that expected loss provides the opportunity to adapt to the reality of the loss, enables loved ones to say goodbye and such circumstances of the death are less likely to result in pathology (Gamino, Sewell & Easterling, 2000; Rando, 1983). Conversely, Davies (2001) argues that the exact time of death is difficult to anticipate even in the context of a life threatening illness and therefore death can be perceived as sudden even in the context of long-term illness. One suggestion for better outcomes concerning anticipated death is that the bereaved sibling has the opportunity to say goodbye to the dying sibling as this process helps to prepare the surviving sibling for the death of their brother or sister. The results of the study suggest that in the five cases explored, this opportunity was limited as death was sudden due to a dramatic change in health circumstances and although there was time leading up to this event, saying goodbye was not a theme present in this data.

4.2.1.3 Witness to a Difficult Death

Participants identified that the time leading up to the death of their chronically ill sibling was an extremely difficult period. They reported that their sibling's illness dominated the family landscape as parents endeavoured to care for the ill sibling.

> So, my mum doesn't really talk about stuff, so I think for the whole time Leonard was
>
> sick that made it really hard to talk – we didn't talk about it at all. Like, how we actually
>
> felt about it. It was just kind of the reality. (Nancy, p. 24)

> … when I was speaking to my psychologist a while ago, I kind of realised that I don't
>
> actually remember a lot of that year (when her sister was ill). I remember lots of
>
> events but I don't really remember heaps and I am not sure if that's because I didn't
>
> want to remember it or because it was so rushed. (Emily, p. 4)

> So, I think that year was tricky in that sense, it was kind of weird not having mum and
>
> dad around all the time to talk about it but that was understandable, they had to be up
>
> there, so it was a bit hard … she would get better and then she would get worse again

and she'd go through phases with the treatments and things and then she was finally better at the end of the year … I think she got an infection from the chemo and it was actually the chemo not the cancer that killed her in the end ... (Emily, p. 5)

I think through year 12, I put everything on standby, emotionally on standby, and so that's when I had a year off and actually like dealt with it and that was a bit different. So, day to day it was different because all through year 11, I always had my phone on me to check for updates, see what's happened, always ... (Marvin, p. 10)

… I realised what I kind of had was unfulfilled grief, you expect someone to die and then they don't and everyone expects you to be really, really happy and you are happy but you thought they were going to die … but you haven't been able to process or deal with those feelings, and I feel like with Leonard, that kind of happened over and over again … it's way crapper when someone actually does die but actually, also not having almost any right to be sad about somebody not dying, is a really hard thing to deal with. (Nancy, p. 10)

Participants reflected on the time leading up to their sibling's death as both tumultuous and confusing. Their unexpressed emotions prior to their sibling's death seemed to be conflated with the grief experienced upon the death of their sibling. The events leading up to the death of their sibling were very much a part of the participants' stories and the experiences of pre-loss and post-loss seemingly intertwined.

The analysis of data from the interviews with the five participants who lost a sibling due a chronic or terminal illness revealed minimal evidence of an ability to process the experience of witnessing their sibling's failing health and ultimate death. Although they may not have been physically present as their siblings were often hospitalised, the participants described the decline of their sibling's health, the urgency of the last hours and in some cases, the sight of their sibling's deceased body. The experience reported by participants described alternating feelings of intense

concern for their sibling and a period of stabilisation or recovery which provided hope over a period of weeks, months or even years. The cycling back and forth of these events concluded with the death of their sibling followed by the realisation of their loss.

Participants spoke about a lack of communication within the family in relation to their sibling's illness both prior to and after their sibling's death. The participants appeared to accept the reality of the declining situation and endeavoured to adjust as best they could to an altered family life. Participants did not indicate that they communicated how they felt to their parents but acknowledged that this was a difficult experience for their parents. The lack of communication about their emotional response to their sibling's plight seemed to continue until their sibling's death, after which time, subsequent coping with the loss of their sibling appeared to supersede all other experiences.

Participants described "taking a back seat" and that they endeavoured to support their parents as best they could which often resulted in a level of increased independence despite their level of development (early, middle or late adolescence). Participants were faced with adjusting to changes in family dynamics and, in some situations, living arrangements while parents cared for their ill sibling. As described by Emily above, her experience during the last year of her sibling's life consisted of living with one parent or in the homes of friend's families within the community while both her parents were with her ill sister in a city hospital far from home. She described this time as a difficult period, away from her parents and older brother. She reflected that if she could change anything about that year it would be that she remained with her family during her sister's illness.

The data from this study suggests that in the case of adolescent sibling bereavement, the context of expected death due to a long-term illness adds complexity via the silent experience of being a witness to the suffering and death of a sibling. The disruption and anxiety experienced from witnessing a chronic illness can contribute to the complexity of the bereaved siblings' grief over the loss of their sibling. Research by Fanos and Nickerson (1991) suggests that adolescents who witness the chronic illness of a sibling who died before adulthood, experienced higher levels of anxiety and a

global sense that things were about to go wrong. A subset of this group also experienced fear relating to their own health and an untimely death (Fanos & Nickerson). The data from this study evidenced the phenomenon of health anxiety in surviving siblings who lost a sibling due to illness and sudden death due to an undiagnosed heart condition.

4.2.1.4 Trauma of Sudden Loss

In this study, sudden loss was characterised as unexpected death as a result of an accident, unknown fatal health condition or suicide.

> The week after his death, I don't remember his funeral, I don't remember getting his name tattooed on my wrist, I don't remember any of it. (Eve, p. 12)

> I stood in dad's doorway and he was just on the phone, he was just, yeah, yeah, and he hung up the phone and I just looked at him and I said Yardley's gone. I just knew. I remember walking out after dad nodded his head, I walked out onto the front balcony, I just fell to my knees and I screamed. (Elaine, p.21)

> It's like my heart had just been ripped out. He was just so young. It was something we weren't expecting, I guess. I never had a chance to say goodbye … just a horrible, horrible feeling just like I was underground, that's kind of what I felt like and I couldn't get above ground. Nothing seemed right anymore, everything just seemed dark. (Scott, p. 5)

> I think, weirdly enough, losing him while it really did affect me, losing him was easier to come to terms with than the method in which he's gone and that's one the thing where, if I have a quiet moment and my mind starts going as people's minds trail off or whatever. I really often get really angry at him, he didn't leave a note, other than a couple of comments here and there, there wasn't really anything to indicate that he was really struggling with anything. (Eve, p. 11-12)

Participants spoke about learning of their sibling's unexpected death and described the experience of intense emotions such as anger, yearning, sadness, fear and confusion. This theme was more apparent when the death of a sibling was sudden and unanticipated rather than anticipated. The emotional response was described as overwhelming and left an indelible mark of profound loss.

One participant, who was 15 years old when her sister died, spoke of being unable to sleep in her own room for six months and slept on the floor of her parents' bedroom, moving to the lounge room and eventually back to her own room. She advised that she was unsure why she felt so insecure but thought it was due to the possibility of seeing her sister's ghost. She spoke of not understanding the permanence of death and felt that she would see her sister again soon.

Research suggests that the shock and trauma associated with sudden death is more likely to result in a pathological response for the bereaved and entail a longer period of recovery when compared to loss of a loved one to a terminal illness (Parkes & Weiss, 1983). Additionally, the bereaved of those who die suddenly, especially young individuals, have more difficulty adapting to the death up to two years later than those who had prior warning (Worden, 2009). The sudden and violent loss of a significant person may affect an individual's sense of justice, and set the scene for the bereaved to experience both trauma and grief in concert (Regehr & Sussman, 2004).

The above is exemplified in the case of Eve who described the loss of memory for two to three weeks following her brother's suicide. She reported feeling numb for many years following her brother's death. Given the traumatic nature of Eve's brother's death, it is likely that she experienced a traumatic stress response, a response that has been documented in connection with homicides, suicides and disasters (Raphael, 1999). Research suggests that symptoms of a traumatic stress response may settle for some people and others may develop ongoing patterns of psychopathology leading to diagnoses such as posttraumatic stress disorder (Raphael). It is therefore important to be able to delineate between a bereavement reaction and that of a traumatic stress reaction.

4.2.1.5 Preventability of the Death

A common theme amongst the participants who experienced the sudden loss of a sibling was questions concerning the preventability of their siblings' death. The theme was applicable to the sudden or unexpected death of a sibling and encompassed deaths that were caused by an accident (i.e. car accident, drowning, military accident) as well as undiagnosed cardiac disease.

… in hindsight it wasn't a total shock, she had been resuscitated once at a swimming pool in her teens for the same reason but my parents, well my step mother and my father, didn't really pursue it. When we knew she'd had many incidents when she would just pass out but they never really had done anything about it … so it wasn't really an accident, it was probably something that could have been avoided." (Harriet, p. 3)

The first thing was, why wasn't I with him? It was a Friday afternoon, I was on an afternoon shift driving to work and remember looking over towards the race course and how sunny it was and I knew Aaron was going out kayaking and I thought I should have called in sick as I was driving into work, I said I'd love to be out in the water. And then a couple of hours later I got the phone call to say that they had found his kayak upside down. Every time I think back, it's just why didn't I call in sick and just go out kayaking with him. (Scott, pp. 7-8)

I remember saying this to (twin brother), too, I said, why did – they didn't have to go so soon, they could have just waited … he knew they were coming. I said, well, he should have waited for you guys to take him, I said to (twin brother) that's what he should have done, waited for them to take him where he was going instead of riding a bike in the middle of winter. (Donald, p. 24)

… it's something you think about now, whereas, if it had of happened somewhere else but then, if I had of picked her up and I was driving, I don't think I'd be here either

because I had a tiny little car. If dad had been driving, I don't think he would have

been able to cope with it. (Linda, p. 18)

When I look back and I think it was so easy when I did tell my dad. It was so easy and

he didn't question it, it was just like we are out of here, he said you are not treating my

kids like that. And I think, why didn't we tell him when it first happened and him and

Yardley and I would still, we would have had four years extra together and then I think

maybe things would have been different because, Yardley wouldn't have got close to

the people he got close to over at my mum's and that was who he was with when he

died and so it's like, ahh, all these 'if's'. (Elaine, p. 8)

Many of the participants spoke about the preventability of their sibling's death and that the

death could have been avoided by direct intervention by themselves or a change in the course of

events leading up to the death. Participants pondered the 'what if's' that may have changed the

outcome of events. Self-blame was not evident in the data although participants spoke of feelings of

frustration and about their wish that things could have been different. The suddenness and

preventability of the loss have the capacity to complicate the grieving process and is cited as a risk

factor for a traumatic death experience (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015).

The trauma of unexpected loss differs from the trauma of expected loss in a number of

ways. Unexpected loss strikes without warning or preparation and is thought to result in more

intense grief with a longer duration than anticipated death (Davies & Limbo, 2010). Studies have

revealed that unexpected loss may be a risk factor for grief complications (Raphael, 1999).

Additionally, this type of loss is likely to have a greater impact on families, particularly if the death

was violent, than a death due to chronic illness (Dickens, 2014). It is likely that adolescents who

experience the sudden loss of a sibling may be confronted with questions concerning the

preventability of the death and whether their sibling suffered. Additionally, surviving siblings may

struggle with making sense of the death and existential issues (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). These

aspects of the loss experience can complicate the grieving process and inhibit the bereaved individuals' integration of the loss.

However, the anticipated loss of a sibling presents a different set of stressors that adversely affect bereaved adolescent siblings. Firstly, the impact of the sibling's chronic illness on family functioning and the potential withdrawal of emotional resources from the well sibling to care for their sibling may alter the developmental environment (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). Secondly, the presence of a chronically ill sibling in the family can create feelings of isolation for the well adolescent sibling at a time when they are attempting to navigate development tasks (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1998). Oftentimes, as the family endeavours to cope with the sibling's chronic illness, a silence descends as a way to insulate family members from confronting the distress and anxiety they face in this difficult situation (Charles & Charles, 2006). One aspect that has attracted little attention in the literature and was evidenced in the study was the processing of the experience of witnessing a sibling's chronic illness and decline. The death of the participants' sibling seemed to overshadow the experience that preceded the event and this was not revisited as part of the mourning process. Hence, if the observed decline of a sibling was traumatic, this may present a risk factor for complicated grief.

4.2.2 The Disenfranchisement of Adolescent Sibling Grief

This section outlines some of the destabilising situational and personal factors that may create or influence the context within which sibling bereaved adolescents may find it challenging to confront their loss. Bereaved siblings unable to confront their grief may experience a protracted and difficult time accessing and learning to tolerate intense feelings. This chapter teases out the themes identified in the participant data that may act as a hurdle to accessing grief.

4.2.2.1 *Unrecognised Grief Intensity of Sibling Death*

Participants spoke of a profound loss experience in the wake of their sibling's death and the isolation they endured as others failed to understand the meaning of their loss.

And that's what I think would have really helped me, if I had a specialised sibling grief

therapist … that knew how I feel, there is nobody in the world that knows how you feel

until you lose a sibling. And like I said to you at the very start, you not only grieve your

past, you grieve your future as well. (Nellie, p. 47)

I think once he passed away, I was just so alone in the fact that, that person is with you

from when you are born, they know too much. They know how crazy your family is and

they know this and they know that and then…yeah, they are supposed to be there with

you for the rest of your life. (Nellie, p. 7)

I'm the second child and now I'm the only child and he is the other person who knew

all my stories. We had that history together and I can't share childhood memories with

anyone else because no one else was there with me, he was. (Elaine, p. 26)

… he was my brother, we are only 18 months apart, it's the most pivotal relationship

that I ever had, so when he was gone, it was like half of my life, he was my life and he

was gone. And, yeah, it really changed who I am and I don't know if I really can

pinpoint things that changed but I feel like a different person. (Eve, p. 7)

I felt like even if my parents, who are both from large families; my mum is one of nine

and my dad is one of five. Even if they'd lost a sibling, it wouldn't be the same as

losing a sibling at age 15 and then having no other siblings as well. (Anastasia, p. 5)

I had a talk with my dad recently, it was my brother's 29th anniversary in April, and

dad couldn't understand why I am still so upset. (Elaine, p. 13)

Data from interviews suggests that participant grief reactions were highly individualised.

Participants shared the unique story of their sibling relationship and the place their sibling occupied

in their lives. With the death of their sibling, a common history could no longer be shared.

Participants spoke of the struggle associated with the depth of their loss and felt that the

significance of their sibling relationship was not generally acknowledged by others. Two

participants, now the only surviving siblings, reported that even their parents were unable to fathom the depth of their loss.   Participants expressed that the death of their sibling also signified a loss of their past and/or a part of themselves.

The death of a sibling severs a familial tie that was expected to last a lifetime. One participant described her experience of sibling loss as "you not only grieve your past, you grieve your future as well." Each sibling spoke of the unique story of their sibling's life and death, and the significance of their sibling's death did not seem to be lessened by the passage of time. This theme can also be described in terms of an absence of response by others in conveying their understanding of the significance of the sibling relationship and meaning of their loss.

Balk (2009b) suggested that adolescent bereavement may be more intense and chronic than anticipated by those around them i.e. peers, parents, teachers. One marker of adolescent sibling grief intensity may be found in the nature of the siblings' pre-death relationship but specific studies in this area are lacking. The theme of intense grief following sibling loss supports the quantitative study by Robinson (2001) which compared the grief intensity of adults who lost a sibling to AIDS with a combined bereavement group (e.g. bereaved parents who had lost a child). Results of the study indicated that the sibling bereaved sample experienced higher levels of grief than the combined bereaved group and that the level of sibling closeness was positively and significantly related to level of grief. Although this study was of adults rather than adolescents, the sibling bond is the important aspect of this finding.

An older study by Davies (1988a) suggests the more central the person is in another's life, the more intense the grief reaction upon their death. Another marker may be the role the sibling played in their life, for example, the importance of the sibling bond may increase as a response to under-involvement by parents (Bank & Kahn, 1982). The latter was evident in two participant stories. One participant described growing up in a discordant family with an alcoholic father. She advised that as siblings, she and her brother looked after each other. The loss of her brother at age 18 when she was 23 years old was described as devastating. Another participant spoke of growing

up in a dysfunctional family environment and her brother became her protector against domestic violence. The experience of loss in these circumstances encompassed other factors that likely amplified the significance of the sibling relationship and the meaning of the loss of this relationship.

The intensity of sibling grief was not measured in this qualitative study although this was a strong universal theme that emerged from the data. It is important to note that many of those who participated in the study were motivated to tell their story and indicated they would like to contribute to the better understanding of adolescent sibling grief. Hence, their motivation may have been driven from their own intense grief experience of sibling loss.

The participants in this study may have struggled as adolescents to understand the overwhelming experience of their loss. The experience of loss may have been influenced by their development stage and the corresponding cognitive, emotional, social and behavioural responses to loss. An inability to confront and process loss may mask the intensity of their pain and blight their ability to express a deep sadness. The experience of overwhelming grief intensity may have triggered numbing or avoidance strategies in an effort to tolerate this intense pain. The development phase of adolescence is also likely to have influenced the way in which participants expressed their grief and, potentially, how others perceived their grief and responded to them. According to Fleming and Adolph (1986), adolescents confronted with loss, particularly in the later phase of adolescence (17 years and older) may display feelings of anger, guilt, ambivalence, fear, rejection, being misunderstood and withdrawal. Therefore, there is the potential to misread the grief response of adolescents when coupled with the developmental tasks they are endeavouring to navigate concurrently.

Assumptions made by others about the depth of the loss experienced by siblings risk an inaccurate evaluation of the bond that existed. The depth of the sibling relationship is difficult to ascertain without exploration and should not be typically described but viewed as a unique relationship for each individual of the sibling pair.

4.2.2.2 Push to Move On

Some of the participants alluded to a sense that they needed to get over the death of their

sibling and get on with their life.   They spoke about messages from family and friends that indicated

it was time to 'move on' and focus less on their deceased sibling.

I might talk to someone and they go, "well, why can't you just get over it?" or "what's

the big deal it's been X years?" They just don't understand that this isn't something

that just goes away and the other sibs (bereaved siblings) understand it can be

however many years and some days, you'll just have that first initial feeling of grief and

shock that you got the first time you found out or whatever. And they just understand

sometimes that can come back even without notice, and that there is no rhyme or

reason behind it, whereas, others don't always, they think it needs to be structured or

that you can control it and that's not the case. (Anna, pp. 21-22)

The main thing I think about is, it's a slowdown thing again, you don't have to get over

this overnight. You don't have to make everyone think that you are fine. You don't

have to be a tough guy … it's that invincibility that you have when you are young. I

think if I was talking to me now (to her younger self after her loss), I would be saying,

you've just got to go easy on yourself, just be a bit nicer to yourself, it's all right, you're

not that bad. But I didn't know that then … (Harriet, p. 25)

So they (parents) were able to take time off but they were pushing me to go back to

school and things and I kind of didn't want to, I didn't feel ready for it but that I think

made me angry as well, it was just like, well, you don't have to, you're not moving on

but you want me to … I couldn't understand and I'm very grateful now that they did it

but at the time, it was really a big struggle to go back to school. (Anastasia, p.6)

Knowing now what I know, I might have done things slightly different. I think I would

have definitely stayed away from school longer, definitely. I wouldn't have gone back

to school as soon as I did … now I would go back and say, no, wait at least another couple of weeks before you go back because I think it gave people the impression that, especially teachers for example, it didn't give them a chance for it to sink in that this was a major life event that affects you badly and that you need time … (Donald, p. 25)

Now when I know there is a funeral, I think in the past I thought the funeral was the end of something whereas now, I realise the funeral is the beginning. So, actually the funeral is the bit where everyone is still supporting you. After the funeral is when everyone else forgets. (Nancy, p. 21)

That's, I think, a thing that I've struggled with the last couple of years, is people get sick of you bringing up the fact that someone passed away in your family, so you get to a point where you just stop bringing it up, you stop talking about it. And, so it's nice to be able to have someone who's willing to listen to your story. (Anastasia, p. 24)

Four participants who were aged 15 and below indicated that their lives continued on much as before their siblings' death and there was an expectation that they return to their normal routine (i.e. school) as soon as possible. This age group reported difficulties in concentrating at school and one individual advised that she was very angry at having to go back to school so soon when others in the family seemed to have more time to adjust. Two individuals in this age group changed their vocation as a result of those who had helped them during either their sibling's illness or after their sibling's death. Both vocational choices shifted towards the helping profession (e.g., social worker). Participants indicated that their sibling's death marked a significant time in their lives and they continued to be affected by the loss in different ways. This theme includes an aspect of 'time since death' and the supposition that the impact of the loss is lessened by the passage of time.

The time since death reported by participants spanned 35 years extending from the 1980s to as recent as two years ago. During this time period it could be assumed that the practices applied to grief and loss within institutions (i.e. schools) or organisations had evolved. Despite the accessibility

of information relating to grief and loss, the sense of being pushed along by those outside of the family (e.g. school, work, friends), remained evident even in the most recent accounts. This sense of being pushed along may also be driven by the very nature of adolescence in their pursuit of independence and growth. Whatever the cause, results of the study suggest that the drive to "move on" with life interspersed the experience of grief and became more pervasive with the passage of time.

One participant spoke of her experience of grief as unpredictable and not reflective of the linear process often spoken about as the normal grief process. Others spoke about being "out of sync" with the expectation that they should "be over it by now". None of the participants spoke of a developed understanding of grief which seems to indicate a potential lack of education concerning the typical trajectory of grief or the validation of their unique experience. Most of the participants accessed a counsellor or psychologist at some point in time and this conversation with a professional would provide an opportunity for psycho-education on the individuality of grief. Not many of the participants spoke of being made aware of the individual nature of grief and what to expect in their experience of loss.

A dominant message received by participants was to move on with their life following grief. Despite theoretical shifts in the conceptualisation of grief, it seems the general view of grief remains with stage theories and that of "letting go". The viewpoint reflected in data evidences that the attitudes of others does not reflect contemporary grief models and points to a lack of education concerning the experience of grief in the broader community.

4.2.2.3 A Lesser Grief

A number of the participants spoke of their grief being recognised as a lesser grief than their parents' grief and that it was their role to "put on a brave face" and support their parents.

> Yves was in (interstate city) when he died, we were in (larger regional town) and this
>
> school friend of mine made a comment, I can't even remember what the comment
>
> was but what he was getting at was that there was a physical distance and therefore,

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it's not the same as losing someone who you shared a house with or lived under the same roof with. And there was another comment about losing a sibling isn't the same as losing a parent. And, that in a way, started a bit of a downward spiral I think. (William, p. 9)

… a big thing that was said around my sister's death is, continually, it's the worst thing that can ever happen to a parent and I would get stopped on the street and people would say, how are your parents going? And I kind of felt a little bit left out of that. I guess in a sense I felt really angry, too, because I felt like no one understood my perspective. (Anastasia, p. 5)

"Oh yeah, that's really sad, how's mum?" And to me it was like my grief didn't matter because I was not the mum, I hadn't lost a child but in saying that a brother is almost like … especially a younger brother is almost like a child anyway because it's my job to look after him, make sure his head doesn't get flushed down the toilet at school. (Nellie, p. 47)

I had a photo of Lionel on my screen on my phone and he (manager) was just like when are you going to change that? And I was just like, what? I don't think he meant it the way it sounded but I always felt like he just wanted me to hurry up and process stuff so that it wouldn't be a hassle to him … then his wife had a miscarriage and it was like this massive deal … not that I didn't think it was a big deal but I was like - wow! You guys are allowed to be that upset about this but I am not allowed to be upset and you're worried that it might affect you that my brother died? (Nancy, p. 24)

It wasn't about me, so I didn't think of it as being about me, so it doesn't matter. It was about mum, for a start because she was devastated. And it was about (brother) who was too young to understand what was going on in some respects … there were stuff that he had to be looked after. (Donald, p. 14)

I would say 95% of the time at least, if not, close to a 100% of the time, if I tell

someone that my brother died, he committed suicide, he was 16, their response is

always "your poor parents" every single time. (Eve, p.7)

Almost everybody will be just be strong for mum and dad, you need to be there for

them, always … it's like what about me, what about what I am going through? Who is

going to be there for me? (Anita, p. 20)

Participants reported that their grief experience was not validated or considered as

important or impactful as that of their parents.   Participants reported that the significance of their

relationship was downgraded when compared to the loss of a parent or the loss of a child.

Additionally, the way in which a sibling dies has the capacity to affect how others respond.   For

example, the stigma associated with suicide was reflected in the comment below:

"He committed suicide" and then it all shuts down. I've always wondered if I said he

died from cancer, if their response would be different, which I am sure it would be

because I liken suicide to murder in a way, when someone says that someone has been

murdered or whatever, it has a very similar kind of connotation to it compared to car

crash, cancer, etc. (Eve, p. 20)

Disenfranchised grief is well documented in the literature on adolescent sibling

bereavement and is experienced when the loss of a person is not openly acknowledged, publically

mourned or socially validated (Doka, 2008). It suggests a belief that someone's loss is not as

impactful or significant as another person's loss. Disenfranchised grief was prevalent within the data

of this study and participants reported feeling angry and frustrated that their grief was not as

important as their parents. One participant, Anastasia, who was 15 years old at the time of her

sister's death, spoke of being handed information by the funeral director and requested to give the

information to her parents when they were feeling better. Anastasia advised that this made her feel

that she had to disconnect from her grief in order to fulfil what was expected of her. This process

may force adolescent bereaved siblings into adult-oriented roles beyond that of their development phase.

4.2.2.4 Camouflaged Grief

Although the impact of the family is discussed in *The Family's Response to Loss* section, it is important to note in this section that some participants indicated that they were unable to fully express their grief due to the fear that they would cause their parents distress. Hence, this theme represents another form of disenfranchised grief.

It was very lonely because I felt a lot of pressure to be strong for my parents and in a sense, if I felt really upset I would try not to show it because the minute I started crying then they would as well. So, I tried really hard to suppress my feelings, so often the only times I'd really allow myself to cry was when I was in the shower or the toilet or in my room by myself … they could be having a good day and if they saw me upset then that would trigger them too. (Anastasia, p. 8)

… and that's the other thing, when you're around family, too – if they are happy, you don't really want to make everybody sad so, it's kind of like, it's a tricky thing sometimes … but you are not feeling so great … I think sometimes I was upset anyway and that was okay. Like, it wasn't always bad but often I think it was kind of more like covered up. (Nancy, p. 38)

I felt like I had to put on a really brave front at all times. I felt like I had to be strong for my mum and I just wasn't sure how to act sometimes … I hate seeing my mum cry, I can't stand looking at her, I don't even want to be there when mum's crying. So, you know, I would try to be strong for her. (Anita, p. 5)

Because you don't want it out there as if I am dwelling on it and that's all I am thinking about because you do move on. But at the same time, it's still something that happened; she was still a real person that you want to remember. But sometimes it's

hard how to do that because then, at the same time, I don't necessarily want to bring

it up sometimes with mum and dad because I think then it'll upset them. So, it's a bit

strange that way. (Linda, pp. 12-13)

… she (mother) doesn't know everything because I don't want to cause much more

grief. She's going through problems herself … I feel like I don't want to pressure her

too much. (Eric, pp. 19-20)

In an effort to avoid upsetting parents, many participants reported that they did not express

their grief in front of their parents. Participants tended to push their grief underground and grieved

without the support of key caregivers. Bereaved siblings reported that they were left to find their

own way through grief and often took on a role in emotionally caring for their parents. This theme

did not appear to be time bound and was evident in the data when participants spoke about the

past as well as the present day as they avoided the subject of their sibling's death for fear of

upsetting their parents.

The theme of *Camouflaged Grief* is similar to that of *A Lesser Grief* as described above and

was coined by Rosen (1984-1985) as "prohibited mourning". "Prohibited mourning" describes the

way in which bereaved siblings are either directly or indirectly encouraged to internalise feelings of

loss as their parents' loss is thought to be much greater. The theme of *Camouflaged Grief*

encompasses the sibling's ability to monitor their own grief, support their parents and only expose

them to feelings they believe their parents can tolerate (Shapiro, 1994).

4.3   The Experience of Grief

This section illustrates two processes of grief, firstly, grief as an intrapsychic psychological

process which involved the expression of loss in some way. Secondly, grief as a transactional

process in which others responded to the participants' expression of grief and this subsequently

influenced the participants' further expression or repression of grief. The latter is predominantly

represented in the section titled The Disenfranchisement of Adolescent Sibling Grief but is also evident throughout this section.

4.3.1 Emotional Response and Expression of Loss

Grief is the bereaved person's reaction to loss and encompasses emotions, cognitions and responses that may be physical, behavioural, social or spiritual (Corr, 2013). This section explores the participants' responses to loss and mechanisms of expression.

4.3.1.1 *Grief Shifts, Alters and Changes*

Participants advised that the way they grieved over the loss of their sibling was not the linear process typically depicted in popular grief models, rather, it shifted and changed on a daily basis.

So, even to this day, I'm still grieving … as time goes on, the way I grieve shifts and

alters and changes. (Anna, p. 11)

Some days were better than others. I found that I seem to get into a system where I'll

be okay for two weeks. It's pretty much two weeks to the day and then I'd have a day

where I was just an absolute mess … I would go to school most days, I would make it

9:00 till 3:30, other days I would go in late or I would leave early. (Anastasia, p. 7)

I think things are always hard some days more than others. If someone asked me if it

was hard I would say, yeah, some days but other days, I think it's just kind of normal.

(Nancy, p. 38)

But day to day, I just tried to … get through each day but sometimes it would be hard

like certain days or birthdays and things like that were hard … I sort of just put

everything emotionally on standby, (Marvin, p. 11)

Participants appeared to grapple with the nature of their grief, describing it as unpredictable and changeable over time. This appeared to be the case for Anita whose brother was killed in a car accident when she was 15 years old as detailed below:

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I think for a couple of years, I was just very numb and I would have moments where

it'd kind of hit me and then I would feel really down, just crying, I don't really cry that

much … I remember a couple of years later, I started feeling really anxious. So, just the

whole couldn't eat, I remember I would always think that I had a disease, I always felt

like I was going to die basically and that was probably related (to brother's death).

(Anita, p. 8)

Anita reported experiencing fluctuating and, at times, debilitating high levels of anxiety over

the 15 years following the loss of her brother. One situation in which she reported feeling highly

anxious was driving and this may be potentially linked to the way in which her brother died. Anita's

experience of anxiety in the years that followed her brother's death could be described as a psycho-

emotional manifestation of grief. Anita's response mirrors findings by Fanos and Nickerson's (1991)

study of the long term effects of sibling loss in adolescence that found those who were aged

between 13 to 17 years at the time of their sibling's death, experienced global anxiety, a global

sense that things were about to go wrong, vulnerability towards their own health or a fear of death.

Responses such as anxiety, fear and anger may be anchored in the inability to express feelings

associated with loss.   Accordingly, McKissock and McKissock (2012) proposed that bereaved people

who are unable to adequately express their grief may be vulnerable to psychological or physical ill

health in the long term.

4.3.1.2 *The Sad and Angry Feelings of Loss*

Participants reported typical feelings associated with the loss of their sibling such as sadness,

anger, hopelessness, fear, numbness, loneliness and anxiety.   The dominant emotional responses to

loss were that of sadness and anger.

… he is kind of immortalised at that age and it makes me sad because I'd give anything

to...you know, he'd probably be married with children by now because he always

wanted children young and stuff. So, that makes me sad as well, because he would be

at that age to start doing that. (Nellie, p. 44)

I just picture what I'm missing out. I would have loved to see Aaron's kids and his wife and … I've got nephews and nieces on (wife's) side of the family now, but I really miss that cause when mum and dad have gone, it's just me. (Scott, p. 20)

The most commonly expressed response to the loss of a sibling across all participant data was that of intense sadness. The participants' expression of grief was often anchored in the context of their world today. They reported experiencing ongoing grief and although for some, many years had passed, there were times when the intensity of grief was similar to when they first found out about their sibling's death. Their sadness encompassed thoughts of the future without their sibling and the milestones in life that they would now experience 'alone' as the person with whom they would have shared those experiences has gone.

Another emotion commonly expressed by participants was that of anger. Participant anger was directed at the way in which their sibling died, the unexpectedness of their death, perceived preventability of their death and/or what the loss represented in their life.

So, I felt really angry and I felt extremely scared. For six months after my sister passed away, I didn't sleep in my own room … for months, I was in a mattress on the floor of my parents' bedroom and then, I moved into the lounge room and, eventually, to my own room. I don't really know what that was about, I think just felt really insecure. As I said, I was quite spiritual, I believe in the afterlife, so I was very scared of seeing her ghost or something. (Anastasia, p. 5)

I understand that cancer affects everyone, I understand that it happened to her and I am not really angry at the fact that she is dead, I am just angry at cancer … seems like everyone has got cancer in some form so that makes me upset that other people have to go through the same thing but I understand that it happened to Kiki and you've got to move on and accept it. (Emily, p. 14)

… one day she said to me that I would never be alone, she would always be with me,

that we'd always have each other and I got mad for a while there because I felt like

she'd left me and that she just left me here on my own so I was quite angry about that.

(Anna, p. 12)

I really often get really angry at him, he didn't leave a note. Other than a couple of

comments here and there, there wasn't really anything to indicate that he was really

struggling with anything. (Eve, pp. 11-12)

Unlike sadness, anger was not typically carried forward to the present day but positioned in

the past. Although not overtly expressed in the interview, there was a sense of anger that plans for

a shared life and future would remain unfulfilled. The response of anger was present across the

spectrum of ages in adolescence suggesting that this emotional response was not age dependent.

This finding conflicts with research that suggests older adolescents (aged 17-19 years) report feeling

more angry at the time of their sibling's death than younger siblings (14-16 years of age) (Balk, 1981;

Balmer, 1992).

For the two younger siblings in this study, anger appeared rooted in feelings that the world

was unjust and they were fettered by a sense of abandonment. This was also true for an older

participant, Anna, who was 19 years old at the time of her sister's death. Although the age of the

participants at the time of their sibling's death is a marker of their developmental phase and is likely

to affect their ability to process the experience of grief, other contextual factors appear to exert

influence beyond that of age.

4.3.1.3 Re-Grief

Many of the participants in the study advised their grief (i.e. anger, sadness, loneliness,

despair or anxiety) continued throughout the years since their siblings' death and at varying levels.

… her birthday is in October and then December is Christmas and then she died in January so it is kind of like them few months, they are harder than the rest, you just feel it more or you think about it more … (Emily, p. 13)

Milestones are difficult and there are some things in life that I should be looking forward to but I'm not at the same time like when I get married because Lisa couldn't help me get ready for the Year 12 formal because she was working and I said to her it's okay, we always have my wedding. Well, that's not going to happen, when I have a baby because I'm nearly 30 I'm thinking about babies … and I think well, she should be there, they should have an aunty. And so, there are some milestones in life that I'm really scared to approach because she's not here. (Anna, p. 22)

… It's very difficult but I've made more of a conscious effort to talk about him and talk to (partner) about him regularly and I often say that my partner and my brother would have gotten along like a house on fire. They are very different people but they've got a lot of similar interests and what have you. And I struggle with that a little bit because I would love for him to have met Connor because he was such an amazing person. And then I would really love my brother to meet my kids and be a part of how amazing life is now and that's a lot. I talk to (partner) a lot about that because I really just feel like he's missing out and that (partner) has missed out on being able to meet such an amazing person and have him in our life. (Eve, p. 15)

… the main times that I really think about Yasmine, at first it was every day and every minute of every day, then it's once a month and now it's all those milestones like when it's her 40th birthday or I've had a baby and she hasn't been there or it's more about she doesn't really play a role in my life. But what is relevant to my life now is that every time I get to experience something she didn't, I think I appreciate it more

because I sit there going well, Yasmine didn't get to have a baby, she should have had

a baby and so you cherish things more because of it. (Harriet, p. 22)

Participants spoke about missing out on aspects of their sibling's life and their sibling not

being part of events in their own lives. Family occasions and celebrations were particularly painful

as voiced by Emily and Anna who both held trepidation for approaching significant events without

their sibling, wishing that they could have shared these experiences.

Overall, participants reported some degree of adjustment to life without their sibling and

data from the study partially supports previous research that the negative effects of loss diminish

over time (Balk, 1997; Balk & Corr, 2001). However, data also suggests that significant life events

can trigger renewed experiences of grief for participants as they mourn the inability to share these

events with their sibling. These findings are consistent with researchers (Davies, 2002; Davies &

Limbo, 2010) who noted that grief often resurfaces for those who lost siblings in adolescence

particularly on significant occasions or when experiencing milestones in their lives i.e. weddings,

children, responsibility of parents. Therefore, bereaved siblings tend to experience renewed and

intense grief during significant times in their life (Davies & Limbo). Although time does help to

diminish the experience of grief, the corollary is that grief intensity can return many years later and

be experienced acutely.

Balk (1983) suggests that adolescent grief is more enduring than adult grief. Research has

evidenced that sibling bereavement outcomes such as anxiety, guilt, anger and depression can be

lifelong (Fanos & Nickson, 1991; Flesner, 2015). Participants in this study advised that they reflected

on the loss of their sibling and were often ambushed by intense feelings of grief. This phenomenon

may be that of re-grief where bereaved individuals reflect on loss from a more mature vantage point

or a different stage in life (Oltjenbruns, 2007). This process provides an opportunity for individuals

to re-grieve a potentially unresolved loss from a different perspective and process it from a new and

developmentally appropriate perspective (Oltjenbruns). Oltjenbruns suggests that this process can

provide new insights, meaning or resolve previous challenges individuals may have experienced with grief.

Bereaved siblings who had children of their own spoke of the experience of re-grief in the context of parenthood. Of the four participants who were now parents themselves, three remembered and reminisced about their deceased sibling with their child as a way to create their sibling's legacy. Two of the participants included a reference to their deceased's sibling in their child's name. The process of reflecting on their sibling with their child provided either the context for generativity and growth or one of vulnerability and continued sadness.

4.3.1.4 Positive Emotions

A few of the participants expressed positive emotions in response to loss. This was evident when the death of their sibling involved pain and suffering. Participants in this situation expressed feelings of relief and closure to a difficult situation.

> … when it happened, like not a relief but you can sort of see it in a way because what happened when the tumour got bigger, it was pushing on the front of her brain, it was making her vision blur and things like that … when it came back, she could have been blind or paralysed so you can sort of see it like she didn't have to spend the rest of her life like that and I can sort of find relief in that. (Marvin, p. 13)

> In terms of since he died, one of the things I planned on doing in my life is actually going and living in China long term and there is a whole sense of relief now he is dead because I am not going to be like should I be here? Has it happened yet? Is it going to happen? So, now I am like, well, he's died. I can't change that. So, I feel like in a way, it's actually kind of a release to go and a freedom to go and do something that I didn't quite feel before. (Nancy, p. 18)

Marvin expressed that he found it difficult to witness his sister's prolonged and painful suffering. Marvin's feelings of concern, anxiety and fear concluded with his sister's death and

contributed to feelings of relief. Similarly, Nancy's brother died of a chronic illness after many years when she was actively involved in his care. Her relief represents an ability to do the things that she delayed during his illness and that she now has the opportunity to get on with life. Grief is often a mix of many emotions that may be inconsistent or in conflict with one another. Expressing relief does not mean that the participant wanted their sibling to die rather the relief represents an end to their sibling's suffering. It is likely that these emotions are difficult for adolescents to communicate with family and friends as they may hold fears of being misunderstood.

The relief felt in the situation of the death of a chronically ill sibling was associated with the cessation of suffering experienced by their sibling or the ending of their own suffering watching their sibling deteriorate and ultimately die. Overall, the relief represents the end of a difficult situation. It has been suggested that disclosing or confronting positive emotions in response to grief can be therapeutic as positive affect has been shown to mediate adjustment (Folkman, 2001). Therefore, facilitating the expression of positive emotions is likely to be helpful in facilitating recovery (Folkman). However, the expression of positive emotions is likely to be difficult for adolescents grappling with grief particularly if they are not afforded the opportunity to express the myriad of feelings associated with grief.

4.3.1.5 Facilitation of Expression by Others

For many participants, processing their grief involved the confronting their loss through communication with others or by writing about it. Those who were able to express their grief in these ways advised they found it therapeutic but opportunities to do so were limited. For some participants, confronting and expressing their loss was not always purposeful but instigated by the events that occurred in their lives.

> I think just letting people know how I felt would have really helped me during that
> time. I didn't really open up about how I was feeling for a long time and I really
> struggled with that. I'd really, honestly, wait until I had these counselling sessions just
> to let it all out because…well, it just didn't happen ... (Anastasia, p. 17)

… you meet new people all the time and sometimes it was every day, the first thing

they would say is where did you come from and what's your family … so, I actually had

to talk about it all the time. Yes, I had a sister but she has just died, so, I actually had

to continually talk about it. So, that probably did help, that was probably more of my

counselling for me than anything else really because I had to explain that to people

when I was travelling … I think it was just a case having to acknowledge it all the time

possibly made it more real for me and that was my way of maybe coping with it a bit

better. (Linda, pp. 8-9)

The other thing I realised that we did, that other friends did while Lionel was sick and

after he died, we had a blog that we used to keep people up to date on how he was

going and so we used to write on that a lot when he was sick and when he got sicker

and people could check how he was going because people were calling us all the time

but we kept writing on that after he died and that was helpful … Yeah, it's really cool

looking back on it now … different things that we wrote and how to explain it, how to

make sense of it. (Nancy, p. 44)

A common theme from the data was the lack of opportunities for bereaved siblings to talk to

about their grief and experience of loss. Anastasia reported that she was able to meet frequently

with a school nurse during secondary school and that this had been helpful. Anastasia advised that

she felt there were not many opportunities to talk about how she really felt or that she was able find

a safe place to discuss her feelings. The opportunity to be able to discuss grief seemed to be the

exception rather than the rule for the participants in this study.

Linda's ability to talk about the loss of her sister was facilitated by interactions with host

families whilst travelling overseas as part of a youth exchange program. The constant enquiries by

different families concerning her own family forced Linda to talk about the death of her sister. She

advised that being constantly forced to face the reality of her sister's death helped her cope with

loss. Another example of being forced to confront the reality of the loss of a sibling was the

academic demands of Emily's secondary school curriculum. Emily advised that she immersed herself

in her studies after the death of her younger sister from cancer. At school she was required to study

diseases such as cancer and wrote short stories for English assessments about past impactful events

in her life. Emily advised that although she felt overwhelmed at times thinking about disease and

loss, she was able to achieve academically and completed these tasks.

> I used to write and I still write a lot and I think it was good to just like get out how you
>
> were feeling out without having to talk to someone about it and so, I think I coped a
>
> lot by writing … (Emily, p. 8)

> Potentially, the situation at school assisted Emily's ability to manage her response to her

sister's death as she reported that she began writing about or to her sister and that this was

therapeutic.

4.3.1.6 Grief Spills Over

Some of the participants spoke of compartmentalising their grief as a way to manage their

feelings but this approach often resulted in emotions spilling over in an uncontrolled manner.

> … I looked at my life and how it was not helping me to be behaving how I was behaving
>
> and that I felt a sense of relief when I actually let out some of the sadness. And, so,
>
> when it did bubble up, I just let myself feel it even though I am in a habit of holding it
>
> in … but if my mind tried and I thought about those things, I just let myself get into
>
> those feelings rather than just trying to shoo them away. (Eve, p. 16)

> I went to work and I put on a front and I pretended just to be this happy go lucky girl
>
> without a care in the world. I pulled it off quite well actually and I would go to work
>
> and really focus on that but then I would go out with friends or my partner at the time,
>
> and I was a mess. I would drink; I would just cry at the drop of a hat, I was all over the
>
> place. (Anna, p. 8)

I was pretty quiet usually but then weekends when we would go to parties … I'd

usually get drunk and then talk to someone … everyone was usually like "how are you?

Are you doing okay?" … Sometimes I would just break down and cry but I never

actually spoke to someone properly and, in hindsight, I probably should have, maybe I

still could. I just find it hard to speak about. (Marvin, pp. 8-9)

Eve's practice of compartmentalising grief appeared to be a mechanism to avoid intense feelings of loss. Eve was able to identify that she felt relieved when she managed to confront intense emotions and has since attempted to facilitate this process consciously in the years following the death of her sibling. During the interview Eve, she stated "*when people ask me about suicide or when someone talks about it, I just switch my emotions off when I discuss it, even now, really, because it's a bit easier that way*" (Eve, p. 6). Eve's detached approach to recounting the story of her brother's suicide may reflect the stigma she has experienced associated with her brother's death. Additionally, as discussed previously, the pain and intensity of her emotions may cause her to disengage with her feelings when discussing the loss of her sibling even five years later.

In the second example of *When Grief Spills Over*, Anna's experience of grief was a mixture of denial followed by overwhelming emotions. Her comments reflect that she was able to control to a degree when she expressed her response to loss. It would seem that her experience of painful emotions triggered avoidance or compartmentalisation of her grief which could be sustained for a period followed by an episode of being overwhelmed by emotions. Anna's internalisation of grief is also evidenced by "acting out" behaviours such as drinking alcohol to excess which is often described as avoidance behaviour (McKissock & McKissock, 2012). Compartmentalising grief is a form of avoidance and distraction detrimental to the grieving process if not accompanied by an equal ability to confront the loss (Neimeyer, 2014).

The grief responses described by Anna and Marvin demonstrated behaviours such as self-medication with drugs and alcohol rather than seeking support from others. Research by Raphael (1983) suggests that females are more likely to reach out for support. Hence, Marvin's response

may be more representative of the male experience of grief, although acting out behaviours were reported by females in the study. Differences in grief responses by gender may be due to culture, interpersonal relationships or life experiences (Nyatanga, 2005).

Compartmentalising the pain associated with grief has been documented in literature as way in which young adolescents avoid or distract themselves from strong emotions (Christ, Siegel, Christ, 2002). Interestingly, the comments above were from older adolescents (aged 17 to 19 years) and the data provided many examples of avoiding feelings of loss across the phases in early, middle and late adolescence. The size of the sample in this study does not permit comparisons between genders or across age groups in relation to grief responses.

The theme of swinging from compartmentalising painful emotions to being overwhelmed by their intensity indicates a struggle for participants to balance the two coping responses for grief. The abrupt outburst of emotions may be due to a lack of experience and ability to confront grief in a measured way. Participants spoke of high level discussions about loss with others following the death of their sibling and frequently expressed that they did not know how to talk about their feelings and/or felt there was a lack of a safe place or supportive person with which to do so.

Historical models of grief describe the healthy adaptation to loss being dependent on the bereaved person's ability to express rather than avoid or deny the experience of loss. Coined as the 'grief work hypothesis', theorists suggested that bereaved individuals accepted the death of a loved one by working through painful feelings and confronting difficult emotions (Freud, 1917, 1957). More contemporary models of grief suggest there are benefits to avoiding or compartmentalising grief as a way of coping. Stroebe and Schut's (1999; 2010) d*ual process model of coping with loss* (DPM) suggests normal grief involves levels of confronting and compartmentalising loss. If imbalanced, individuals may experience extreme symptoms of intrusion and/or avoidance as they endeavour to cope (Schut & Stroebe, 2010).

The theme *Grief Spills Over* highlights an unbalanced combination of confrontation and avoidance. The imbalance is created through the lack of opportunity for adolescent bereaved

siblings to safely confront and/or express their grief. As a result, the intensity of painful and

overwhelming emotions may trigger avoidance mirrored by the swing towards intrusive thoughts or

emotions, the "spilling over" of grief. The ability to confront loss is a difficult exercise for

adolescents as they often have limited experience with loss and life skills. They are also immersed in

a family struggling to cope with the loss of a child and may have limited access to support resources.

Hence, the expression of adolescent grief is influenced by life experience, enhanced communication

skills, personal context as well as the challenges associated with development tasks (Corr & Balk,

1996).

It is likely that participants in this study, for many different reasons, found it difficult to

express how they felt about the loss of their sibling at the time but this may not have been indicative

of an inability to confront their loss. Additionally, the results from this study suggest that not all

individuals felt comfortable expressing their grief and responded in many different ways. Stroebe

and Schut (1995) suggest that the more traditional perspectives of grief and "grief work" are more

aligned to the female experience of a willingness to express difficult emotions. Therefore, through

the expression and exploration of their anguish, females may appear more connected with their

experience when compared to males. Interestingly, of the 15 participants in the study, 10 were

female which may reflect more of a willingness by females to talk about a loss experience than

males.

4.3.2   Physical and Behavioural Responses to Loss

4.3.2.1 Exhaustion of the Mind and Body

A few participants spoke of grief as a physical experience where they felt overwhelmed

physically as well as emotionally.

> … there was a strong physical component to the grief. I think when I had chronic
>
> fatigue and also a bout of glandular fever, I think those thoughts and feelings about
>
> grief were mixed up with that physical experience of grief and some of the symptoms
>
> that seemed to go with it. And, so, there was a bodily tiredness and I think a spiritual

tiredness as well. And I think that made just approaching day to day tasks often quite

onerous, particularly in about the first five to six years. (William, p. 10).

I've always tried to be a strong person, sort of be there for others and never think

about, I think about myself but I never give myself enough time to basically support

myself and I think it just got to a point where enough was enough and my body was

just saying no, you can't keep doing this and that was it. It was just, just collapsed and

just went to panic and anxiety. I think I should have been hospitalised that day but I

went home, went to bed. (Eric, p. 25)

Participants who spoke of feelings of fatigue and exhaustion tended to struggle with

connecting with or confronting intense emotions. The two participants above described their

struggle with grief as one where they endeavoured to avoid it or push through to be strong for

others. Their grief culminated in a level of physical exhaustion and a forced a break while they took

time to recover. Another example of the physical impact of grief can be found in the response to

upsetting dreams or nightmares. As indicated by Anna below, she often felt exhausted following

dreams of her sister in which the theme is always the same that her sister returns.

I can wake up and I'll sometimes have to go "listen, I am going to be about half an hour

late" because I just need to calm down, I'm shaking, I'm just all over the place and I can

be put off for the whole day and so, it still actually has a big physical impact on me

sometimes and I don't think everyone knows that it's not only you're waking hours

that are sometimes consumed by it, sometimes even when you're supposed to be

sleeping and resting, you still feel the grief and it can then put you off for the next day

… (Anna, p. 23)

Anna spoke of the physical affects and intrusion following dreams of her deceased sister.

Such a response may be indicative of a level of trauma experienced as a result of her sister's death.

Anna suggests that grief is all encompassing, affecting her during the day as well as at night as she

sleeps.   Another expression of grief from a physical/behavioural perspective is that of Anastasia's overeating.

> … since my sister's passing, I gained 15 kilos because … I'd feel depressed, I'd just eat, I was always a bigger person but that's a lot of weight to put on in a very short period of time. (Anastasia, p.17)

Two participants, Anastasia and William, reported issues with disordered eating. William advised that he lost a significant amount of weight in the year following the death of his brother. Anastasia advised that she used food as a way to distract herself from the pain she was experiencing. Other physical responses reported by participants were sleep disturbance, social withdrawal and treasuring the possessions that once belonged to the deceased sibling. Literature documents physical expressions of grief such as crying, shaking, difficulty eating, disrupted sleep, headaches and fatigue (Balk, Zaengle, & Corr, 2011). Data from this study evidences that grief can be expressed as a physical experience consisting of physiological responses to grief. Research suggests that younger adolescents tend to report more physiological distress than older adolescents (Balmer, 1992). Within this sample, age did not appear to be an indicator of the likelihood of physical symptoms in response to grief.

As an additional point to this theme, William and Eric both reported a physical response to grief and both cited physical activity as a highly effective way of coping with their loss. It is interesting to note that their grief manifested as a physical response and an effective coping strategy included a physical approach. They both reported feeling better after physical activity and that exercise helped them find hope for the future. This minor finding was not included in the literature review for this study but may be worth investigating further as a number of participants, predominantly male, cited exercise or physical activity as a way in which they coped with the loss of their sibling. The benefits of exercise have been long established in the treatment of depression and it is likely that adolescents experiencing grief associated with the loss of a sibling may benefit as well.

4.3.2.2 The Transactional Nature of Grief

Participants spoke of disconnecting with peers in the aftermath of their sibling's death. This was often due to feeling 'shut down' by peers or feeling that they had to conceal their grief through pretence or withdrawal.

> I think the other thing was that I tried to bring up Yves and Yves's death to peers … I felt that they just looked at me with wide eyes and then either changed the subject or physically moved away. I was very aware of their discomfort and so, I didn't want to make their discomfort any worse. And so I, in a way, just shut down and would only really speak about Yves with mum and my sister. (William, p. 9)

> A lot of my friends were having 21st's and I wasn't interested in pretending to have a good time and things like that. So, yeah, I probably went into my shell a little bit more … (Linda, p. 8)

> … one of my best friends that I went to high school with, I don't think she has ever mentioned Yvonne again. It's only perhaps if I might say something in passing that she sort of goes "oh, yeah" and changes the subject. (Linda, p. 11)

Although participants may initially have been open to expressing their grief to peers, some felt 'shut down' by peers and subsequently hid their grief. Participants expressed that they felt alone in their experience and that others did not understand, therefore, could not assist. William spoke of the response from his friends as he endeavoured to talk about the loss of his brother but felt they did not want to engage in a conversation high in emotionality. He reported that he stopped talking to peers about his brother's death which marginalised his feelings of grief and undoubtedly other aspects of expression.

Bereaved adolescents may withdraw and isolate themselves in response to feeling different from others while they grapple with feelings of intense grief (Davies, 1991; Hogan & Greenfield, 1991; Shipkey, 2008). This response is likely to limit the opportunities to express their grief and,

hence, minimise the prospect of support, thereby exacerbating feelings of isolation (Balk, 1990; Birenbaum, 1989; Davies, 1988b; McCown & Davies, 1995).   Balk (2009a) identified that bereaved adolescent siblings may experience the dwindling of friends as their experience of grief continues with intensity and friends become weary. Some adolescents may stop sharing their thoughts and feelings about the death in an effort to retain friendships (Balk, 2009a). Additionally, adolescents may feel self-conscious, want to avoid appearing out of control, judged by others or seem different. Therefore, the way in which they are perceived is particularly important for adolescents and likely to mediate their outward expressions of grief.

> … sometimes, I just wasn't sure how to act. I used to think a lot about what others thought of me … if I was to laugh or joke around, it was like oh, no, I shouldn't be doing this because my brother just passed away. What people are going to think? People are going to think that I am not mourning for my brother. (Anita, p. 5)

> I kind of felt guilty because it was something I was enjoying and I felt like I shouldn't be enjoying anything. It was a very confusing time obviously, being in a new relationship because you have all those happy feelings with, 'oh, cute boy', falling in love and all that and so, I was confused every time I felt a positive emotion. So, there was a lot of confusion there because I just felt I shouldn't be laughing or I shouldn't be smiling so, yeah, there was quite a lot of confusion. (Anna, p. 16)

Anita expressed that she did not know how she should appear to be grieving for her brother and this made expression of any emotions difficult. Adolescence is filled with many new experiences and to feel restricted in behaviour or not feel confident complicates interactions with others. Findings from Forward and Garlie (2003) revealed that bereaved adolescents felt others were watching them after the death of their sibling and this made it difficult to maintain relationships with their peers.

The expression of grief is often influenced by the response of others. Below is a comment from Harriet which illustrated that her ability to express pain commenced a therapeutic process that created change for her.

> … there is a lot of stuff in me I didn't understand, a lot of sadness and emptiness and when Yasmine died, I was allowed to express it all, I was allowed to cry because I would never cry when I was a kid ever and I think it was like a relief to have some people acknowledge some pain in me and I was allowed to be in pain and I was allowed to be upset and people were cuddling me which they had never done because my family obviously didn't have much love to give [laughs] and so I definitely gained a lot of opportunity to feel pain, again, which I had never had and that certainly changed me. (Harriet, pp. 8-9)

4.3.3 Cognitive Responses to Loss

Four main themes evolved from the data in response to how the participants thought about the death of their siblings. The themes encompassed: an inability to focus during some period within the experience of loss; dreams relating to loss; a changed perspective of the world; and an attempt to 'make sense' of their sibling's death.

4.3.3.1 Inability to Concentrate

Participants reported that their ability to focus on education or employment was impaired by the death of their sibling. The result was that they were unable to continue as before which, in some cases, hampered progress in life.

> Well, it was in the year that I should have finished school … I had gone back to a senior college in Adelaide to try and get my credits to finish but I couldn't focus, I just had no interest in dealing with anyone that was there, no interest in reading. I really and still do struggle a lot with focus. So, although I'm really interested in something, I would

really struggle to zone in and actually do an assignment or whatever and so I stopped that and then I started working … (Eve, p. 9)

I do remember, at times, just getting extremely frustrated because I think maths was never my strong point and even if I was concentrating quite well, if I got stuck on something then my mind would just wander back to my sister passing and things like that. Then I just couldn't get back into concentrating again. (Anastasia, p. 15)

I deferred. I found that my concentration after his death was just completely gone, really. I had very, very poor concentration. I felt as though I couldn't start reading a book as in 15 or 20 seconds, my concentration would be, what have I just read? And then I went back to university a year later and again just found I could not concentrate, I just really struggled and that knocked my confidence in having any sort of academic ability. But not even just academic ability but just being able to do fairly simple tasks. (William, p. 5)

I've even advised my boss what I'm going through and day-to-day he still doesn't appreciate it … I've asked for less workload and still files and files of jobs come on my desk and I guess from his point of view, he doesn't appreciate it because he can't understand what I'm going through . (Eric, p. 38)

Studying when I was at uni was just hard because I was spending a lot of time at the hospital with mum and Lionel. I remember trying to get a uni assignment extension and my lecturer says to me just because someone else is sick I don't understand how that affects your ability to complete your assignment? (Nancy, p. 19)

The inability to concentrate was a common theme reported by participants, affecting progress at school, success at university and work. A lack of focus was illustrated by Eve, Anastasia and William who advised of a level of disengagement in their learning to the point where getting started was difficult, if not impossible. The quotes by Eric and Nancy indicate an ability to focus and

continue with studies or work but identified times when this was more difficult than others. These experiences may be due to the intrusion of thoughts and images of the deceased that interrupted the adolescents' ability to concentrate on tasks at hand (2011). This theme supports research that suggests adolescent sibling bereavement is associated with difficulties in concentration and altered study habits (Balk, 1981; 1983).

Mid adolescents (aged between 14-17 years) reported that the secondary school system was generally helpful and teachers were supportive. One participant was provided with counselling support via a social worker which she reported as being very helpful. Some of the participants who were mid adolescent at the time of their sibling's death felt that they went back to school too soon and had problems concentrating upon returning while others identified school as an effective distraction. One participant commenced Year 12 the year his sister died. He advised that he was able to complete the year and secured a place in his chosen university course.   The ability of mid adolescents to function at school was impacted to varying degrees with the majority of secondary school aged participants advising their concentration was affected.

Tertiary institutions and workplaces were less conducive and more rigid in the accommodation of flexibility for later adolescents (aged 18 years and older). Participants advised they spoke to lecturers and employers but felt unsupported in their grief. Eric reported that he felt his manager did not understand what he was experiencing and did not reduce his workload as Eric had requested. A few participants spoke about difficulties in relationships at work which they attributed to ineffective management of their grief.

The implications of the *Inability to Concentrate* theme are significant given the potential impact of this would have on success at secondary school, university or work. Faltering at any point could disrupt sibling bereaved adolescents' ability to complete studies and engage in their chosen profession. Implications for economic status in terms unrealised potential are also relevant. Environmental supports such as access to safety nets in schools and the workplace could help

ameliorate the challenges presented for adolescents in their navigation of grief after the loss of a sibling and their ability to cope more effectively (Balk, 2014).

An American study by Fletcher, Mailick, Song and Wolfe (2013) compared two large data sets to investigate the effects of sibling death in childhood on adult economic outcomes, particularly years of schooling. The authors found that the experience of sibling death in childhood was particularly impactful for females in terms of high school drop-out rates and college attendance. The authors posit that the emotional and behavioural problems of bereaved siblings may directly interfere with success at school and employment. Additionally, they argue that the experience of an existential crisis by bereaved siblings may lessen their achievement focus. Although the above study was undertaken in America and utilises data on childhood sibling bereavement, it is likely that the variables reviewed and the outcomes identified are also applicable to adolescent sibling bereavement within Australian education and workplace contexts.

4.3.3.2 Dreams of the Lost Sibling

Another cognitive response to loss experienced by a number of participants in the study was dreams of their deceased sibling returning only to realise the reality of their death either in the dream or upon waking.

> … even though I'd seen him on the road myself, I still would have dreams that he was not gone, he was in Europe somewhere having a holiday. And even right up until recently, this is like 30 odd years down the track, I still dream of him coming back and telling me about his adventures, you know, being dead but not … and he was 17 and I'm now 50, yet he still feels like he's older than me. (Donald, p. 9)

> I would always kind of think that he was coming home for years and years. I'd have dreams that he was coming home or that I could hear his car arriving, it was hard to process. (Anita, p. 4)

… it's been seven years, eight come February … my dreams of her are always the same and it's as if and they're like she's come back from the dead or it was a joke or she ran away and then came back, so it's always, coming back of some sort. All this time, it's still the same theme. It has never once changed. So, it's obviously my subconscious wanting her back … so people need to understand that even after so long, it still affects you in some way. Your subconscious still wants the same thing, that there is not always full acceptance. I, personally, don't think there will ever be but even after all this time, I'm still getting those recurring dreams and they rattle me. (Anna, p. 23)

The content of the dream in Donald's quote appears to reflect an ongoing dialogue with his deceased sibling, catching up and sharing news whilst maintaining the dynamic of an older and younger brother. The content from both Anita and Anna's dreams are reflective of the longing or searching that has continued for some years following the death of their sibling. Anna advised that her dreams are upsetting and this may indicate of a level of non-acceptance towards her sister's death.

Although a minor finding in this study, the notion of dreaming and its connection with either grief, coping or the experience of trauma was not a key topic within the bereavement literature and, therefore, was not reviewed in detail by the researcher. Subsequent investigation of the literature revealed an argument that dreams of the deceased or of the loss experience can be helpful to bereaved individuals adjusting to loss and mirror the grief process itself (Worden, 2010).   Dreams are thought to aid the integration of loss and enable the bereaved to make sense of the death (Worden). It has been suggested that dreams parallel the individual's mourning process and can be utilised therapeutically (Worden). Raphael (1999) suggested that dreams of the deceased can be indicative of a traumatic stress reaction related to the death of their loved one as well as a component of the bereavement process. Raphael suggested that disturbing dreams or nightmares may be indicative of psychopathology and have the capacity to re-traumatise individuals.

It has been argued that if dreams facilitate adjustment to the loss of a loved one, then the bereaved should experience a higher rate of dreaming about the deceased compared to what is observed in normative dream content data (Germain, et al., 2013). Germain et al.'s (2013) study failed to support the hypothesis that dreams facilitate coping or that dreams may be a symptom of psychopathology. The results of the study indicate "detectable changes in dream content can be captured in adults with complicated grief, and suggest that dreams in complicated grief may reflect a reorganisation of cognitive-affective representations of lost significant attachment figures" (Germain, et al., p. 278). Perhaps Anna's dreams are an indicator of the importance of the relationship she had with her sister and the role of her sister as an attachment figure. This hypothesis supports research that suggests family members other than the mother can fulfil the role of attachment figures (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007). The death of sibling who was a key figure in the survivor's life should be recognised as a risk factor for complicated grief and specific support should be directed toward the surviving sibling (Maercker, 2007).

Additionally, Anna reported that her dreams of her sister "rattle her" and the effects of such can last throughout the following days. Anna's response to her dreams is aligned with Raphael's (1999) notion that dreams or nightmares may be indicative of psychopathology. Anna commenced medication for depression two years after his sister's death and appeared distressed throughout the interview process, so much so that a follow up call was made the following day to check for any detrimental response to the study's interview. Anna's response to her sister's death seven years ago as described by her in the interview, carries the hallmarks of complicated grief.

4.3.3.3 Changed View of the World

> I thought it was very unfair, why should it happen to her? It was just after one of my
>
> good friends … he was diagnosed with leukaemia … he spent the year in the hospital …
>
> he finished treatment and was actually okay … it's heaps unfair because there's so
>
> many people that don't deserve it, people like him and Kiki … (Marvin, pp. 7-8)

A key theme within the data was that participants' view of the world had shifted. The world was no longer a benevolent place of fairness and predictability. Participants described the unfairness of a disease (i.e. cancer) terminating the life of a sibling compared to someone who failed to care for themselves (i.e. smoking, sunbaking) who were more deserving of a lethal disease such as cancer. The injustice relayed by a few siblings was expressed with anger and frustration followed by sadness. In some cases, the *Changed View of the World* encompassed a level of openness or insight towards the plight or suffering experienced by others. Anna spoke about her sister's undiagnosed illness and the frustration that medical practitioners initially diagnosed her with an eating disorder instead of a chronic disease. Experiences such as these tended to promote a feeling of injustice and that life should not be taken at face value.

> I'm intolerant of people's intolerance and judgement, you don't always know a
> person's situation, you sometimes need to learn more about certain things. So, if I had
> to put a sense on it, she gave that to me to sort of stand up for people without a voice.
> (Anna, p. 13)

The above was echoed by Eve who spoke of other people's attitudes to suicide and her ambition to educate others and reduce the stigma of suicide.

> … people would say "oh, if this happens one more time, I am going to kill myself" …
> and people don't understand why it might affect someone. And I have, actually, in the
> last year or so, started calling people out on it, sometimes, probably not as politely as I
> could, but I think that it's very important that people know that those kinds of
> comments can really affect someone, you never know what someone's gone through.
> They are very disrespectful and it's just not something to make light of, it's not
> something to talk flippantly of. (Eve, p. 6)

Participants spoke of being more aware of the complexity of life and that people you work with or meet may have experienced difficulties that you do not know about. This theme extends to

an awareness and sensitivity towards others. A review by Robinson and Mahon (1997) identified a

unique characteristics of sibling loss when compared to other losses. The authors stated that

changes in self-perception and view of the world for bereaved siblings were unique to this

experience of loss. An increased sensitivity towards others or feelings of increased vulnerability as

outlined by Robinson and Mahon represents a component of the theme *Changed View of the World.*

The theme of *A Changed View of the World* was also evident in participant comments that

indicated the world was not a safe place, that it was unpredictable and that bad things happen to

good people for no reason.

> I always think the worst, so I always think something bad is going to happen and I think
>
> that strongly comes from, I think that comes from that directly (brother's death). So, I
>
> have a fear of driving at the moment, I have had that fear, that strong fear for about 4
>
> years now. So, whenever I get in my car and I start driving further from my comfort
>
> zone, I feel like something is going to happen to me, I feel like I am going to die
>
> whether it be an accident or whether it's just me dying in the car for no reason. Yes, I
>
> just get extremely anxious to the point where I have to drive back home or stop.
>
> (Anita, p. 15)

> Well, that's thing, you are never assured of anything. As soon as you have lost, I guess
>
> a significant loss, whether it be a sister or not, it's not always a case of "oh, it will be
>
> fine". It's always a "well, no, actually you could die" or something could happen that
>
> you're not guaranteed that everything will be okay. So, I think that's always in my
>
> mind as well. I try to look at things the other way and say "no, everything will be okay"
>
> but that's not necessarily always the case. (Linda, p. 15)

The event of sibling death in adolescence tends to shake the foundations of the world

participants thought they knew and prompt questions about their own safety. Some participants

spoke of increased anxiety after the loss of their sibling and this played out in different aspects of

their lives (e.g. driving, parenting, relationships). Participants often viewed themselves differently, sometimes as less capable in their studies or at work and, in some cases, unworthy.

> I think when Yardley died, I sort of felt like a big part of me felt like I deserved what I get, you know, that I had trouble with relationships, I probably would still have trouble with relationships, but I sort of steer clear of them now. I think I have always searched for that person that Yardley is going to approve of means they've got to treat me, I don't know, not like a princess because it's, you know, with the amount of respect that, I don't know, it's stupid. (Elaine, pp. 15-16)

The dynamics of the relationship between Elaine and her brother Yardley were such that his loss was a huge blow to Elaine's self-esteem. Elaine advised that she and her brother experienced domestic violence and other family difficulties while growing up. She idolised her brother and identified with him closely, stating they had a relationship similar to that of twins. It is likely that Yardley fulfilled various roles in Elaine's life and without him she felt lost. Although changes in self-perception and world view are not specific to sibling bereavement, they can be uniquely and intensely influenced by the pre-existing sibling relationship (McMahon & Robinson, 1997).

A change in world view is a commonly identified characteristic within bereavement models in literature on grief and loss (Attig, 1996; Davis, 2005; Hogan & DeSantis, 1996; Neimeyer, 2000; Shipkey, 2008; Stroebe & Schut, 1999; Worden, 2009). McMahon and Robinson (1997) specifically investigated sibling bereavement in their review of empirical literature comparing sibling loss with other loss experiences and identified three ways in which sibling bereavement differs: manifestation of a multidimensional bereavement grief reaction that incorporates physical, psychological and/or behavioural components; change in self-perception; and a change in world view. Additionally, Janoff-Bulman and Berg (1998) suggest that a traumatic experience such as the death of a loved one can disrupt a person's assumptions of the world. The shattered assumptions of the world relate to: *they are worthy*; *that the world is benevolent*; and *that they live in a world that makes sense*. The latter is believed to be central to recovery and enables those who have lost to re-integrate their

experience within a broader meaning (Janoff-Bulman & Berg). If re-integration of the loss is not

achieved, bereaved adolescent siblings may be disoriented and feel lost in the grief experience.

4.3.3.4 Making Sense of the Death

A common theme derived from the data was the thought that "everything happens for a

reason" or that participants could make sense of their sibling's death from a religious or spiritual

point of view.   Although some participants advised that there were able to make sense of their

siblings' death, their interpretations of events were not always therapeutic or helpful.

> … we're not heavily religious but we believe in God and so, what God said: Aaron's
>
> done enough on this planet, he's shown he's a legend, he's a great person and he
>
> deserves the rewards now so, God said you can go to heaven and have left us here.
>
> That's how we see it, so we picture him in a nice place where he's good. (Scott, p. 13)

> … what got me through a lot is my religion, so it gave me peace knowing that, I
>
> strongly believe that everything happens for a reason and that kind of got me through
>
> as well. So, I think, for example, because he used to get into a lot of trouble, I used to
>
> think maybe if he was alive he would have, maybe have gone to jail, you just never
>
> know. He's in a better place, so I'd probably say that to young Anita. I'd say that you
>
> will learn to live with it. So, yes, that's life, life's too short. (Anita, pp. 9-10)

Comments by participants making sense of their sibling's death alluded to 'a bigger plan' or

'higher power' which dictated the occurrence of unfortunate events. These comments may have

been based on religious or spiritual beliefs although, interestingly, this theme was not matched by

the strength of belief in religion or spirituality in other areas of their lives (i.e. consistent practice of

religion) except for two participants. This theme may also mirror the cultural views of society that

expresses platitudes and clichés such as "he's in a better place" as a way to avoid the bereaved

individual's strong reaction to pain (McKissock & McKissock, 2012). Perhaps the beliefs expressed by

participants in the theme of *Making Sense of the Death* reflect efforts to appear strong and truncate

the full expression of pain and loss. This response potentially impacts the ability to express and process the emotions associated with loss.

The response of a 'higher power' or 'bigger plan' may also be a way to subvert the unnerving realisation that death could call upon them.   Confronting the reality of sibling death is an affront to the very nature of adolescence as everything moves toward life. Developmentally, middle and late adolescents possess the cognitive capability to imagine life threatening situations together with the biting reality that they are not indestructible or unique when it comes to mortality (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1998). This awareness may be balanced with a belief that there is a pre-ordained plan over which they have no control.

Included in some of the responses were narratives that provided a reason for the untimely death of their sibling. Participants advised these stories helped them to make sense of their sibling's death and were often framed by a fatalist view of the events that transpired.

> A few people now have said to me that everyone's life course is mapped out to them if you believe in a God, well, he's created this, a certain number of things you have to achieve and once you've achieved them you pass away. And when I think of it, my sister was only 18, but she went to school, she went overseas for six weeks when she was 16 and she saw all of Europe and she just had the time of her life, it sounded like the most amazing holiday. She met her boyfriend when she was 16 as well and it was her first and only boyfriend but they just seemed so in love and to me, that's how I believe I've made sense of her death, that she achieved quite a huge number of things in her life, so there was no need for her to keep going because she did experience love and travelling and good friends. And I think that's what's made me at peace with it too. (Anastasia, p. 11)

> We were coming home from a party and mum was sitting at a T-intersection, I was lying down in the back sleeping and a truck was coming past and the truck driver fell asleep just before he got to us and smashed into our car and mum was heavily

pregnant with Yvonne and they thought at that time she would lose the baby but she

didn't and as soon as mum had Yvonne, you'd put her in a car, she'd scream, she

would vomit, she absolutely hated it from day one and it's just one of those things that

you think, I wonder if it's caught up with her later on. If you believe in, are you

supposed to be here and all that kind of stuff, it was just a weird that she started off

life almost in a car accident and then that's what's also taken her later on. (Linda, p. 6)

As outlined by Ribbens McCarthy (2006), "making sense" and "finding a purpose" represent

different themes within meaning.   In this study, *Making Sense of the Death* was not necessarily

indicative of finding a purpose in the death of their sibling nor did it reflect an adjustment to the

loss. However, the narrative responses to *Making Sense of the Death* did possess an element of

additional meaning. As expressed by Anastasia, her sister had achieved key milestones in life and,

therefore, had met the pinnacle of what was required. In Linda's case, she advised her sister,

Yvonne, was lucky to have survived a car accident while in utero. Linda provided a sense that her

sister was aware of this at some level and after cheating death once, was not so lucky the second

time.

The narratives within the theme of *Making Sense of the Death* provide another dimension to

meaning, constructing a story that 'fits' in their world which often reflects the culture, religion and

others systems that they have been immersed in. This aligns with Ribbens McCarthy (2009) who

suggests that young people make sense of death by drawing on systems of meaning through their

experience of interpersonal, cultural, structural and material contexts.   Therefore, it is likely that the

results of this study represent a homogenous sample of Western cultural values and Christian like

values, and that if this study was repeated in another culture, significant differences may be found.

4.3.4   Complications of Grief

4.3.4.1 *The Perfect Storm*

Themes in this section as well as the previous section, *The Experience of Trauma and*

Disenfranchised Grief, highlight some of the challenges faced by adolescents in the wake of their

grief. *The Perfect Storm* theme suggests that the way in which grief is experienced, avoided or unacknowledged by others may contribute to the participants' ability to grieve and potentially delay the integration and adaptation to loss for a number of years.

> … it was probably a case of me trying to constantly stay busy and constantly stay preoccupied and not ever get to the point where my mind did trail off because I didn't want to think about it (brother's suicide), I didn't want to start dealing with it because it was far too complicated and far too horrible to do that. (Eve, p. 12)

> Honestly, I was bat-shit crazy. I went off the rails and looking back now, I would have gone to the doctor for a diagnosis sooner. I waited three years before I went to the doctor and I was diagnosed with severe depression, shock, but I would have gone sooner because those three years dealing with it … I was going to counselling and all that but I needed to be medicated. There was no 'ifs' or 'buts' about it and those three years were blindingly painful and looking back, I wish I'd gotten additional help sooner … I think it may have been an underlining sort of thing but hadn't really hit the surface and then when she passed away, it just sprung out. From what I understand, depression does run in our family, so I would have been susceptible to it anyway but that really sort of pushed me over the edge so to speak. (Anna, pp. 7-8)

Evidence from the data suggests that a number of participants found it difficult to process the grief and/or trauma associated with the loss of their sibling for a number of years and as a result, the experience of intense grief continued for a period beyond two years often extending into adulthood. Some of the siblings spoke of avoiding feelings of distress believing that the intensity of their pain was intolerable.

A significant aspect of adolescent sibling bereavement is the way in which the surviving siblings process their grief. If adolescents are unable to connect with their grief or it is "pushed underground", their ability to process grief will be hampered. If the death of their sibling

encompassed trauma, this scenario presents an additional complicating factor in processing grief. Unprocessed trauma can block an individual's mourning process, therefore, symptoms of trauma need to be addressed before grief can be processed (Barle, Wortman & Latack, 2015; Worden, 2009). Avoidance of feelings for bereaved adolescents may exacerbate their grief reaction and increase the risk of a complicated grief outcome (Eisma, et al, 2013).

The evidence of trauma experienced by participants as a result of the loss of a sibling may have acted as a potential trigger for mental health concerns. Not all those who experienced a traumatic loss experienced a traumatic grief response. However, adolescent sibling bereavement provides a 'perfect storm' for the occurrence of complicated grief. It is possible that mental health symptoms of some of the participants were attributable to the 'perfect storm' that adolescent sibling bereavement presented.

4.3.4.2 Post Loss Mental Health Concerns

Some participants spoke of significant mental health issues following the death of their sibling. Participants indicated that they endeavoured to cope with the experience of anxiety, depression and/or suicidal ideation in the years following their sibling's death.

> When I say I attempted suicide (post loss), looking back and I think I knew that she
>
> (step mother) was coming over, so it was probably more a cry for help a lot of the
>
> time. The last time I did it, I didn't realise anyone wasn't going to be home and, yeah,
>
> so that was probably my wake-up call though. (Elaine, p. 12)

> I don't know how I got my hands on these sleeping tablets, someone must have given
>
> them to me … seriously, I was that close, I don't know why, I don't know what it was if
>
> there was a particular thing that happened other than Yasmine dying obviously… for
>
> whatever reason I didn't take them … that was when I made a decision to get on with
>
> my life, it was really soon after Yasmine died, it wasn't like I had been grieving for two
>
> years and I had this experience where I felt like I just couldn't take it anymore and I
>
> had to get out of here … I don't know, I guess it's like any mental milestone, well if I

have decided not to do that, then I've got to try find another way through this.

(Harriet, p. 6)

I think it was only about two weeks ago, I had a nervous breakdown, a massive nervous breakdown … it was the first time in my life where I thought 'this is it'. I just want to pass away but never, never self-inflicted any harm, never, ever, has that crossed my mind yet but certainly, two weeks ago, when I had a nervous breakdown, I thought this was it. I just want to go and I just want to leave this earth. (Eric, p. 23)

It was loss and I guess it was to do with a bit of work as well. It was just getting too stressful for me to cope with both the grief and the work and just family life and I just broke down, I just couldn't… I literally just collapsed to the ground and just, you know, I was just in a panic. I couldn't deal with it. (Eric, p. 24)

I do remember feeling anxious as a child, at times, afraid of death as well. So, I don't know if it's directly related to my brother but obviously that didn't help … And since then, I always get anxious, I'll get better, I'll see someone, I'll go on medication, I'll get better and then it comes back. So, it's probably come back about three times and it's been significant. (Anita, p. 8)

I think I suddenly lost an awful lot of weight. That was about a year after he died and…I don't know if … it probably was an eating disorder of some description, but I really cut down my food intake and I'm not even entirely sure why, I suspect, in looking back on it, I was probably trying to exert some sort of control where the rest of the world just seemed out of control. (William, p. 5)

The majority of participants, eleven in total, reported experiencing a period of ongoing adjustment difficulties for at least two years following the loss of their sibling during adolescence. Four participants' spoke of suicidal thoughts in the months following their siblings' death and one of the participants expressed recent feelings of hopelessness that he attributed to a "nervous

breakdown" which occurred two years after his brother's unexpected death. Other mental health symptoms described by participants were the experience of anxiety, feelings of depression and disordered eating. A number of participants reported interpersonal relationship problems in the years that followed the death of their sibling, specifically, romantic relationships, friendships and subsequent attachment issues with their own children.

Some of the participants reported a history of mental health concerns prior to their sibling's death (e.g., anxiety, anorexia nervosa, depression) and went on to describe worsening of symptoms or the occurrence of additional mental ill health symptoms. A subset of the eleven participants who reported mental health concerns following the loss of their sibling also reported personal, social or environmental factors that may have predisposed or perpetuated the complications associated with managing their grief. Domestic violence, family discord, history of parental substance abuse, sexual assault and being placed in institutional care were some of the experiences reported prior to their sibling's death. These factors have the capacity to affect the resilience of participants, their available resources and impair their coping capability in response to this significant life event. Given the methodology of this study, it is not possible to partial out the influence of these factors from the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement.

The remaining four participants did not report any ongoing mental health difficulties beyond a two year period following their siblings' death which seems to indicate an absence of any bereavement related psychopathology. It is interesting to note that this subgroup represents approximately 25% of the overall participant group and suggests that loss of a sibling in adolescence may present as a mental health risk if symptoms exist beyond two years post loss. Review of the literature by Valente, Saunders and Street (1988) suggests that adolescents' inability to resolve bereavement issues may place them at risk of behaviour problems, suicide and morbidity.

According to Genevro, et al. (2004), only a small but significant percentage of those who experience grief will fall into the category of complicated grief but those who do are subject to an elevated risk in terms of adverse health effects. Additionally, those who experience significant loss

or trauma have a higher risk for psychiatric disorders as well as decreased self-esteem, increased vulnerability, lowered trust and well-being when compared to those who have not experienced such an event (Davis, 2005). A number of the mental health disorders identified by Kauffman (2007) as potential outcomes of traumatic grief are reflected in the symptomology described by participants in this study i.e. symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, major depression, anxiety disorders and somatic symptoms.

Due to the methodology of the study, it is not possible to conclude that the mental health symptoms reported by participants were a direct result of an inability to cope with their sibling's death. Participants may have possessed an underlying mental illness or predisposition which was triggered by the event of their siblings' death or their response to the death event may have exacerbated a pre-existing mental health issue. Although it is not possible to draw a conclusion that the experience of significant loss or traumatic grief is directly related to mental health symptoms of diagnosable disorders, evidence from this study suggests a relationship is likely to exist.

The descriptions of participant intrapersonal grief responses and the interpersonal responses of others suggests that the majority of participants were confronted with challenges that impacted their ability to acknowledge, express and/or process their grief. It is interesting to note that the contemporary models of grief and coping reviewed as part of this study do not accommodate for potential "blockers" of grief beyond that of trauma. Grief and coping theorists refer to catchall terms such as the "unique factors of the individual" and "the event of concurrent stressors" (Hall, 2014; Rando, 1993; Raphael, 1983) and although these factors are very relevant, aspects that may block the processing of grief are not clearly addressed i.e., disenfranchised grief.

4.4 Coping with Sibling Loss in Adolescence and Beyond

While endeavouring to recover from loss, participants described the process of adapting to a life without their sibling. At times, they avoided thoughts and feelings associated with their loss. At other times, they were able to confront their feelings of loss. Some took "time out" from the reality

of their loss either through unconscious or conscious distractions while others reported feeling lost

in their grief, unable to find acceptance or the ability to move forward.

4.4.1   Processes of Coping

4.4.1.1 Confronting Loss

Participants spoke about confronting the reality of loss which was reflected in their yearning,

remembering, imagining and reminiscing about their sibling. The realisation of loss was often

triggered by events in their lives as they were forced to confront their changed reality.

> I remember mucking around with one of them (younger male friend) the other day
>
> and we had this massive fight as to who was going to open the car door first. I have no
>
> idea how it happened, it was literally like two children squabbling and trying to push
>
> each other out of the way, it was so funny. And then all of a sudden, I was just like this
>
> is what Lionel and I would have done, actually, it made me really sad. (Nancy, p. 42)

> At the time, all I wanted to do was be with Aaron again. I think I was looking to skip 60
>
> years of my life and wait till I was eighty so I could pass away and go see him again.
>
> (Scott, p. 17)

> … you try to carry on with life as much as you possibly can but there is always a vacant
>
> spot. I actually renovated a room in my house and made it blue and put a surfboard
>
> and stuff in there because he loved surfing so that kind of helped … (Nellie, p. 33)

> … a lot of time I think like how you have your conscience talking to you, you've got the
>
> good one and the bad one, he's always the good one. I often think, you know, what
>
> would Yardley think or what would Yardley have done in this situation or problem?
>
> (Elaine, p. 26)

Participants spoke about the realisation that the loss which continues to this day.   Some

participants experienced sudden jolts of renewed rawness of their grief even years later. This theme

relates to the acknowledgement of the permanence of their sibling's death within different contexts

of their life. Participants reported that their response to the permanence of loss was intense at times but also provided the opportunity to reflect on what their sibling had meant to them.

4.4.1.2 *Lost role of the Sibling*

A strong theme that emerged from the data was that of the lost role participants played alongside their sibling and the role of their sibling in their lives. Participants appeared to struggle locating themselves in their new reality as they endeavoured to construct new mental models of being in a world without their sibling.

> I was at a party probably about a year after and a couple of the girls … one of their boyfriends was standing next to me or talking to me or something and they got quite nasty and started pulling my hair and things like that and the music stopped, pretty intense . They were 19 and I was 15 – 16 … everyone stopped and separated and I just started crying and I was just like … "I've never really needed you in a situation like this but I need you now and you're not here". (Anita, p. 7)

> I think I was probably just looking for something to fill the hole in my heart which realistically wasn't going to happen and I know that. I think sometimes I wanted somebody who would understand me like Yardley did. I suppose that is crux of it, I suppose I have gone through my life thinking no one understands me like he does or accepts me like he did … (Elaine, pp. 19-20)

> I always find it sad, she would be going through high school and I won't get to be that heaps older brother that could have been over-protective and stuff like that. (Marvin, p. 19)

The participant quotes above illustrate the secondary losses associated with their sibling's death. Participants frequently spoke of the roles they each played and how one complemented or supported the other. They spoke of the void left without their sibling and the struggle to adjust to the missing piece in their life. Anita considered her brother a protector, someone who watched over

her and kept her safe. Since her brother's death, no one is available to fulfil this role leaving her feeling vulnerable which creates additional stress in certain situations. The example provided by Elaine suggests that her brother was a source of validation and once gone, she has searched elsewhere for understanding and acceptance without success.

The concept of a lost role or changed identity has been studied in adolescent sibling loss as it intersects with identity development. Research suggests that surviving siblings must redefine themselves in the absence of their deceased sibling who may have been a key reference point in their life (Balk, 1991; Bank & Kahn, 1982). However, the essence of this theme portrays a loss of a shared history, a loss of the role they had once inhabited for another and reflects aspects of themselves or their life that are gone forever. Packman, et al. (2006) state sibling identities are intrinsically linked and when one sibling dies, the survivor loses part of themselves. Perhaps the theme of the *Lost Role of the Sibling* portrays the grief associated with the loss of the roles played out by one another in their shared life.

4.4.1.3 Avoiding the Loss

A number of participants described ways in which they attempted to avoid thoughts and/or feelings of loss. They advised that the strategy of avoidance was sometimes a conscious effort, whereas other at other times, it was a strategy employed to minimise the intrusion of grief in their day to day lives.

> I suppose I found a lot of escapes, I watched an awful lot of what would have been videos then. I had always had quite a strong interest in films for instance and I think that interest just became even more so, just to sort of separate myself a bit from the not so nice realities of the real world so to speak. Those probably helped me day by day, although they didn't necessarily make it any easier to step out into the world. (William, pp. 13-14)

> I haven't really processed a lot of this stuff and I think she (psychologist) kind of described it and I thought it was kind of like everything is in the freezer and the freezer

is a bit full. So every now and then it opens itself up when I least expect it. I think I was really stressed at work last year, it was just a bit like that. I just felt really like every now and then, it would just be like, I don't know, the freezer is full." (Nancy, p. 23)

"I think it was also a case of not wanting to be in the one spot for too long and just continue moving and continue having experiences so that it kept me busy, kept me possibly not thinking about things that I didn't want to think about maybe. (Linda, p. 22)

I still do find that if I don't want to think about it, I will just put it to the back of my mind and it might not be until an anniversary comes up or if something happens, you are having a bad day and then everything sort of comes to fore again and you just think, "oh" and you have a bad day and you get over it and start again. (Linda, p. 22)

I guess that's just something that's always there and something that I have to live with. … the denial that took a very long time, that's probably a stage I was in for a very long time. (Anita, p. 9)

Didn't really have many pleasant conversations especially probably in the year afterwards because I just didn't really have time for it and it was probably a case me trying to constantly stay busy and constantly stay preoccupied and not ever get to the point where my mind did trail off because I didn't want to think about it, I didn't want to start dealing with it because it was far too complicated and far too horrible to do that. (Eve, p. 13)

Endeavouring to avoid thoughts or feelings of their deceased sibling and the meaning of the loss provided some relief from this cataclysmic event in their lives. Many participants spoke of ways in which they avoided thinking about the death of their sibling. Avoidance was demonstrated by pushing thoughts of their sibling aside or attempting some level of denial, becoming immersed in fun activities or endeavouring to keep themselves busy with new experiences. Participants reflected

that pushing aside their grief was because they were not yet ready to confront it while others spoke of complete unacceptance, experiencing a state of almost complete denial for a number of years.

A strategy of avoidance does not necessarily signify a dysfunctional adaptation to the loss of a loved one but possibly assists in managing exposure to intense grief. Avoidance and denial were once considered maladaptive but investigators have provided evidence to the contrary and believe that some degree of avoidance may be healthy (Stroebe & Schut, 2001a). However, complete denial has been associated with pathological grief responses (Stroebe & Schut). Some of the participants spoke of denial which was ongoing for a number of years and likely to have been detrimental to the participants' adaptation to loss, such as in the case of Anita above.

Some participants described times in which they confronted the loss of their sibling and/or secondary losses and at other times, they avoided thoughts and feelings associated with the loss. Avoiding intense feelings of loss may be helpful to manage bereavement as well as other stressors related to the loss (i.e. family or relationship problems, work difficulties, adjustment issues). Empirical studies suggest that too much confrontation or too much avoidance can be detrimental to adaptation (Stroebe & Schut, 2001a). Therefore, attempts to deny, avoid or supress grief responses should be balanced with the ability to confront loss.

4.4.1.4 'Stuck' in the Loss

A theme that characterised adolescent sibling bereavement was feelings of immersion in intense sadness. Participants spoke of the duration of years spent feeling helpless, lost and alone. This theme is related to the previous theme, *Avoiding the Loss,* due to the participants' avoidance or denial being intertwined with feelings of intense sadness.

> I have tried very hard to process it without the negative sides of grief which has not
>
> been very healthy because I do have times where I just lose it. (Eve, pp.5-6)

> It's funny, I find it hard to really put my finger on what would have helped me cope in
>
> the first three or four years after his death. Perhaps, it was just taking things day by

day. I found thinking about the future was just too daunting for words, a future

without Yves. (William, p. 14)

Because the same things I've told you is basically the same things that run through my

mind every day. I sit down in bed and I guess it's probably why I don't get to sleep. I'm

just thinking and thinking, thinking and the worst thing about it is that there are no

answers you know. (Eric, p. 39)

This theme illustrates the halting effect of an inability to process the loss of their sibling.

Participants spoke of intense emotions they felt were lurking in the background that threatened to

ambush them if their grief was triggered. This was the case for Nancy who identified feeling

confused as to how she could manage not being overwhelmed when forced to confront her grief.

Nancy advised that she was working with a psychologist and struggled executing homework tasks

and actioning suggestions made in therapy.

A few participants described the experience of chronic rumination concerning their sibling's

death. A ruminative style of coping focuses on the distressing aspects and meaning of the death and

has been associated with levels of depression (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999; Nolen-Hoeksema,

Parker & Larson, 1994). Ruminative coping may extend and worsen the impact of loss due to the

enhancement of depressed mood on thinking, its negative influence on behaviour (i.e. reducing

motivation), interference with effective problem solving and impact on social support (Nolen-

Hoeksema & Jackson, 1996). Participants who exhibited a ruminative coping style advised they still

struggled with feelings of grief at the time of the interview.

The theme of '*Stuck' in the Loss* was not dependent on time since death as it was present in

the transcripts of the more recently bereaved as well as those whose sibling died at the most distant

point in time (e.g., 17 years ago). Some of the participants who reported more adaptive responses

to the death of their sibling may not have been able to report such if interviewed earlier, therefore,

timing did come into play. This theme was not dependent on participants' inability to "make sense"

or find meaning in the death of their sibling although this may assist in the acceptance of loss.

4.4.1.5 Comparing Data with the Dual Process Model of Coping

Participants spoke about ways in which they confronted or avoided thoughts and feelings associated with the loss of their sibling. Some spoke about feeling stuck in their experience of grief unable to find their way forward. Other participants spoke about ways in which they endeavoured to find a reprieve or distract themselves from grief.

The mourning process represented by the themes identified in this chapter: *Confronting the Loss*; *The Lost Role of the Sibling*; *Avoiding the Loss*; and *'Stuck' in the Loss*, support Stroebe and Schuts's (1999) *dual process model of coping with loss* (DPM). The DPM has some similarities with the "grief-work" hypothesis in terms of its focus on confronting loss and working through grief. It has been described as an intrapersonal model that encompasses the coping processes that can affect grief while also considering the cultural context of the bereaved (Stroebe & Schut, 2010).

The DPM model suggests that the pain of loss must be confronted for healing to be undertaken and reflects a cyclical grief process (Neimeyer, 2014). The authors of the model describe the oscillation between two stressors, that of 'loss-orientation' and 'restoration-orientation'. 'Loss-orientation' refers to the primary stressors related to coping with the experience of loss (i.e., death of a loved one) and 'restoration-orientation' refers to secondary stressors such as the consequences of the loss (i.e., concepts about self and the world, identity change, psychosocial transitions) (Worden, 2009; Rask, Kaunonen, Paunonen-Ilmonen, 2002). Secondary stressors are focussed on the future as the bereaved embark on rebuilding shattered assumptions about themselves and the world (Thompson, 2012; Worden, 2009).

Data from the study suggests that participants moved between the two stressors, 'loss-orientation' and 'restoration-orientation' as they endeavoured to cope with loss and, at times, employed avoidance strategies as part of their coping repertoire. The model suggests that individuals can only attend to one stressor at a time and move back and forth between them (Worden, 2009). However, the formula for a healthy balance between the stressors is unclear (Carr,

2010) although it has been suggested that as the individuals recover, they will spend more time considering the future than confronting 'loss-orientation' stressors (Thompson, 2012).

Some participants described feeling stuck in either avoidance or denial, unable to process their grief whereas others described an unrelenting focus on what they had lost. Stroebe and Schut (2010) suggest the experience of extreme intrusion or avoidance can be symptoms of traumatic bereavement and impair the ability to move between 'loss-orientation' and 'restoration-orientation' which ultimately impedes coping. Ruminative thoughts about the sibling's death were not associated with confronting the pain of loss or thinking about the future, but focused on things such as the circumstances, preventability or meaning of the death and therefore could be described as cognitive avoidance (Eisma, et al., 2013). These extremes were evident in the data as expressed by Anita's denial and Nancy's 'freezer' metaphor.

The results of the study suggest a dynamic process is at play for adolescents coping with bereavement as they oscillate between the confrontation and avoidance of bereavement demands. By way of example, Stroebe and Schut's (1999) DPM has been applied to illustrate one participant's experience with coping with the loss of their sibling in adolescence. Data from the transcript of Eric has been allocated to elements of the model.

Table 4.

Dual Process Model of Coping with Bereavement Example

Orientation	Example: Data from Participants
Loss-Orientation • Grief work • Intrusion of Grief	I didn't cry even at the funeral, I wasn't crying but I cry now. I cry now because I feel it now. But I didn't feel back then because it just all seemed so surreal. It was like this is not happening … I do cry now … now it's hit me and I realise he's not coming back. And I sit back in bed and there are nights when I just cry and cry because, particularly, I know, his room is next to mine and its empty. (Eric, pp. 7-8)
Loss-Orientation • Grief work • Intrusion of Grief	… I've taken some photos in my car and at home and the photos I've taken have the smiles on his face and it just reminds me, just to be happy. So, in that regard, he's still there but there is a point like some days I come home … I refuse to look at the photos and I just want to forget it but there'd be days where I am down and I just look at this smile on his face and I think he wants me to be happy. Maybe I should be happy. So, there's a bit of that but I think I'll never, never forget him. (Eric, p.31)
Restoration-Orientation • Attending to life changes	I feel I'm no longer a role model for my brother … I feel he doesn't look up to me. He does what he wants so … I've gone through all these years, done all the hard study, tried to be a good role model, a good friend … and was it all worth it? I could have done my own path … being the oldest I was cornered into studying to get the good grades. I mean, I could have gone through and been an average student and then got to a point where, what do I do with my life? And I basically followed in my father's footsteps being an engineer and, initially, I liked it. I'll tell you now that it's not a role that I like at all. Since my brother's death, I've analysed my life and thought, is this what I really want? (Eric, pp. 12-13)
Restoration Orientation: • Denial • Distraction from grief	I think the only thing that's distracted me is going to the gym. I find it's a major distraction. I mean, if I push my body physically and it just clears my mind and I find it's better than any drug … When I reach fatigue and the next day, I feel amazing … you are also focusing on what you are doing and I find it is some sort of clarity. It brings some sort of clarity into my mind. It's a weird thing that I've noticed that that's has helped me tremendously. I never used to go the gym prior my brother's death … (Eric, p. 28)
Restoration Orientation: • New roles / identities / relationships	I've been seeing counsellors over the last two years and they give advice but none of them understand the position that I'm in and I constantly, from day-to-day, am feeling lost and that's how I feel … they say find new friends and social group and all that sort of stuff. It is fair enough but it's not easy … I'm working Monday to Friday, going Saturdays and Sundays on my own just relaxing because I suffer from a lot of insomnia. So, I am just trying to catch up on sleep and so it's not easy at all. (Eric, p. 37)

Eric spoke about confronting the loss of his brother and was able to articulate the depth of pain as evidenced in the quotes aligned to the DPM's 'loss-orientation' in the table above. The intensity of Eric's grief was difficult for him to access shortly after his brother's death but he was able to speak of it in the interview which marked two years since the loss. In terms of secondary stressors, Eric described the roles lost to him now (i.e. being a role model for his brothers and the role that he played in his family). He reports no longer enjoying his work and reports a disconnection with his father as his father is no longer interested in his job as an engineer, a profession they shared. Eric wonders whether his hard work setting an example for his brothers was worth it as his brother is no longer there to mirror his achievements and share his successes. These thoughts and feelings reflect Eric's inability to re-engage in the future without his deceased sibling as he struggles to find his place.

Eric demonstrates his ability to avoid or distract himself from mourning through exercise, commenting that this was something that enabled him to cope with loss. He spoke of this distraction as providing clarity and it appears to offer hope for the future. Similar to Eric, another participant, William, found physical activity alleviated his experience of grief.

> I'd say a good five to six years there was an underlying sense of hopelessness in all. I found certain things helped, exercise, I did a lot of walking, a lot of jogging and that I think, whether it was the endorphins or what it was, that helped at times and gave, I think, a sense of hope. So, exercise was quite valuable, if not essential. (William, p. 10)

Lastly, it appears that Eric has been unable to forge new roles, navigate changes to his identity or manage the transitions in key relationships. These steps would help to propel him towards healthy adjustment. Eric appears to resist efforts to embark on a new life and find his place in the world without his sibling. The Coronial Inquiry into his brother's death engages him with ruminative thoughts and he describes this process as extremely distressing for both himself and his

family. Ruminative thoughts are likely to distract him from the grieving process and inhibit his ability to oscillate between the loss-orientation and restoration-orientation stressors. Conversely, the example below highlights the ability of William to transform his relationship with his deceased sibling in a way that enables him to move forward in the world.

> It was about six years after his death that I remember I was just walking through a corridor at university and it suddenly just occurred to me, I'm not leaving Yves behind, I'm taking him with me. And prior to that, there was that sense of…if ever I felt engaged in something, I almost felt as though I was leaving him behind and all of a sudden I was thinking, no, I'm taking him with me … and that felt like that was the truth of the matter as opposed to some cliché that had been imposed upon me. And I think that helped make some sense of the reality of his death. (William, p. 16)

Being able to find a way forward in life enabled William to re-engage in the future after many years of grief. He expressed an ability to make sense of the reality of his brother's death and that he was able to live his life with a changed connection to his brother. Some participants expressed that they have found a way to live with the loss of their sibling and this heralds a positive shift in adaptive ways of thinking. For others, the world remained a bleak and hopeless place in which they felt lost. William appears to have integrated the loss of his brother although his mourning process spanned many years and the intensity of his grief is often revisited. It is likely that his ability to cope is facilitated by the movement between the two stressors described in Stroebe and Schuts' (1999) DPM model.

4.4.1.6 Trajectories of grief

Theorists suggest coping mediates the distress connected with loss (Balk, 2014) as the individual endeavours to process and integrate this life experience. If adaptation to loss is achieved, this does not mean mourning is complete rather it is revisited by even those with a healthy adjustment to their loss (Corr, 2013). Although this study is not generalisable as it consists of a small sample and quantitative measures of adaptation to bereavement were not undertaken, it would

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appear that approximately fifty percent of participants in this study exhibit an inability to accept and integrate the loss of their sibling.

In terms of empirical evidence on trajectories of grief for adults, research by Bonanno (2009) suggests that fifty percent of individuals will fall within the bereavement category termed "resilient", not experiencing an extended and/or distressing period of coping after the loss of a loved one. Approximately forty percent of individuals would fall within the "recovery" trajectory and experience a prolonged period of difficulty before returning to normal functioning within a two year period (Bonanno). Bonanno also suggests that ten percent of bereaved adults will fit within the "enduring grief" trajectory, experiencing an intensely complicated and unending response to grief.

Results from this study suggest that approximately fifty percent of adult participants could be classified in an "enduring grief" trajectory at this point in time. Of these participants, the majority surpass the two year timeframe used to measure the duration of normal grief recovery by Bonanno (2009). Therefore, the participants experiencing intense grief responses two years post the death of their sibling may benefit from professional intervention and the percentage of participants from this study who could be classified in this trajectory is much higher than typically found in the general bereaved population.

Time since death has been recognised as factor in the adjustment to loss but also an aspect that varies greatly in retrospective studies (Adolph & Fleming, 1986; Davies & Limbo, 2010; Rosner, Kruse & Hagl, 2010). Research findings regarding the reduction in symptoms of adolescent sibling grief over time have been conflicting (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Robinson & Mahon, 1996). It is likely that symptoms of grief decrease over time for many adolescents although the presence of symptoms of grief intensity for those removed in time may indicate complicated grieving (Rosner, Kruse & Hagl). Therefore, time can be a useful measure in determining when grief becomes complicated.

4.4.2 Factors That Influence Coping

There are many factors that affect coping including personal attributes (e.g., personality, coping style), social supports and environmental factors. This section explores the most salient themes derived from participant data associated with what helped or hindered coping with sibling death in adolescence.

4.4.2.1 *Friends as a Source of Support*

Participants reported various forms of support that assisted their ability to cope with the loss of their sibling. Along with family members, friends were cited as the most expected or actual sources of support. Additionally, friends were an important point of discussion in interviews with participants. One participant, as stated below, believed the importance of friends in sibling loss is overlooked.

> ... it was good to finally speak about my friends, the whole bullying aspect and all of
>
> that. Everyone kind of looks at someone going through stuff like this and thinks, oh,
>
> you and your family but no one ever really thinks about your friends and your whole
>
> other aspect of school and everything, so it is good ... And you are with them most.
>
> You are with your friends eight hours a day ... (Emily, pp. 24-25)

Despite the acknowledgement by some participants that friends were a common source of support, many felt their peers and friends were limited in their willingness or ability to support them and felt abandoned.

> Unfortunately, after she passed away, slowly friends dwindled and only a few stuck
>
> around. It was funny, even the friends I'd met more recently, were more supportive
>
> than older friends. (Anna, p. 6)

> ... it was sort of got to a point where they thought that I should have been over it and it
>
> was time to stop talking about Yardley and stop talking about the accident and stop

trying to figure out why and stuff like that which I couldn't do at that time. So, basically, I had to make a whole new group of friends and move on …" (Elaine, p.10)

I think that's why my ex-boyfriend struggled, he didn't want to be 19 with a girlfriend going through the death of her brother. He wanted to be partying and drinking and living his life. He didn't want to be held back … because people don't want to take that on, people don't want to hear about it. Even if you don't talk about it, they don't want to risk hearing about it. They don't want to risk it affecting their lives. (Eve, p. 22)

She and I were really close … people knew I was okay because (friend) was looking after me … But not too long after Lionel died, maybe like a month or so, I think (friend) just shut down completely … I have no idea what really happened but I think she just stopped being my friend for no apparent reason whatsoever. So, I think that made Lionel dying a whole more complicated because Lionel was dead and I couldn't fix that but she was like my best friend and she was still alive and I couldn't fix it. (Nancy, pp. 14-15)

I think that made the process a lot more complicated and prolonged because I just didn't really deal with anything because I am not very particularly good at processing stuff anyway because it always feels crap to kind of burden other people who have no connection to me. I never really know how to share stuff with other people that have no connection to it. (Nancy, p. 15)

This theme contains a sense of isolation as participants' anticipated a level of support which was found to be lacking. Some spoke of friendships failing while others indicated that friends became scarce. Three participants reported that they shared friendship group with their deceased sibling and for different reasons, ties were severed from this group.

4.4.2.2 Well Meaning Friends

Some of the participants felt supported by friends but not understood in their experience of sibling bereavement. They talked about their experience differentiating them from others and found it difficult to be supported by friends. The support they did receive tended to be at a "high level".

I think my friends, they supported me emotionally a lot but I think it was because they didn't get it, they hadn't been through the same thing, I didn't really look at the support, I just rolled my eyes and just went like, you don't understand, you don't get what I am going through. (Emily, p. 23)

But it's not because they didn't want to (support from friends), it's because they didn't know how to. They don't know what to say. What do you say or do to someone who has lost their brother or sister and then their dad? It's like, "whoa, that's too hard". Especially for that age group, you don't have the mental capacity to deal with things like that. And that's what I think would have really helped me, if I had a specialised sibling grief therapist. (Nellie, pp. 46-47)

At uni I did find that hard when I had all this crazy stuff going on and I remember my best friend just saying to me one day, I think she was trying to say that she had stuff going on as well, she didn't really, it wasn't like there was actually anything going on, it was just her essay stuff, it wasn't anything big, family stuff or life stuff. I remember just feeling really angry like "you just don't get it!" (Nancy, p. 20)

When Connor died, a few of my friends came to the funeral and they were all 'we're here for you', whatever, we can go get a drink whenever you want, whatever, but it was very, I won't say superficial but like high level, it wasn't very deep support and other than (friend) (mentor/friend 9 years older), I didn't really have any deep

relationships. Because I just don't think that my friends were capable of it really, we were all young … (Eve, p. 17)

I guess I had a couple of friends that were trying to push me to, you know, let's continue on like we were before, let's go out, let's go to parties and things like that and pretend everything is fine and get me back on track which I can understand. (Linda, p. 11)

Participants spoke of interacting with peers and although the majority felt there was some level of support, they expressed feeling misunderstood and disconnected. The theme of *Well Meaning Friends* denotes a perception that although friends offered support, the support provided was deemed ineffective or participants felt friends did not understand and therefore could not assist. Within this theme, participants did not seem to provide the opportunity to help friends connect with their experience of grief but assumed that they were not able to provide the support the participants felt they would find helpful.

The two themes, *Friends as a Source of Support* and *Well Meaning Friends* reflect the coping styles of both the participants and their friends. Some of the participants felt aggrieved by the response from others who cut off friendships or they felt abandoned by those who they thought would support them. This is likely to have affected the way in which bereaved siblings thought of themselves and may have resulted in a lack of confidence or diminished sense of competence. Some of the participants represented in these two themes were resilient and able to form other relationships, while others were left alone in their grief.

The death of a sibling can facilitate feelings of being different from their peers and that no one really understands them (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Additionally, those supporting a friend experiencing the loss of a sibling in adolescence may be ill-equipped to respond to a loss of this magnitude and may potentially underestimate the intensity or duration of their friend's grief reactions (Balk, 1997; Balk & Vesta, 1998). Additionally, research suggests that bereavement in

adolescence has the capacity to impact social relationships, setting adolescents apart from their

peers (Balk, 1990; Davies, 1991; Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Fleming & Adolph, 1986).

Feeling different from peers has been a well-documented experience of adolescent loss

(Adolph & Fleming, 1986; Davies, 1991; Forward & Garlie, 2003; Hogan & Greenfield, 1991; Worden

& Silverman, 1996) and was a finding of this study. Forward and Garlie (2003) identified the

ambivalence experienced by bereaved adolescents in the knowledge that this experience made

them different from their peers but yet did not want to be treated differently.

The two friendship themes were present across the age groups of early, middle and late

adulthood, although consideration should be given to the differing expectations of friends in the

different phases of development. For example, older adolescents tended to seek higher levels of

emotional support and understanding from friends, whereas, younger adolescents were more

focussed on belonging and remaining accepted in their friendship group.

4.4.2.3 Found someone who understood

A number of participants identified a source of support in someone who had experienced

loss or was able to support them in a meaningful way. Some participants found speaking with others

who experienced loss or difficulties in the past were able to provide the empathy and support

needed to share their experience.

> I think to be in an environment with other students who are very compassionate and
>
> are willing to listen to your story has really helped me to express how I was feeling and
>
> never really had the opportunity to discuss with people. So, yeah I think my grief was
>
> put on hold to a certain extent, for a little while. (Anastasia, p. 9)

> I had one serious boyfriend after she died about a half a year after and I think well, he
>
> lost his dad, so it was like he understood a lot more than other people. And, so, yeah,
>
> it was good, he was good, but I don't know, I don't think it has affected me heaps
>
> except for the fact that I find it harder to talk to people. (Emily, p. 17)

I had (friend), who is 70 this year … he is a great friend and when Yasmine died, he and

his wife just picked me up and looked after me, they were amazing … They put me on a

plane, got me to (overseas) and took care of … all the insurance issues … as all things

like this are a bit of a mess and they were just amazing. They were just amazing.

(Harriet, p. 9)

So, with The Compassionate Friends, we all understand each other, where you can say

a sentence that wouldn't make sense to anyone else and yet, we all understand

perfectly because sometimes it's so hard to express yourself but the things that are

sometimes said, we're like, "oh, yeah, I know exactly what you mean". And you just

feel so safe and understood and accepted. (Anna, p. 21)

Participants who reported effective support from their partner, friends or family expressed a

theme that they had someone to support them. These participants appeared better able to process

the loss of their sibling and move towards a period of re-organisation. A key finding from research

by Forward and Garlie (2003) suggested that bereaved adolescent siblings seek support from a peer

who has experienced significant loss as a primary support person. This challenges previous research

that suggests family members were the main source of support (Mahon & Page, 1995; Balmer,

1992).

A number of participants advised that they were able to express themselves in a way that

they were understood in group situations where others had also experienced a similar loss or

trauma. This sentiment was expressed by participants who felt that connecting with adolescent

bereaved siblings would have been valuable but the mechanism to do so was not available to them.

Family members were reported as being available to an extent but this connection was often

fraught by the inability to really support each other due to their own grief. One participant, Donald,

who lost an older brother in a cycling accident and had a twin brother, spoke of the support found

within the twin relationship. Donald reported that he and his twin brother had ongoing

conversations about their deceased older brother and what they were experiencing. Therefore, he reported not feeling alone in his grief.

> So, we (he and twin brother) were sort of the ignored ones and to our credit, we had each other as well, so that always helped, though we could talk with each other and we also had our friends from school and the youth group, which were always good for leaning on and so they would come and visit say hello. And Neil's friends would come and visit us as well because, again, the age difference wasn't that great then and so we were more accepted into their circle. (Donald, p. 8)

The presence of friends of the deceased sibling proved to be a comfort for surviving siblings who reported that this was the case for the family as well. This relationship provided a connection to their deceased sibling and seemed to be revered. However, one sibling spoke of the subsequent loss of her deceased sibling's partner as he moved on with his life and she reported the break in their relationship as a significant secondary loss as she regarded him like a brother. A few of the other participants were able to maintain relationships with friends of their deceased sibling or forged new relationships with friends who mirrored the nature of a sibling relationship or characteristics of their sibling (e.g., gender, age). Findings from Balmer's (1992) research suggested that surviving siblings experienced a level of comfort interacting with their deceased sibling's friends and, at times, preferring this group of friends to that of their peers. Such relationships can offer a means of escape from the reality of pain within the family and offer an opportunity to share memories of their deceased sibling (Balmer).

4.4.3 Supporting Sibling Loss

The scope of this study did not include the evaluation of professional support provided to adolescents following the death of a sibling. However, this theme emerged from the data as participants recounted their lived experience of coping and the usefulness of professional support.

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Some participants also spoke of a relationship that provided a level of safety which enabled them to connect with feelings of unexpressed sadness.

4.4.3.1 Sitting with the Story

A number of participants reported that the ability of someone to listen to their story and respond with empathy was hugely therapeutic as they felt this was rarely offered. At times, this experience provided a turning point for participants in confronting their loss.

> I remember going to see the shrink that my friend sent me to. She was a really lovely woman and she said you are really sad and she wanted the whole story, she wanted the story from the start when I was born, my mum dying and everything that lead on from there and at the end of it all, I was there for 3 hours … she said there is absolutely nothing wrong with you, you should be sad, after what you have told me, you should be sad … if you need to talk to someone, come and talk to me but there is nothing wrong with you. And it was like a light bulb moment and such a relief for somebody to say and that's what I mean about Yasmine dying, it gave me the opportunity to hear that and if she hadn't died, I would never have heard that from someone, albeit a complete stranger, but it was a relief to hear it from a stranger. (Harriet, pp. 16-17)

> … the first session I remember sitting there telling her my background, my childhood and about Yardley and all that sort of stuff and after everything I said and I said "but that's okay that this happened" … talking about my mum, my step-mum beating me up and all these horrible things, and by the end of it, she is sitting there in tears and she said what makes you think it is okay? And that was the first thing, it was like, yeah, it's not okay … (Elaine, p. 16)

Participants who sought support from counsellors or psychologists reported that the opportunity to tell their story was therapeutic although this was not mentioned in all of the cases in which therapists were involved. The participants' ability to tell their story was not restricted to

therapists alone as evidenced by three participants who reported that, in the years following the death of their sibling, they were able to share their story with a significant friend or romantic partner who was a witness to their story and be able to 'sit with them' in their grief, tolerate the pain rather than withdraw. Quotes from the participants are presented below:

> I think I was just, for the first time able to relax. I was with someone who, my partner is about 8 years older than me, he is a lot more mature. While he has really never gone through any loss or anything like I have been through, he is a very kind and understanding person and I think for the first time, I was able to just relax and just feel something and feel safe knowing that the world wasn't going to fall apart if I just felt that a little bit ... I think it was just for the first time my brain wandered into the realms that I hadn't wanted to think about and also, I let myself feel the sad stuff that I had been blocking out, yeah. (Eve, p. 14)

> Yves' death will always be a central part of my life and really who I am. And so I've just been very fortunate to have met someone who is really, I think, comfortable with the reality of trauma in people's lives, whereas, I think for a lot of girls or women who I was involved with, I suppose you could say, the grief thing was something that was hard to fathom. (William, p. 12)

> So my best friend has actually helped me through quite a lot of this. She never met Lisa but she's been so supportive … when we first sort of started hanging out, she probed me to the point where I was on the floor in tears because she just wanted to understand. And the fact that she pushed so hard to understand, I wasn't going to let her go, it was like you are a good friend … she really cared and she wanted to fully understand and to me that's amazing. (Anna, p. 15)

The data suggests a theme of feeling psychologically held in a relationship with a therapist or significant friend/partner. Results from the study indicated that the therapist's or significant other's

ability to be a witness to the participants' story of loss was helpful in their grieving process. In the examples provided, one partner was a sexual assault counsellor and the other partner was approximately eight years older than the participant and described by the participant as being more mature. These individuals had the capacity to sit with the emotional intensity that sibling bereavement in adolescence presents and were able to offer the support that was found to be reassuring and helpful by the participant.

The ability to tell one's story of loss and grief is a key element of Neimeyer's (2000) *meaning construction theory* which focuses on the narrative through which bereaved individuals "make sense" of their life after loss. The ability of bereaved individuals to find significance in loss has been suggested to predict greater longer term wellbeing (Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010). Meaning making may be especially critical for those bereaved by suicide, homicide and fatal accidents as an inability to "make sense" has been found to mediate the impact of loss on the survivors adaptation (Currier, Holland & Neimeyer, 2006). It is likely that the participants' ability to tell their story and construct their own meaning of their sibling's death in the context of their own lives was a therapeutic process facilitated by another.

4.4.3.2 Ineffective Professional Support

Some participants reported that they felt misunderstood by therapists they engaged with. Some reported connecting with multiple therapists before they identified and engaged in therapy that was helpful.

> Well, when she first died, mum and dad kind of went, "oh, we'll take you to a
>
> counsellor" … just a thing that they thought they should do and it was horrible, it was a
>
> terrible psychologist.   I think it was more aimed a bit younger or I was a bit older for
>
> my age or something so I never went back. (Emily, p. 2)
>
> I've been seeing counsellors over the last two years … they give advice but none of
>
> them understand the position that I'm in and I constantly, from day-to-day, am feeling

lost and that's how I feel and they all give advice and say find new friends … it is fair enough but it's not easy. (Eric, p.37)

Soon after my brother died I did (seek psychological support) but I found it more of a hindrance than an aid at the time. Whether that was on them or me, I'll probably never really know but I did see two different counsellors or psychologists but I didn't find it very helpful. I think finding a psychologist is like finding the perfect handbag, you've got a whole shop and there's a lot there but there is only really one that works for you. (Eve, p. 2)

We went to a counsellor in (regional town) for a couple of sessions but I didn't see the point at the time, it didn't make sense to me because I was talking to someone that didn't know what I was going through and I still feel now that the process was always geared more to the parents and the focus was more on the parents all the time than the actual sibling, so I just didn't really see the point of it. It possibly did help looking back but at the time I didn't think it was worth bothering about but then I am also the kind of person that never would talk about anything and you bottle everything up and you don't express anything so whether that was just me at the time as well, I am not too sure. (Linda p. 3)

The results of this study were suggestive of a mixed response to the efficacy of mental health and other practitioners offering support for adolescents prior to or following the death their sibling. In the circumstances where participants sought support from a counsellor or psychologist following the death of a sibling, the assistance received was not always recognised as meeting their needs. The data from the study suggests that bereaved adolescent siblings typically seek support either immediately following the death of a sibling and/or more than two years after their loss.

In the instances where participants reported receiving support but found the support did not meet their needs, comments were mainly directed at the feeling that the psychologist/counsellor did

not understand what it was like to lose a sibling or the support offered was developmentally

inappropriate. There was one instance where the support received by a 14 year old participant was

identified as not meeting her needs as she felt the support was directed towards a much younger

person.

It could be suggested that different types of support are required at different times during

and after the loss of a sibling. Siblings who experienced the chronic illness of a sibling may require

some practical support via hospital settings (i.e. social workers, nurses, etc.) and this may relate to a

level of support not necessarily directed towards the grieving process as their sibling is still alive.

After the death of a sibling, whether expected or unexpected, there may be an opportunity for

practical support as well as offering an opportunity for the bereaved sibling to explore and/or make

sense of their initial reaction to the death of their sibling. Following this phase of support, it may be

appropriate to offer support to assist the grieving process and/or work through any trauma

associated with the sibling's death.

As noted by Bonanno (2009), humans are wired for grief and assistance may only be helpful

when grief has become complicated and protracted, requiring professional intervention. In the case

of adolescent sibling bereavement, there may be a number of variables present (i.e. trauma,

disenfranchised grief, history of mental illness, inadequate support from family) that pose a risk for

the complication of grief and therefore, the trajectory of adolescent grief should be evaluated by

health practitioners to determine whether intervention is warranted.

4.4.3.3 Effective Practical Support

Quotes below from two participants indicate their appreciation of the support received by a

social worker/nurse and both participants advised that these individuals inspired them to consider a

career in the field of mental health.

I always wanted to be a fashion designer and pursue fashion and things, and then after

her death I looked at that and said, I can be doing something better and so I looked

into social work. They had this amazing social worker at the hospital through the year

she was sick and he was just amazing, he helped us with finding an apartment for mum

and dad to stay up there with and just all this crazy stuff … (Emily, p. 16)

I didn't really know what I wanted to do and I think because I started seeing school

nurses, the first one I don't think was a social worker but she had some other degree

or qualification but then the ones in year 11 that I saw was a social worker. I guess I

wanted to, in a sense, give back but I think there was a certain understanding that

people who have experienced grief or loss then can just pass onto others or just have

the empathy to listen. And, so, when I was in year 10, we needed to do our work

experience placement and my aunt is a social worker, so, I spent a week with her and

she works with people with mental health issues. So, I did that and I really enjoyed it

and then as I continued to see counsellors throughout year 11, I thought that was

really good. So, I think it's definitely influenced me. When I was younger, I always

wanted to be a teacher and I just don't have an interest in that anymore. (Anastasia,

pp. 12-13)

Evidence from the data suggests effective support from social workers in hospital settings

for adolescents with a chronically ill sibling were perceived as positive experiences. Another

participant reported that the school nurse was able to provide support on a weekly/fortnightly basis

after the unexpected loss of her sibling. It may be that these individuals were able to provide

practical support for the participants which helped to meet some basic needs during a difficult

period. Additionally, chronic illnesses such as cancer and cystic fibrosis may engage the family in

support via community services such as those accessible by hospitals but that this support may

disappear after death (Shapiro, 1994).

4.4.3.4 Lack of Community Support

A number of participants indicated that they sought support from community organisations

and online forums after the death of their sibling and reported that it was difficult to locate

appropriate support options.

I was very fortunate to have the support I had but I guess I felt as though, I don't know, mum and dad went to (support group), I didn't feel as though there was any society for siblings. I did see a couple advertised but, yeah, I just felt from a community point of view, there wasn't much available to siblings. If I didn't have the family and the friends I did, then I think I would definitely be in a different situation. (Scott, p. 22)

I just found nothing for siblings … my goal one day is to change that. Because I think especially with a sibling, that, not only do you grieve your past and what you've had, you grieve your future as well because they are supposed to be there when your parents die and things change. (Nellie, p. 7)

I think (support group) was brilliant but in saying that, once I hit 25, okay, you're out, sort of thing. And not only that, (support group) was not therapy, I think you really need therapy and you really need to deal with your grief properly before it manifests into something else. And there was just nothing, nothing there. I had to go out and find an actual therapist, but I want somebody that specialises in grief and sibling grief and can understand what I feel. (Nellie, p. 45)

A clear theme which emerged from the data was that participants found it difficult to access community groups specifically created to support sibling loss. Participants spoke of the desire to connect with others who could relate to their experience of loss. Many of the participants who commented on the lack of community support said that their search for support was driven by a lack of adequate support from family and/or friends. In some cases, they reported receiving little or no support from anyone.

A few of the participants indicated an intent to correct this situation themselves and spoke of creating technology enabled support groups. Two participants advised that they were actively involved in setting up online support mechanisms.

4.4.4 Moderators of Mourning

For a few of the participants, the complicated circumstances of their sibling's death contributed to an already difficult loss.

4.4.4.1 Search for What Happened

The circumstances of the death had the capacity to distress participants further and, in some cases, distract them from confronting their grief in the months and years that followed.

… one of the worst parts about it is the whole coroner's inquest … all the results were published in (the newspaper) two days ago. What that brings up is a lot of grief back to the family ... now we're going through the courts again … they published photos of him without our consent and we just want to know why this has been done. So, that's brought a lot of grief back into the family, when we're just sort of dealing with it, it's come back and hit us again. (Eric, pp. 8-9)

I certainly remember those struggles with the (defence force), I certainly remember a lot of those feelings but a lot of memories, it's as though the grief has just knocked a lot of that stuff into…yeah, I remember events prior to his death far more clearly than things that have come after. (William, pp. 20-21)

There's losing him and there's the way that he died. And losing him, I think I have made a lot of progress on, processing and accepting that, however, I don't know if I ever will be able to process the way in which he died. There will always be a question why because we'll never get the answer and I think that is what makes suicide so complicated … (Eve, p. 19)

… a few of the media reports were that he had faked it or suicide and I guess that was hard. People started saying that, that's not true, we know Aaron, that would never have happened and people had their own theories and they were very open in expressing that to me. (Scott, p. 15)

In the examples provided above, participants became focussed, fixated or absorbed with the events connected to the death of their sibling. For Eric, this was the Coronial Inquiry into his brother's motor car accident. Similarly, for William, it was a military inquiry into his brother's accident in the defence force. These two participants spoke of years of ongoing pain and suffering for both themselves and their families in which their siblings' death was sidelined as the official investigations played out. They both reported witnessing the devastating effects of the investigation on family members, particularly their parents. Both Eric and William spoke of the distraction of these external and independent processes as their energy was consumed by questions surrounding their sibling's death. Another stressor evident in the data was that of death by suicide. Eve spoke of some progression on her acceptance of her brother's death but found it difficult to come to terms with his death being the result of suicide as she felt she would never find the answers she seeks. Additionally, Scott was confronted by the ambiguous death of his brother who was suspected to have drowned in a kayaking accident but his brother's body was not found for two weeks. Scott advised that during this period there was conjecture from the media concerning his brother's possible suicide or purposeful disappearance. Scott's brother was a well-known sporting identity and the media was focussed on the circumstances of his brother's death to the point of intrusion which was upsetting for him and his family.

In a previous chapter, the way in which the sibling died was reviewed together with themes associated with trauma and traumatic grief. The theme of *Search for What Happened* is related to questions surrounding the death of their sibling and searching for some certainty in the midst of ambiguity and conjecture.

Worden (2009) identified 'mediators' of mourning in his task approach model of grieving, many of which are relevant to this study and are discussed in other chapters of the thesis. The mediators of mourning, or more correctly, the moderators of mourning identified by Worden which can be applied to many different models of grief, are: *who the person who died was; nature of the attachment; how the person died; historical antecedents; personality variables; social variables;* and

concurrent stresses (Worden, 2009). The relevant moderators for this theme are *how the person*

died and *concurrent stresses*. The way in which a person dies has been a subject of much research.

Deaths due to traumatic losses such as suicide, homicide or accidents were more likely to lead to

trauma symptoms and depressive symptoms over a longer period of time than those who

experienced other losses (Bonanno & Kaltman, 1999).   In the case of this theme, the unknown

elements of the siblings' death prompted a level of rumination that negatively influenced the way in

which the participants coped. Searching for the answers and unable to find them was a difficult

process which the participants and their families endured. These circumstances could be classified

as concurrent stresses related to the death of the sibling.

4.4.4.2 Sibling Death as a Beacon

Many of the participants interviewed had some prior experience of loss such as that of a

grandparent or aunt and in one case, a friend when they were a child. The participants thought

these experiences of loss had been helpful but paled into insignificance when faced with the loss of

their sibling. Additionally, significant deaths following the loss of their sibling, although impactful,

were reported as easier to accept.

> I've lost half of my family, it's really unfair. I guess, with that, my dad had cancer so it
>
> doesn't make it easier but I guess we were more prepared. I accepted it a lot better,
>
> so, my acceptance, I guess, it would have helped me accept it a lot more. Yes, so, it
>
> probably helped. Again, I had to be strong in terms of "everything happens for a
>
> reason". You have to be strong. (Anita, p. 16)

> I had an uncle who I was very, very close to, he died last year and that has sort of
>
> thrown me back to some of those feelings around Yves's death as well … I think,
>
> thankfully, it isn't the futility that's activated. I'm happy that hasn't really kicked in. I
>
> think it's just that sheer disbelief that someone who's so central in your life has
>
> suddenly been torn away and you can't get access to them. I think that's what has
>
> really thrown me. But it's certainly taken me back to that time. (William, p. 13)

So, every time I've lost someone since then, I had never lost anyone before, when I

have lost someone since then, I've really felt like there's always been an answer for

why, whether it was an accident or an illness or whatever. So, it's been really different

every time because none of it has ever been as uncertain as what Connor was. (Eve, p.

24)

This theme is highlighted in the examples of the significant deaths of others following the

loss of their sibling. The participants expressed their experience of subsequent loss, although still

very painful and difficult, was an easier loss to accept and process. This may be due to the

refinement of coping capabilities, increased experience and maturity or that the subsequent death

represented more of a "natural order" when compared to that of their sibling as those they lost

were older. However, the subsequent loss did not possess the hallmarks of trauma often described

by participants recounting the death of their sibling. The death of a sibling in adolescence remained

a beacon of loss in which other losses fell into its shadow.

4.4.5   Uniqueness of Sibling Loss

The themes identified from the data in this chapter relate to the experience and uniqueness

of sibling loss. Some of the themes have no parallel in the broader grief literature.

4.4.5.1 *The Accidental Only Child*

Participants spoke about the realisation that they were now an only child after the death of

their only sibling. This experience seemed to speak to their profound loss and isolation in that they

felt truly alone.

I guess it didn't really hit me that I was an only child for a long time afterwards … even

though my sister passed away in July, it seemed the months until Christmas seemed to

fly by and little things such as people leaving my sister's name out of a Christmas card

… I used to get really upset about it because it was like she never existed and I was an

only child but she did exist so I used to get really upset at that. (Anastasia, p. 7)

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One of the questions that catches me all the time is 'oh, do you have any siblings?' And that is just, nobody will ever understand how complicated that question is when you are one of two children and one of you is not here anymore. Because I am not an only child but by bereavement, I am the only living child. (Eve, p. 19)

It's been a huge adjustment. My parents are so supportive of me and my feelings and all of that but I still sometimes feel I have to be everything for them." (Anna, p. 3)

I just picture what I'm missing out. I would have loved to see Aaron's kids and his wife. I've got nephews and nieces on (wife's) side of the family now, but, yeah, I really miss that cause when mum and dad have gone, it's just me. (Scott, p. 20)

… but all the things, getting married, having kids, that's always been, it's the quintessential bitter sweet, you've got something beautiful going on in your life and a great big hole. (Elaine, p. 25)

Mother's Day, Father's Day, birthdays, I feel like I have to put in extra effort. I know I don't have to but, no, I want to and I feel like I should kind of make up for her not being there. (Anna, p. 22)

Ten of the fifteen participants reported that they had become an only child after the death of their only sibling. Participants reported a deep loneliness at the realisation that their sibling would not be present to share significant events (e.g. marriage, birth of a child, aging parents) and there was no one else could fulfil that role. One participant stated "*I am no longer the oldest or the youngest but the only one.*" Those who were the only surviving sibling spoke of a major adjustment in their role within the family and their view of their lives. Becoming the only child was reported as an isolating experience and one that was difficult to convey to others.

… mum and dad are 30 years older than what Aaron and I are so, yeah, at times I think, yeah, I do feel lonely without Aaron at times even though I could have 30 people around me, I'd still feel lonely. (Scott, p. 20)

So, I can understand why they don't say anything but it's just a case of you just feel

quite alone because you don't want to say to somebody "actually, do you remember

my sister and this is what, this is her birthday?" or whatever because you don't want to

make them feel uncomfortable and at the same time, talking to mum and dad can be

difficult because their experience is different. It was their child not their sister. (Linda,

p.17)

… I said to dad, I don't get that, I don't have that and the only way that you could

understand how, why I still miss Yardley so much is think of that, it's the little things

and one day my dad's going to die and I said, oh, it's just me. Yardley is supposed to be

there, we're supposed to organise your funeral together, we are supposed to decide

what songs to play … (Elaine, p. 13)

A shared life space is thought to influence the intensity of bereavement after the loss of a

sibling (Parkes, 1972). A shared life space refers to the emotional closeness between siblings and is

likely to be much greater within smaller families (Davies, 1988a; Parkes). Therefore, the concept and

influence of a shared life space supports the intensity of grief expressed by only surviving siblings.

Additionally, research by Hogan and DeSantis (1996) found that the loss of a sibling and becoming an

only child was reported as a deeply lonely experience. The role of having to function independently

as the only surviving sibling and adopt the role of "the only child" can be a difficult transition to

make (Robinson & McMahon, 1997).

Given the larger number of only surviving siblings who participated in this sample, it is

possible this reflects a willingness of participants who have experienced an intense grief response to

participate in the study.   It is likely that losing your only sibling adds another dimension to the loss

of a sibling in adolescence.

Participants spoke of the unrealised potential of their deceased sibling, the missed experiences and alluded to feelings that they were somehow unworthy of living when their sibling had died.

> Because why her and why not me? If she was the one that wanted to do so much in life … knew who she was and what she wanted to do. And I'm just sort of skipping from place to place and not having a real drive and knowledge of what I want to do. Why did she die and not me, sort of thing? It's a sense of, well, have I done enough and utilised what I've got to make the most of it? But if something happened to me tomorrow, I mean, I have done a lot. I've enjoyed what I have been able to do so I am happy that way. I think, looking back on it, yeah, I'm happy that, the life that I lived. (Linda, pp. 18-19)

> A lot of the time, I'll say I've got all of these plans, I want to do them and I never quite get there. I feel as though now, I really need to push a lot more and actually live up to what I say and want to do. (Scott, p. 20)

> … just the mass guilt and then after that, I realised, "oh, it's okay for me to enjoy things, it's okay for me to have fun, it's okay for me laugh and smile" … if I wasn't exactly in the right frame of mind or it was near an anniversary or a birthday, I would feel the guilt on quite a severe basis for about a year and a half. And that sort of dropped off a bit after quite a few talks with my mum and my mum showing me that it's okay for me to be happy and enjoying life that I really think I started to perk up. (Anna, p. 17)

> … if that hadn't happened (sister dying), I don't think I'd be sitting here with my loving, caring, kind husband and my four children now. I'd have another reality but it wouldn't be anywhere near as positive as the one I've got now and I put that down to

Yasmine dying … I've spoken to my husband about it, a sense of guilt, that in some

way, and I know it is not real because it is not the way the world works, but I

sometimes feel like Yasmine was sacrificed and I got to be happy and it doesn't make

sense. (Harriet, p. 18)

Participants spoke of a desire to live a fulfilled life as their sibling did not get the chance to. The positive side of survivor guilt was the drive to be all that they could and appreciate experiences in life. The negative side of survivor guilt manifested as feelings of inadequacy and that something was inherently wrong with who they were. Participants expressed the desire to make their lives worthwhile and some participants alluded to the hopes and dreams that their parents had for their children.

Survivor guilt is a well-documented phenomenon within the literature and appears to be a hallmark of adolescent sibling bereavement (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Hogan, 1988; Hogan & Greenfield, 1991; Walsh & McGoldrick, 1998). Research by Robinson (2001) investigated grief intensity of sibling bereaved adults after the loss of a sibling due to AIDS found that survivor guilt did not predominate in the results of the adult sample. The author suggests that survivor guilt among children and adolescents is likely to be more reflective of development phase rather than an aspect of sibling loss. These findings may be explained by the future oriented notions expressed by adolescent bereaved siblings reflecting on a future without their sibling and projecting thoughts about what would have been had they lived.

4.4.5.3 The Lost Sibling

This theme speaks to the erosion of memories and acknowledgement by others of the deceased sibling and, as time passes, evidence of their sibling's seems to disappear.

… they seem to sort of cease to exist because you move on in life and all the people

who knew them, they're not around you anymore … I sometimes feel like it is a relief

when someone remembers Yasmine because I feel like I'm not the only person who

remembers her, she's almost disappeared, there's nothing left of her now other than the things that I've kept, it's sad. (Harriet, p. 23)

… most of my friends now never actually met Yvonne, whereas my school friends, there is only a few that I keep in contact with but they never ever mention her. So it's a weird, she was real but people don't acknowledge it anymore. It's almost like you get to a point and it's don't talk about it anymore … I don't know whether they don't want to upset you or it has been enough time, move on, forget about it, that kind of thing. (p. 9) ... after a while you sort of think, well, she has been dead longer than she was alive, was she actually there? You know, you get that sense of, did it really happen, I guess. (Linda, p. 12)

I've never really dated many people but after Lionel died, the year after, I went out with a guy who was also living on campus at college and in my mind it was quite a long time after Lionel died but actually it was only like five months or something … I just remember that going out with him brought up heaps of stuff … I remember it was really hard that he had never met someone who was so important to me. Lionel and I were so close, that was a big part of my life, to know that he blinked and missed that. That was really hard. (Nancy, pp. 21-22)

I think it's in a sense been a little bit harder as I've got older because even though I'm friends with my two best friends, they both moved into working life after high school and stuff and I went into uni life, so, I sort of merged with another group of friends … this new group of friends never met my sister, so it's like they'll always have the understanding of who my sister was whereas the other people only know her by what I've said. (Anastasia, p. 8)

I think that the other big loss I have had was actually Kiki's teacher, Kiki's favourite teacher. She used to organise 'relay for life' events for Kiki and things like that and

then she was in a car crash about a year and a half after Kiki's death and so after that,

it was like there were no 'relay for life' events, not as much commemorative stuff. She

was kind of the one behind it all and then she died so it was a bit horrible and she was

Kiki's favourite teacher and I had her as a teacher at one stage and so, that was

horrible. (Emily, p. 20)

… we've moved into this house about four, nearly five years ago, and being that I've

always rented properties, you've never put much of your life up on the walls because

you weren't supposed to and that's what I've said to him (husband), I want to have a

wall of family photos and I want a picture of Yvonne up and things like that because

otherwise I feel a bit like I'm not, not honouring her but I've forgotten about her.

(Linda, p. 12)

As time passes, someone who was important in their life seems forgotten. A sense of re-

grief is awakened as people leave their life or new connections (e.g. husband or wife, children,

friends) enter their life. Additionally, opportunities to talk about their sibling diminish and the

experiences of their childhood and/or adolescence are infrequently discussed. The loss of people or

objects from the past coupled with the forward motion of life presents a challenge in the

maintenance of their sibling's memory. This experience was captured by a few participants as a

surreal feeling and they questioned "did they ever really exist?"

4.4.5.4 Feeling Robbed and Cheated

Another meaning of bereavement is that of being robbed. Some siblings reported that their

lost sibling was their best friend, protector, confidant and it was difficult to imagine a future without

them.

Friends are very hard because there is always that jealousy from me that says, "you've

still got your sister or you've still got your brother" so, I've got a few friends, they

never understand, they'll never get it but they're there nonetheless … I've always said

that I'm very jealous of people that have a brother or a sister. (Husband) has got a

sister who they don't really get on that well and that frustrates me to the core.

Because I think you are a moron if you have seen what I have gone through and yet

you don't even talk to your sister that just cuts me to the core. (Nellie, p.46)

And I guess at the same time I feel cheated. I see my friends with their siblings, you

know, especially the ones where it's just them and their sisters or sister and I kind of

feel cheated because I'm like, how come I don't have that. You know, we were just

getting to be adults together and had these plans and she went away and I feel

cheated. (Anna, p.13)

At first I was hesitant to do anything … I did not want to go out and socialise especially

with my wife's side of family. If they were doing family events, I didn't want to be

around other people's family. She's got two sisters and their partners, they're both

really close with their brothers and that upset me at first. And probably after about six

or seven months or so, I started enjoying that, I enjoyed seeing people getting along

well with their siblings. (Scott, pp. 8-9)

I do find it funny that I am always looking at other people's relationship with their

brothers and sisters just to see what it would have been like or perhaps, maybe they

should make more of it because if they didn't have their brother or sister how they

would be? Yeah, it's something that I think I look for as well. I remember when I met

(husband) and his family and I thought, oh, they all get along quite well and it's nice for

them to have the three siblings that they can talk to each other. (Linda, p. 27)

It was hard because I wanted to surround myself with people that knew him and keep

hearing stories about him and how he made people feel, yeah, so I suppose I've felt a

bit ripped off. (Elaine, p. 10)

… I have met people who have lost siblings since but not somebody young and even

my step-sister's husband lost his sister to cancer a few years ago but she was 50 and

he thinks that means that he understands my grief and I said to my dad, losing your

brother just like that at 17, you can't even compare that to somebody at 50 dying of

cancer. I said (step-sister's husband) has had all this time to talk and tell her everything

he wants her to know and they've had that, I still get that would be hard but you can't

compare. (Elaine, p. 28)

Some of the participants expressed feelings of anger, jealousy and vulnerability many years after the loss of their sibling in adolescence. This theme was dominant for those who became the only surviving sibling and it seemed that a point of reference upon which they had relied was now gone. Only surviving siblings appeared to struggle with the loss of this role.

Research by Buhrmester and Furman (1990) suggests birth order can influence the relationship between siblings. Findings from their research suggest that younger siblings look up to older siblings, value interaction with them and afford them feelings of admiration and intimacy. The dynamic described may account for reactions from younger siblings upon the death of an older sibling although data from this theme were evident in participant stories from older siblings as well.

4.4.5.5 Do You Have Any Siblings?

Participants described the question often asked "do you have any siblings?" as a difficult one to answer. The participants expressed they were forced to make a swift choice to either deny their siblings' entire existence or continue the conversation by disclosing their loss and navigate the unpredictable response.

When people ask me if I've got any brothers or sisters I can never say no because I just

feel like it's unfair to just dismiss that whole part of my life. I always say I've got a

brother, depending on how I feel, depending on who the person is and if I am ever

going to see them again or if they know people I know. I go along with it and just like

"yes, he does this''. (Anita, pp. 10-11)

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I learnt that people are uncomfortable with death … and grieving, so, if people ask me … do I have brothers and sisters? "Yeah, I have got a brother"… then once you have said that, if you don't say a "but he was killed in the car accident" then you've got to carry that through and I didn't do it, like try to be deceiving or anything, it's just, I don't want these new friends to pity me or not want to be around me because I'm fragile or something like that. So, I just never told them, when Yardley's name came up, I never spoke about him in past tense. (Elaine, p. 27)

I think it's hard when people ask you how many people or who's in your family because in my mind I have five siblings but I don't. It's always been tricky. You don't want to freak people out either … It was awkward the other day I said I grew up with five siblings and one of my friends asked me did one of them die or something? And I was like, yeah, actually and they were like I am really sorry and I am like it's really fine. (Nancy, pp.38- 39)

If I am ever in a situation where I am with someone I just really don't know at all and they say "oh, do you have any brothers and sisters?" and in that split second I decide to say "no" and then I grapple with this, this horrible feeling of saying that he is not here, effectively saying he doesn't exist and that's just, yeah, I hate that. But you can't say it though. If the receptionist somewhere that you're sitting waiting for 20 minutes asks you if you've got any brothers and sisters, it's not really appropriate but then, sometimes, I said "yeah, I have, yeah, I've got a brother", then "how old is he?" Well, now I have to think because he hasn't had a birthday of six years and it's just a really, it's really complicated and messy. (Eve, pp. 19-20)

People always ask weird things like do you have any brothers and sisters? It depends on what mood I'm in or what sort of conversation you want to have. If you say I've got

two sisters or one sister or whatever. It's weird saying that in the past tense. But

people are always pretty understanding. (Marvin, p. 21)

If I meet new people, they say do you have any siblings and it's a very hard to answer

because I want to say yes, I have a brother but at the same time, he's not here. I don't

know how to answer that question and when I tell people, they kind of regret asking it

which, I have no trouble, I am happy for people to ask me, it's that really weird

situation to be in ... usually I end up comforting the other person as they are really

upset that they have asked me anything that has upset me, you haven't upset me, it's,

I just don't know how to answer it. (Scott, p. 5)

The question of "do you have any siblings?" forces survivors to either deny or acknowledge

their deceased sibling to others. Some of the considered factors in this decision highlighted by

participants were the relationship they had with the person who asked the question, whether they

will see that person again, the situation or environment they were in and how the participant felt at

the time. If the death was revealed, participants often reported that they were confronted with

others not knowing what to say and that the participant somehow had to manage the situation. This

theme relates to the attitudes of society towards death and the unpreparedness to engage in

conversations about death and dying. If society was able to acknowledge and engage in

conversations concerning loss, sibling survivors may not feel so compelled to deny the occurrence of

such a significant event in their life to avoid others feeling uncomfortable or not knowing what to

say.

The response to the question may be based on variables such as the relationship the

surviving sibling has with the person asking, if they will see this person again, their current mood,

the level of comfort in disclosing information about themselves or the level to which the death has

been accepted. When choosing to ignore the existence of their deceased sibling, it may be a

strategy to simplify the response given for the context in which the question is asked. Alternatively,

bereaved siblings may once again be driven to internalise their grief to avoid others feeling

uncomfortable or upset. Hence, the theme of "do you have any siblings?" in part supports the experience of disenfranchised grief discussed in *The Disenfranchisement of Adolescent Sibling Grief* section.

> No, I don't talk about it (brother's death), not in depth. I don't really talk about myself that much especially talking about something like this. I am always wary of the other person and what they might be thinking, if they are getting bored or feeling a bit weird about it. Because even when I tell people now, for example I started a new job a year and a half ago and people that I speak to that find out, they get really weird about it. (Anita, p. 19)

Benefits of keeping secrets or suppressing traumatic experiences have accumulated in literature on coping and grief (Stroebe & Schut, 2001a). "Keeping grief in" or regulating grieving can be potentially adaptive in situations where an individual feels that they cannot express their loss to others (Stroebe & Schut). Anita's comments above may reflect such a situation where she feels some situations are not conducive to disclosure. However, research suggests that when individuals feel that the social environment does not welcome disclosure, this constraint may have negative consequences such as intrusive thoughts about the loss and depressive symptoms (Stroebe & Schut).

For a couple of the participants, not acknowledging the death of their sibling to others may represent a form of denial. Two participants spoke of not using the past tense to indicate that their sibling had died, rather, an effort was made whether conscious or unconscious, to maintain proximity to their deceased sibling in the present when speaking with others.

> Until actually a year ago, I never realised this but my boyfriend, he actually made me realise that I would talk about my brother and my dad as though they were still here, I talk about them in present tense. But ever since he's made me conscious of that, of thinking about that. I've noticed my mum does it as well, I never used to notice but he brought it to my attention. (Anita, p.11)

I still don't talk about him past tense, in saying that, I mean I know he is gone and

everything, but I suppose I decided from the word go that I wasn't going to stop saying

his name even though I saw people cringe because they are thinking, "oh she's going

to bring up Yardley. What are we going to say?" So, I did lose a lot of friends because

of it. (Elaine, p. 10)

In the case of Elaine, she met a community of parents at her daughter's primary school and

conversations led her new friends to think her brother was still alive. This situation culminated

when she acknowledged her brother's death as part of a speaking engagement educating the

community about the support group, The Compassionate Friends, which was attended by many of

her new friends and in which she told her story of sibling loss.

… he (parish priest) made me agree to doing three different sessions and each of those

sessions there were all these people sitting there looking at me and all of these

parents that I knew and it wasn't until afterwards, I had so many of them come up to

me and cried and said "I didn't realise that Yardley was gone". A lot of mums would

come up and say I'm a bereaved sibling too and it's like, ah, you know. So, that was a

bit of an eye-opener that a lot of people walking around pretending, probably for all

the same kinds of reasons, you're meeting new people, especially when you say it has

been 19 years since my brother died, honestly, people think you should be over it, well

and truly over it. (Elaine, p. 27)

The above situation possibly offered a corrective experience for Elaine as the response

concerning her brother's death was supportive and she advised that this prompted others to

disclose to her that they had also lost a sibling. Elaine reported that she felt supported in this

experience.

4.4.5.6 Anxious Parenting

Participants who are now parents disclosed a level of anxiety regarding the health and safety of their child, and expressed a sense that something could go wrong.

Only now has it come out in the past few years that my anxiety … I worry that (daughter) is going to end up the same as my brother. I think that every time she coughs, oh, she's got lung cancer or… that has really taken its effect on me now when I didn't even know that it was possible to worry so much about another person before I was a mum … I second guess myself all the time and I'm just terrified that something is going to happen to (daughter) because of what's happened in my past. (Nellie, p. 26)

I think my only other issue though was just having (daughter) not quite two years ago, I found it a little bit hard with that connection initially because I just thought what if something happens and she's no longer with us, how do I cope with that? So, that was a bit of a … this is my child and I love her but, at the same time, I don't want to get too close if something was to happen. And I think that's my problem with having, it's a monitor that if they were stop breathing it goes off, and I only could relax once I had that on because I just always had this fear of something was going to happen like SIDS or something like that and it has taken me quite a while to get over that fear of, if something happens to her what do I do? How do I cope? (Linda, p. 14)

… I suffer from anxiety with (daughter) because I'm worried that she's going to end up like my brother. And I'm so frightened that she's going to die because my brother died and my dad died. (Nellie, p. 42)

So, when (daughter)'s driving, I put a lot of pressure on her to stay safe, stay safe, because I couldn't cope with something happening to her. So, there is a lot of pressure because of Yardley. I suppose I put a lot of pressure on my kids because of Yardley. (Elaine, p. 27)

… we lived together for few years, we separated when (daughter) was about two and a half. I had post-natal depression, I was sort of the opposite of post-natal depression really, I was just consumed with this baby. I wasn't interested in anything else, he'd come home from work and do all the housework and cook dinner and stuff like that and I'd just let him. When she was about two and a half, I just said to him I am not happy, I haven't been happy for a long time and then I moved out. Obviously, I took (daughter) with me and after about 18 months of being on my own, it was sort of like, oh, I still loved him and I was feeling better and may be if we give it another go, but he'd moved on … (Elaine, p. 18)

The theme of the participants' anxiety regarding the health or wellbeing of their child was prevalent for participants who were now parents. Of the four surviving siblings who had children, three spoke of an overwhelming anxiety about their child and a fear that their child might die. The theme of anxiety about the health or wellbeing of their child was present in the cases of two unexpected and one anticipated sibling death and the potential cause of danger reflected the way in which their own sibling had died e.g. car accident, illness. The remaining surviving sibling spoke of her children being alert to her distress and her young children would check on her if she displayed any vulnerability.

There is little research dedicated to the anxiety experienced by parents who had lost a sibling in their adolescence. Perhaps the best explanation lies within Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory which may be applicable for two reasons. Firstly, participants who are now parents and fearful for the health and wellbeing of their children may not have experienced secure attachment with their own parents or key attachment figures. An alternate proposition, as suggested by Robinson (2001) and based on the relationship between grief reactions and closeness of sibling pairs, extends attachment theory beyond that of the maternal-child context. Robinson suggests that siblings can serve as attachment figures for one another. As such, the loss of a close sibling

relationship in adolescence may affect the bereaved sibling's attachment style wreaking havoc on one of the most important close relationships, that of parenthood.

Another perspective offered is that by Worden (1996) points to a lack of predictability in the life of bereaved adolescents as a result of the death of a parent. Worden's research compared parentally bereaved adolescents with non-bereaved adolescents and found that bereaved adolescents were more anxious and fearful over time. Although this study relates to the loss of a parent, it could also be applied to the loss of a sibling particularly if the sibling relationship was close and/or influential.

4.5   Loss as a Crisis and Growth

4.5.1   Loss as a Crisis

As previously illustrated by themes of *Changed View of the World* and *Making Sense of the Death* in the *Experience of Grief* section, some participants were able to make sense of or find meaning in their loss. The broad theme of *Loss as a Crisis* exemplifies the participants' expressed inability to make sense of the tragedy as they struggle to adjust to a future eroded by the loss of their sibling.

4.5.1.1 Inability to Make Sense of Death

A common theme in the data of this study was the participants' inability to make sense of their siblings' death together with a deep struggle towards of acceptance which, in some cases, continued for many years.

> … I think prior to his death I had more of a sense of things happen for a reason. After
>
> his death it was, well, actually things can happen out of the blue and things that are
>
> quite outside of anyone's control. There can be a really cruel randomness to life.
>
> (William, pp. 15-16)

> … realising that the day to day stuff that happens isn't that big of a deal. It doesn't
>
> matter because guess what, you're going to be dead … It was the first of my many mid-

life crises … where you go through a period of your life where everything does not make sense. Questioning it, this is not for whatever reason not right and that was the first time that I went through that process of no, no, no, everything is going to change now, consciously to an extent but unconsciously as well, it's both … what's the deal with all of this, this is it, we're to reproduce and die and that was the first time that I had that and I've had it I think I've had about 4-5 mid-life crises since then. (Harriet, pp. 31-32)

… I just think someone up there has it in for me and they just took her away and sometimes I just can't understand it at all … I think it really depends on the person whether they can ever make fully sense of it or not. I might find I've made full sense of it a couple of years from now or a decade from now, but at the moment, my major thing is there is no sense in it. (Anna, pp. 13-14)

I know I believe that God made the world, and I think in the beginning there wasn't death even though it's now a part of our normal human life cycle that people die, I don't think we are necessarily meant to be able to understand that. I don't think it's natural. I think death is always, there's a certain amount of strangeness that doesn't really make sense. I think it feels weird to humans when people die. I think I am kind of used to it now. I guess it's kind of a new normal. (Nancy, p. 16)

I still don't know why it happened as in life would have been better off if it hadn't have, I don't see why she died, why she died the way she did or whatever but I guess it's just a case of you've got to learn how to live with it and you hope that that means you are a better person from it. (Linda, p. 18)

Harriet spoke of confronting her own mortality and the finiteness of life, questioning her purpose and what life has to offer. Harriet expressed that she had encountered similar experiences at certain points in life describing such as "mid-life crises" which caused her to challenge life's

meaning and ultimately enabled her to redefine purpose at each stage. William indicated a shift in

thinking towards his perceived level of control in life after the death of his brother. His conclusion

was that life was unpredictable and sometimes cruel rather than the benevolent world that he once

thought existed. Anna's comments suggested that there was some control in life but it was not

within her power and the forces at play were punitive and malevolent.   The comments from Nancy

and Linda indicate the questioning of death alongside a tolerance for a type of rationale.   Nancy's

efforts to make sense of her sibling's death were anchored in her religious beliefs against which she

appeared to struggle but accepted on some level.   Although not reviewed as part of this study, it

appears that religious or spiritual beliefs can provide meaning for loss and enable bereaved

individuals to make sense of that loss (Hall, 2011).

The remarks of the participants above portray a level of emptiness and an inability to find

meaning in death as they navigate a world that no longer makes sense. Some were able to make

some sense of the loss but not essentially in a way that offered comfort and/or acceptance. The

reality of death challenged views of their own mortality and, subsequently, their belief system as

they incorporated such into the construction of a new understanding of death (Batten &

Oltjenbruns, 1999). As evidenced by this theme, the experience of loss interfered with the

participants' ability to rebuild their assumptive world due to the destruction of a belief that life was

predictable and the world was benign (Hall, 2011).   Hence, participants who described an *Inability to*

Make Sense of the Death lacked the meaning-making processes required to construct a new

worldview that incorporated their loss (Hall, 2011).

The inability to make sense of the death is closely linked with the theme outlined below,

Sibling Loss as an Existential Crisis, as those who were unable to make sense of their sibling's death

typically embarked on the deconstruction of previous held ways of understanding the world.

4.5.1.2 *Sibling Loss as an Existential Crisis*

Some participants confronted the reality of their sibling's death and deeply struggled with its

unresolvable permanence. These participants reported questioning the meaning of life, their beliefs

and direction. The death of their sibling was often a catalyst for change reflected by an altered

relationship with themselves and with others. The experience of an existential crisis affected the

participants' values which transformed their place in the world.

> I thought I knew who I was. I always aspire to be the top engineer and I wanted to be
>
> able to build bridges and stuff like that. To be honest with you now, I couldn't care
>
> less. I have no aspiration for that. I don't know who I am anymore. All I know is my
>
> name, Eric, that's it. I don't know what I stand for anymore as in purpose … I wake up
>
> day-to-day thinking it's another day and I appreciate that I'm alive and healthy but I
>
> can't understand what's going on with me … (Eric, p. 38)

Eric spoke about feeling incredibly lost and that all that was familiar no longer fitted in the

world he once knew, e.g. his occupation, thoughts of the future, friends. Some of the participants

interviewed were able to reflect on a period of time when they felt caught in searching, yearning and

longing for their sibling for many years. Some of these participants were able to recognise that they

had endured many years of suffering, unable to integrate the loss or find their place within an

altered world. William's words below reflect the hopelessness he felt during the years of intense

grief.

> I think as more and more years pass by, I become more aware of just what a rotten
>
> time it was … I was taking things day by day, after a while I started to assume this is
>
> just how life has been and I've always felt a level of hopelessness and I've always felt a
>
> level of powerlessness and all of that. I suppose every now and then you do feel those
>
> feelings but you also feel feelings of hope and all. And I think I had just assumed when
>
> I was in the thick of all that grief, that's just how life was. And I had a bit of an inkling it
>
> might have been related to Yves's death but I think I also just thought, oh well, I
>
> obviously can't hack certain things in life and now I realise, you know, probably starting
>
> from the last decade onwards that actually, no, there are things that I absolutely can

hack and can cope with and then I go, wow, gosh, I'd obviously gone through a really

black place for a number of years. (William, p. 21)

Not all shifts in the lives of participants' during the experience of an existential crisis had a negative effect. One of the exceptions is illustrated below and describes Harriet's positive and affirming shifts during her experience of an existential crisis. Harriet spoke of the experience of the loss of her sister as devastating but this experience triggered a realisation that she was not responsible for things outside her control.

… everything that happened when I was younger I felt, because I was a child and I did

not understand, I felt guilt. I felt that the reason that everything that had happened

was my fault and I was in some way bad because I had caused it. Yasmine was the first

time that something happened to me that was bad and I could totally see it wasn't my

fault, I didn't cause it, I had no part, she wasn't even in the same country as me, she

was on the other side of the world and it wasn't my fault that Yasmine died and that

gave me the opportunity to grieve for a whole range of reasons not just because of

Yasmine. (Harriet, p. 16)

Harriet's comments relate to the complexity of her life growing up with loss, dysfunctional family dynamics and spending the later years of her childhood and early adolescence in State Care. The death of her sister triggered a realisation that she was not responsible for all the difficulties that occurred in her life and this realisation released feelings of guilt and enabled her to grieve for many painful experiences in her life. The shift in the way Harriet viewed the world offered a component of healing which she was able to accept through the expression of grief and in allowing others to support her. Harriet's response reflects a changed world view in the direction of growth which leads to increased self-worth. She expressed feelings of emancipation and the ability to grieve for events that she previously thought were due to her actions. Additionally, there was a realisation that bad

things happen in life rather than taking responsibility for difficult events and the belief she was a bad person.

Balk (1997) suggests that sibling loss provides a platform for spiritual growth due to the following aspects: it provides time for reflection; the impact of the event is permanent; and the psychological imbalance created cannot be quickly stabilised. The death of a sibling in adolescence is an event that is both permanent and inescapable; therefore, it offers opportunity for reflection and the broader contemplation of life. Perhaps Balk's latter point indicating a psychological imbalance that cannot be quickly stabilised speaks to the variable depth and duration of existential crisis reported by participants in this study. The data revealed some participants became overwhelmed by the intrapsychic implications of their sibling's death which triggered doubt in many areas of their life, whereas, other participants were able to integrate the loss with less introspection and disruption.

As with the individual experience of grief, variability in the experience of existential crisis following the loss of a sibling may also be true. Some of the participants who reported an existential experience of loss advised they acquired wisdom and a renewed meaning in life after many years of darkness. Others reported that the crisis was destabilising but short lived and balance was restored in conjunction with growth. Those who were able to resolve an existential crisis more expediently seemed better able to move on with life than those who expressed heightened levels of despair and a protracted period of crisis. In the comments below, Marvin's pragmatic approach to life after the death of his younger sister demonstrates a change in the way he viewed life and a renewed sense of what he valued.

> I think it's pushed me to try and actually, I'm not sure, just enjoy myself. There is no point of stressing out over your degree that is going to get you a job and somewhere in ten years when you could be dead within a year. It can be taken so quickly like that. So, I just appreciate what you've got at the moment, at that time because it can be taken away so quickly I think. (Marvin, pp. 14-15)

Within Marvin's comments exists an acknowledgement that he does not have control over events that may impress significant change upon his life. He expresses a long term view of the future and the way that he would like to live his life. In comparison, Eric's comments below encapsulate his feelings of desolation and hopelessness as he appears stuck in the experience of existential loss. He talks about the inability to convey his pain and anguish in a way that others can understand. He expresses that "*everything just seems to go*" and provides a sense that he has been left with nothing.

> I lost a girlfriend as well … it's just a nightmare … I don't think she appreciated how much my brother meant to me and what I was going through. She was a psychologist but she dealt with drug addictions and so on but she didn't, I don't think she appreciated that. And I think I have been abusive towards her as well. So, it ended pretty badly but, yes, lost that as well. So, I just feel everything just seems to go. (Eric, p. 30)

Eric expressed that his life has been disturbed in many areas due to his brother's death. He spoke of withdrawing from long term friendships, the end of the relationship with his girlfriend, his inability to focus and engage in his professional work and difficulties within his family as they struggled to come to terms with the loss. In addition to this, Eric questions who he is and what he values. Eric's brother died two years prior to the interview and at the time of the interview, he appeared caught in suffering, unable to find meaning or integrate the death of his brother. It is difficult to discern why some individuals may skim the surface of existential crisis while others dive in and sink to its depths. Given the intensity of the grief experienced in the theme *Inability to Make Sense of the Death*, the development tasks of adolescence are likely to be put on hold or become severely disrupted as bereaved individuals grapple to find their place in the world.

Research by Coleman and Neimeyer (2010) suggests that the ability of bereaved individuals to find significance in loss predicts greater longer term wellbeing. The inability to find meaning in the death of a loved one promotes greater intensity and duration of grief, and has been associated

with higher levels of complicated grief symptoms (Coleman & Neimeyer; Hall, 2011). As experienced by some of the participants in the study, the failure to find meaning in the death challenges their personal equanimity, potentially creating feelings of self-doubt and turmoil (Balk, 2014). Being unable to find a way through an existential loss experience may be an indication of complications of grief. Research by Spuij, Reitz, et al. (2012) identified a cluster of grief symptoms evident in children and adolescents following the death of a parent, sibling or close relative. The results of their study suggested that symptoms such as intense yearning, difficulties accepting the loss, anger and a sense life is meaningless were indicative of prolonged grief disorder.

Robinson and Mahon's (1997) analysis of empirical literature on sibling bereavement identified two of the unique characteristics of the sibling loss experience as changes in self-perception and world view. The authors' findings are reflected in later research by Forward and Garlie (2003) whose qualitative study of bereaved adolescent siblings perhaps best describes the findings of this study. Forward and Garlie conceptualised a non-linear model based on the grief process of sibling loss and conceptualised components as follows: a search for new meaning which encompassed elements such as how the tragedy fits into their life; how the death has irrevocably changed them; and how they learned to move forward knowing their sibling was gone forever. The authors state that the search for new meaning was a key process that bereaved individuals focus on within each stage. Forward and Garlie's findings underscore the importance of finding meaning in the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. The results of this study suggest that finding meaning in loss, whether it be through religious, spiritual or other beliefs, is central to recovery.

Finding meaning in death typically encompasses two concepts, firstly, making sense of the death and secondly, finding benefits or growth from the loss (Hall, 2011). Grief and loss literature often encompasses notions of growth after loss as an outcome of grief. However, the processes that enable growth and resilience versus stagnation are not very clear. For some participants in the study, overcoming adolescent sibling bereavement was an experience in the transcendence of loss through a renewed sense of self and the world while others remained in a struggle to find meaning.

For those who continued to struggle, death potentially awakens or deepens introspection and their inability to make sense of the death traps them in a ruminative preoccupation about the loss. Further research is required to understand the processes or mechanisms that enable bereaved individuals to find their way through the loss of a sibling in adolescence.

The participants whose data aligned with the theme *Inability to Make Sense of the Death* varied across many variables such as time since death, circumstances of the death and other personal variables such as age and gender. Although there was a trend in age, where older participants (17 years and above) at the time of their sibling's death tended to be more likely to struggle with existential issues than those who were younger (aged 14-15 years old). Given the size of the sample, it is difficult to generalise on the basis of age although this finding may be explained by the cognitive maturation of adolescents as they develop in areas such as abstract thought i.e. conceptualising death and insights into death (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1999). Additionally, abstract thought enables adolescents to engage in the construction of new meaning when faced with questions of life and death (Batten & Oltjenbruns). One aspect connected to this theme and salient within the data was the quality of the pre-death relationship with their deceased sibling.

4.5.2 Sibling Relationship as a Moderator of Existential Loss

An aspect relevant to the existential experience of loss was the pre-death sibling relationship. Participants who described their relationship as close or dependent were more likely to demonstrate an enduring sadness and struggle to secure their place in a changed world.

4.5.2.1 Close Ties

Some of the participants spoke of the love, admiration and strong friendship that imbued their sibling relationship. Subsequently, the death of their sibling was described in terms of profound loss with implications for future hopes as well as shared aspects of their lives such as accommodation, friendship groups, sporting groups and other past-times.

Yves was someone who I really looked up to and so there was quite a bit of idealising going on there. I always felt a bit cheated that just at the time where I think age matters less, that relationship, our relationship, was cut short, basically. (William, p. 4)

I was put into foster care when I was eleven and Yasmine was really the only member of my family other than my grandma that I had contact with and then when I was about 16 they stopped me being a ward of the State. If you can look after yourself, you can be your own guardian so they made me my own guardian and at that point Yasmine and I lived together. Basically, from then on we rented a house and stuff. I might have been, no, I was 16 or 17. She was my best friend … we had all the same friends, like the lot of the time growing up or early in our teens and 20's, we shared houses with other people as well. (Harriet, pp. 2-3)

… from when we were little, we were really close … he's five years older than me so he was an only child until I came along and then, you know, he loved the fact that he had a little toy to play with so he always wanted me to be a boy, he'd dress me up as a boy and try and get us to have boxing matches together and things like that, pretty close as children and even growing up. (Anita, p. 3)

We were extremely close. There was a joke in our family, when mum was pregnant with Lisa, Lisa was a bit overdue and labour took quite a while. When she gave birth to me, mum barely made it to the hospital so, there was a joke, Lisa was trying to wait for me and I was trying to catch up and we'd always been really close. Like, the amount of times mum would tell me oh, your sister called and I would tell mum what she called about and she goes how do you know? And I just knew. We were extremely close where it was pretty scary and we always used to joke we should have been twins. (Anna, pp. 4-5)

… growing up pretty much we were really strong mates and we'd gone through high school together, the same friends and we'd all stick together. Whereas, I've got another brother who's three or four years younger and it was completely different with him … (Eric, pp. 3-4)

… I was always loud, talking, Yardley would shake his head, 'bloody hell, you're raucous' and his nickname was Raucous. I laugh loud, I talk loud, and Yardley put up with it. My mum used to hate it, my grandma hated it, my step-dad hated it but Yardley just always, yeah, it was just how I was. I think I have just always wanted someone to just accept me the way Yardley did. (Elaine, p. 20)

A pre-death relationship pattern emerged from the data for those who experienced existential loss in the wake of sibling death. One dynamic expressed by those who classified the relationship as a very close friendship and advised that they were "best mates" sharing many aspects of their lives. Another dynamic was the admiration and adoration towards an older sibling who showed the way.   This was the case for William, Elaine, Harriet, Anita and Anna. It is likely that the lost older sibling played an important role in the participants' development as they deferred to their sibling for direction and were often the recipient of protection and care.   The intertwined identity of siblings can impact the surviving sibling as the loss of a sibling is essentially acts as a loss of part of themselves (Davies, 2002; Devita-Raeburn, 2004).

4.5.2.2 My Protector or My Child

For some participants, the sibling connection revealed a level of dependency with one or both of the sibling pair. This dynamic was either against the backdrop of family dysfunction or emerged due to other reasons such as caregiving, where one sibling accepted responsibility for the care of the other.

He was the biggest part of my life. I effectively brought him up and it's very interesting, actually, because in October, my grandmother, my dad's mother came to

visit … and she is the first person to ever come here and I don't know what I said but I must have said something that made her say that I was his caregiver and it's really no different for my parents than it is for me and that people need to understand that it's really just as big a deal for me to have lost him as it is for my parents to have lost him but most people don't. (Eve, p. 7)

Our relationship was mostly good because we kind of had to stick together because dad was off drinking and mum had a few, too. But it was like, we both kind of did our own thing but we knew that we were there for each other if we needed each other. I mean, being a teenager is hard enough but I moved out quite young. I moved out when I was 17 because I was working … and I thought well, I can drive, I don't want to live at home anymore with dad so, I moved out quite young and my brother, I don't really know how he coped as such but I know that he got into a bit of trouble at school and I know that he was smoking a bit of pot and just being a typical naughty teenager. (Nellie, p. 19)

I'm very independent. My parents have always been workaholics and so, I grew up from the age of about 6 being my brother's primary caregiver, effectively. And, so, I've had a lot of responsibility and I've been treated like an adult since I was very young … I always have because I have obviously had more responsibility than probably what should I have. So, I have always had a bit of anxiety, my dad was abusive until my early teenage years and so, I've always sort of grappled with that … He was only physically abusive towards me, he never laid a finger on my brother … Mum stayed with him for us and then when I was 15, sounds weird to say, but he crossed the line from just smacks and stuff, he actually kicked me to the ground and started kicking the crap out of me. And after that, something switched in his head and he realised he actually had to stop what he was doing. So, that was almost 10 years ago now and I've got such a good relationship with him now. (Eve, pp. 2-3)

I was a bit of a rat bag. I am two and a half years younger than him and I was always the noisy, crazy child and he was the calm, level-headed one, so we sort of balanced each other out and we grew up together very close. We had a lot of stuff going on as kids that was sort of, we stuck together through and, yes, made us really close. I've always said it's almost like the relationship I imagine twins have. (Elaine, p. 4)

I think I felt that I was kind of looking after everything, I don't know if I necessarily was … but I think I kind of felt like a definite responsibility to help, kind of look after things … visiting them at hospital, spending a lot of time with mum and Lionel at the hospital … I spent a lot of time just trying to look after them and keep them company. (Nancy, p. 32)

A few participants reported historical issues such as a substantially dysfunctional family environment, domestic violence or an alcoholic parent. Of these, all but one of the participants was the eldest in the sibling dyad with the remaining participant, Elaine, being the younger sibling in the dyad and the recipient of protective care in the face of physical abuse administered by her step-mother or in State Care. In another case, a dynamic of responsibility was evident for Nancy who provided care for her chronically ill sibling. Nancy reported that she was actively involved in her brother's care, visiting him daily in hospital while he underwent cancer treatment. Nancy expressed feelings of responsibility towards her younger brother as well as her mother, as she tried to protect them both from the harsh reality of her brother's chronic illness.

In these cases, the sibling relationship foretold of another function in the form of protection or dependency. Environmental factors can impact the sibling relationship and create roles or functions in the sibling dyad due to the lack or absence of parental care. The existence of a dependency dynamic in the sibling relationship may have been a complicating factor in the experience of grief for these participants. The role that they or their sibling played offered a sense of security or responsibility which was lost with the death of their sibling.

4.5.2.3 Normal or Ambivalent Relationship

Most sibling relationships possess elements of rivalry, jealousy and conflict as well as love, friendship and respect. A number of participants reported their sibling relationship was 'normal', not close but close enough. The relationship may have been characterised by a mix of feelings such as animosity, conflict, companionship and friendship. Some spoke about the hope that their relationship was trending towards a better future as they matured and adopted a more egalitarian relationship.

> My relationship with Kiki, it changed quite a lot, I think there is always that sister rivalry between us … I think we used to get along more when we weren't at home, so when we were away holidays we got along but at home we were just horror children. Then when she got sick, we stopped fighting, but I think we also didn't see each other as much because she was up at the hospital … so when we did see each other, we didn't fight … we didn't have a close, close relationship, we didn't tell each other secrets and stuff, we had our friends and everything, but we were close enough as siblings. (Emily, p. 3)

> We fought like cat and dog. I am a Taurus, she is Scorpio and for some reason we just didn't see eye to eye on a lot of things … it was just starting to come around, so I don't really know what it's like to have a sibling that you're very close to because you hear of people growing up and they ring their sibling all the time whereas I didn't, we didn't get to that stage. (Linda, pp. 3-4)

> … he was 2 years older so he was 17 at the time and as it was, we were just getting to the point where as teenagers, when he was probably a little bit more accepting of us as we were, I've got a twin brother, getting a little more accepting of us as peers more so than younger brothers … just when he was 16, 17, started to accept us a bit more as on his level. (Donald, p. 2)

Some siblings who reported that they were not overly close to their deceased sibling but agreed there was some level of companionship or friendship. Others reported a relationship that was either fraught with conflict, regarded with ambivalence or on the path towards improvement. Participants attributed age differences or personality as challenges to their sibling relationship but had hoped or thought the relationship might improve as they matured. The response to the loss of a sibling for participants with a normal, ambivalent or conflictual relationship appeared devastating and may hold the added potential for further complications due to unresolved conflict or feelings of guilt.

Data from this study suggests that the quality of the pre-death sibling relationship sets the scene for the way in which participants grieved. Close relationships were not necessarily a function of similarity in either age or same gender but represented a strong connection for whatever reason. Some of the participants described their relationship as the closeness felt by twins. Some of the participants idealised and idolised their sibling, typically this occurred in dyads when the youngest of the sibling pair lost an older sibling. Bank and Kahn (1997) identified three patterns of close identification that predict the character of the sibling relationship. The authors note a fused relationship known as "twinning", a blurred relationship referred to as "merging" and a relationship based on hero worshiping as that of "idealising". These patterns of close identification are reflected in the themes of *Close Ties* and *My Protector or My Child* and the intensity of these relationships play out in the intensity of the grief responses of participants.

Researchers suggest that the quality of the relationship that the adolescent had with their sibling is predictive of their grief response and the more central their sibling was, the more intense the grief reaction (Davies, 1988a, 2013; Davies & Limbo, 2010). As such, closeness between siblings overrides other variables such as age and gender differences (Davies, 2013; Davies & Limbo, 2010). The results of the study support prior research that suggests the closeness of the sibling relationship influences the experience of grief for the surviving sibling. Siblings who reported a close or

dependent relationship also reported an intense and enduring grief with some participants exhibiting symptoms of complicated grief.

Hence, the type of relationship that existed between siblings influenced the level of disruption to intrapsychic wellbeing. An enduring and chronic grief response to the loss of a close and loving sibling relationship was typically characterised by acute separation distress, deep searching and longing. The participants who tended to significantly question their beliefs as well as life's purpose and meaning were those who described their sibling relationship as close or dependent. Other participants tended to be able to find meaning or make sense of the loss but this did not necessarily exclude them from a prolonged grief experience. Those who seemed to integrate their loss over a shorter period of time tended to draw on religious or spiritual beliefs and reported a normal sibling relationship described as 'close enough'.

Participant grief responses to the loss of a sibling relationship described as ambivalent or conflictual were characterised by less searching and longing than close relationships but may have evidenced a level of complicated grief. Participants in this group demonstrated a sense of self-direction and agency towards recovery. It appeared that the identities of bereaved participants who were 'not close but close enough' had functioned independently within their sibling relationship and continued to function autonomously after the loss of their sibling. Those who were not close often wondered how their relationship would have played out in the future as differences (i.e. age, interests or personality) may have become less important.

Research on the quality of the pre-death relationship of siblings and the outcomes of sibling bereavement in adolescence is limited. However, Bonanno, et al. (2002) investigated spousal grief responses and found the highest levels of distress typically had high levels of dependency in the relationship prior to their spouse's death. Bonanno also reported that chronic depression was more likely if the spousal relationship was conflictual. The results of the study strongly mirror Bonanno's findings as illustrated in the themes *Close Ties* and *My Protector or My Child*. Of the two cases (Emily

and Linda) in this study in which the sibling relationship was characterised by conflict, results from one interview suggest ongoing levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms.

4.5.3   Re-locating the Lost Sibling

4.5.3.1 A Place in My Life Today

Participants in the study were asked whether their deceased sibling had a place in their life today. Overwhelmingly, the response was affirmative and participants described the ways in which they remained connected to their lost sibling.

> I think it's feeling as though in whatever new events or new occupations or new whatever, new relationships, whatever, feeling as though I'm taking him in that journey with me as opposed to, if I start a new job or I meet a new person, I'm putting him more and more in the past, which is a scary concept to me. And so, instead, I feel as though he's in a way perhaps experiencing this as well. So, it's a comfort. It's a comfort there, yeah. (William, p. 16)

> … unfortunately, he couldn't be the best man at our wedding but we still had a photo of him there and just everywhere we go, just driving the car, I'll pretend he's in the front seat with me and just pretend I'm having a conversation with him and, I just pretend he's there as though he's not gone. (Scott, p. 9)

> Yeah, she (deceased sister) does (have a place in her life) when I am writing, I always write and I'll write little messages for her birthday or if I am thinking of her and stuff like that. So, she is very much a part of my life and I can just choose when I want to speak to her, write about her and stuff. I don't think I really believe in the whole they are out there somewhere like as a ghost, I kind of just think she is still there somewhere. (Emily, pp. 15-16)

> When we see butterflies, that's a symbol for her (deceased sister) and even I'll get messages, even friends who have never met her, especially my best friend, "I saw Lisa

today", meaning I saw a butterfly. She's spoken about quite often and I'm quite proud to have had her as a sister and I'm not ashamed to say my sister has passed away … let me talk about her, let me tell you all the silly things she used to do, let's just remember her and not let her be forgotten and so, to me, she is everywhere and I see her in the small things or in a song and now I smile. I used to cry whenever I saw those things but for the most part I just smile now ... She was that kind of girl; she could even make a mark when she's not here. (Anna, p. 14)

I feel as though right now he's 32, he grows with me, I don't feel as though he passed at the age of 20. So, yes, he's growing with me but at the same time … (Anita, p. 10)

… my hair has always been dead straight and after he died, my hair started curling at the bottom. Very weird and I know it has no connection to it. I don't know, unless I've thought so hard about his hair that my hair went a bit curly but coincidental, my hair has gone a bit like his … my boyfriend thinks that my hair looks really messy when I leave it to just go natural which it does but it reminds me so much of him and I want it to just curl, curl, yeah, it's a weird little… (Eve, p. 27)

The notion of a continued relationship with the deceased sibling was strongly evident in the data. The participants in the study voiced that their sibling remained present in their life in some form whether that be through talking to them, writing about or to them, or involving their sibling in new experiences. William advised of a turning point in his grief with the realisation that he could carry his brother into new experiences and that enabled him to be a part of his life rather than leaving his memory in the past. This process enabled William to nurture an ongoing connection with his brother Yves and integrate him in his life today. Similarly, Scott spoke about imagining his brother was alongside him and part of his experiences in life.

Symbolic references were also mentioned, such as Anna's re-location of her sister in the everyday appearance of butterflies. This notion was embraced and continued by friends and

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provided a constant reminder of her unseen presence. Participants provided a sense that a

relationship with their deceased sibling continued in some way and remained part of their life and

future. Other experiences noted in the theme of Re-locating the Lost Sibling were the felt presence

of the deceased sibling and the performance of rituals that brought comfort and connection.

> There's always photos around, absolutely. I don't want her (daughter) to ever not
>
> know who uncle Rory is and who uncle Rory was. And I don't' think of him as a 'was', I
>
> think of him as just in a different form. And it's the same as my dad. I know that
>
> they're both around me because I am very, I'm becoming more aware and occasionally
>
> I'll get a whiff of grease and cigarettes and I know that that's dad. I just know that he's
>
> around. (Nellie, p. 41)

> They identified the last spot they saw him so each year on his anniversary we go out to
>
> that spot or if dad and I are feeling a bit down, we will just go out in the boat and go
>
> out to that spot and just feel at peace. So, that is something that really, really helps.
>
> My mum struggles to do that, she hates going out there but dad and I really feel at
>
> peace there. I guess that's what we do or just talk about funny stories of what Aaron
>
> used to do, yeah, that gets us through it. (Scott, p. 11)

> … when I go over to my parents' place, a lot of time mum will go "have you said hi to
>
> your sister?" Which basically either means paying my respects at her bedroom door or
>
> giving a kiss to a photo frame we have of her and it's our way of keeping her alive so to
>
> speak. (Anna, p. 15)

Although not initially reviewed as part of this study, a 'sense of presence' experience has

been well documented in grief literature and reflects a perception of the bereaved that they are in

contact with the deceased (Rosenblatt, 1996). Research suggests that the incidence of 'sense of

presence' of the deceased is experienced by as much as half of the bereaved population (Datson &

Marwit, 1997). A 'sense of presence' has been recognised as a way to stay connected with the

deceased. Another form of maintaining connection with the deceased sibling is through rituals. Rituals are not always formal public or religious ceremonies but every day acts that help to connect the bereaved to the ones they have lost. The practise of rituals was more common in families who openly talked about the deceased sibling. Participants who practised rituals reported that they felt comforted and connected to their lost sibling.

Sibling loss in adolescence is a life crisis that is not readily resolved and one way of coping with the existential crisis of sibling death is to find a way to continue the relationship (Balk, 1997). The desire to maintain a relationship with a deceased sibling has been identified as a process by which adolescents are able to manage that crisis. Theories such as Klass, Silverman and Nickman's (1996) *continuing bonds* and Hogan and DeSantis' (1992) *ongoing attachment* present models to illustrate ways of coping with the loss of a sibling. The supposition of the two models is that death marks the end of a life not the end of a relationship and represents a distinct departure from the grief work hypothesis mantra of "letting go". Interestingly, the analysis of data in this study did not yield references to themes such as "severing ties and getting on with life" or "letting go" that might reflect an intent to leave the deceased sibling behind or disconnect the ties to the deceased. These intentions were not voiced in any way rather the opposite was true reflecting a relationship of continuing bonds with the deceased sibling.

A study by Hogan and DeSantis (1992) investigated *ongoing attachment* in bereaved adolescent siblings and found that surviving siblings maintained an ongoing attachment to their deceased sibling. *Ongoing attachment* was used to describe the phenomenon of bereaved adolescents continuing to love and miss their sibling and anticipating an eventual reunion (Hogan & DeSantis). *Ongoing attachment* is underpinned by the following assumptions regarding bereavement: that after loss, the survivor continues to be meaningfully attached to that person and wishes to retain spiritual proximity; the realisation that death is permanent and irrevocable which shatters the assumptions of a shared future with their sibling; and a response to reconstruct a new

meaning in life and sense of self through the maintenance of spiritual proximity with the deceased (Hogan & DeSantis, 1992; Hogan & DeSantis, 1996).

The sample size of this qualitative study was small, therefore, it is unlikely to possess sufficient power to explore all elements of Hogan and DeSantis' (1992, 1996) *ongoing attachment* model. Their model outlined three constructs: *grief; personal growth;* and *ongoing attachment*. Apparent gaps were noted when comparing the data to Hogan and DeSantis' construct of *personal growth* where limited support was found for increased faith and ability to receive and give help. Participants in the study made references to religious or spiritual beliefs in an effort to make sense of their sibling's death but only one participant suggested religion was crucial to her ability to cope with the loss. Participant data in relation to the ability to receive and give help was also limited and was reflected more so in an increase of empathy following their sibling's death. Participants expressed difficulties in receiving support or being understood, only one participant (Harriet) signified a shift in her ability to accept the support provided by others. Additionally, within the *ongoing attachment* construct, although some references were made, evidence for regretting and reuniting was limited suggesting it was not a common theme in this study. The results of this study may reflect cultural differences in the Australian population when compared to the American model of *ongoing attachment*.

Neimeyer (2014) suggested that the maintenance of a bond with the deceased can be adaptive or pathological and is dependent on the bereaved individual's progress in bereavement, their ability to make sense of the death and the nature of their attachment relationship with the deceased. Research on the latter point indicates those who had close relationships with their deceased loved ones experienced more difficulty integrating the loss. Field, Gao and Paderna (2005) draw on Bowlby's (1980) attachment theory to illustrate maladaptive expressions of *continuing bonds*. The authors suggest that an inability to decrease the desire to regain physical proximity or the inability to modulate distress in confronting loss was evidence of an inability to integrate loss. Further, the authors identify an inability to work through painful thoughts and feelings associated

with the loss blocks the mourner's ability to use these aspects as a coping mechanism. According to the authors, an adaptive approach to the expression of *continuing bonds* is through finding comfort in remembering their sibling warmly rather than continued attempts to re-establish physical proximity post six months of the sibling's death (i.e. through excessive use of possessions).

Some of the participants exhibited indicators of a failure to integrate loss due to their chronic avoidance of processing the implications of the loss and exhibited such through intense yearning and separation distress. Hence, the grief responses of some participants were suggestive of *ongoing attachment* but their response may serve to intensify the pain either in their avoidance or ongoing confrontation (i.e. rumination) of loss. More adaptive *ongoing attachment/continuing bonds* expressions of grief have been associated with internalised and symbolically-based connections such as finding comfort by evoking fond memories of the deceased (Hall, 2011; Field, Gao & Paderna, 2005).

Another perspective associated with the theme of *Re-locating the Lost Sibling* is that of meaning reconstruction theory. Meaning reconstruction theory provides a way to make sense of life after loss (Thompson, 2012; Balk, 2014). The example below demonstrates the reconstruction of the participant's relationship with their sibling through a narrative that enables them to make sense of their life and their loss.

> For his 21st we'd planned to surprise him take him over to New Zealand but pretend we're driving to Jamberoo or somewhere down south and then just pull into the airport and say no, we're going to New Zealand …We decided let's just do it anyway, he'll be with us … we just want to explore the world and have been to a few countries now, going to Hawaii at the end of the year, just want to do everything with Aaron. I believe he is with me and so I guess it, now it doesn't hold me back at all. (Scott, p. 9)

The participants' stories allowed their deceased sibling to remain part of their life and part of their future as opposed to restricting their relationship to the past. Anastasia spoke of receiving messages from her deceased older sister which symbolised encouragement and the experience that

her sibling was close. Scott's relationship with his deceased younger brother is reinforced by their shared desire to travel and encounter new experiences as he speaks about the feeling his brother is with him. If adaptive, processes such as those described in *continuing bonds*, *ongoing attachment* and *meaning reconstruction theory* can facilitate the development of mental models that enable the bereaved to attach meaning to loss.

4.5.3.2 Compiling the Past

A minor theme identified in the data related to participants learning about their deceased sibling through the stories of others. This theme was reported as comforting as participants indicated the additional information provided a further glimpse of who their sibling was through the experience of others.

> Initially, it was like I wanted to know everything that everyone else knew about him. Everybody had different experiences with him, I wanted to know, I wanted to know everything which sounds a little bit manic really but I think just the idea of just 17 years, I thought maybe if I filled it up with everyone else's stories … (Elaine, p. 11)

> … after he passed away, we had all his friends over to our house and we wrote down all of these saying of his and it was bloody two and a half pages long of all these little one liners that he'd come up with. And he'd tell these stories … (Eve, p. 26)

The minor theme of *Compiling the Past* shares some commonality with the theme *Re-locating the Lost Sibling* as it is based on generating an understanding or narrative of their sibling that provides meaning. Both Elaine and Eve spoke about the desire to learn more about their deceased sibling as a way to continue the relationship. Previous research from which parallels could be drawn is that of Cait's (2008) qualitative study that explored the impact of parental death on adolescents. Cait's findings suggested that participants in the study utilised memories of others and their relationship with the deceased parent to extend their relationship. The study indicated that as participants learnt new information about their deceased parent, this information was integrated

into their memory to extend the relationship. Additionally, as participants learnt more about their deceased parent, this process contributed to shaping their identities through a better understanding of their parent and, in turn, themselves (Cait).

The reason for including the minor theme of *Compiling the Past* in the results is that there has been little written about the desire to learn about a deceased sibling in grief and loss literature. Additionally, there is an impression that the theme may be of therapeutic value for bereaved adolescent siblings for two reasons. Firstly, continuing to learn about the deceased sibling may generate new thoughts and reflections concerning the lost sibling that assists the ability to make sense of the death or generates further understanding of their sibling, particularly if they were not close. Secondly, as research suggests siblings are central to identity development (Cicirelli, 1980; Davies, 2015), learning additional information about a deceased sibling may assist bereaved adolescents with identity development tasks during a difficult time and their achievement of such is likely to be challenged.

4.5.3.3 The Sibling Legacy

The theme *The Sibling Legacy* denotes the purpose or meaning derived by participants as a result of their sibling's death. The *Sibling Legacy* represents a positive and enduring way for participants to view the contribution of their sibling's life beyond their death.

> I will be dealing with this for the rest of my life but I want to try and if I save one life, and that's kind of where my head is at with just wanting to prevent it (suicide). (Eve, p. 22)

> One story that I think had a big impact on me was Yves flew F111 fighter jets and I remember speaking with a woman whose son was an engineer for the (defence force) and her son, as an engineer, found (pilots) really difficult to deal with. They were arrogant and just didn't give the engineers the time of day. But Yves did give this engineer the time of day and he spoke with the engineer and they spoke about why they both had loved the plane and the engineer was absolutely touched that he had

taken the time to sort of speak with him. And I remember an uncle of mine … said, "well, that's what I consider a person's immortality to be"´ and I think that that had a huge impact, really in that sense that even when we die, even if we don't exist in a spiritual sense, perhaps our behaviours can have an ongoing impact on the living. I really found that a great comfort. (William, p. 17)

I've always been interested in helping people but now I actually want to make a difference. I don't want her death to be for nothing. I want something positive to come out of it whether it's to educate people in grief or rare diseases or even sort of understanding how to support someone going through grief.   (Anna, p. 20)

So, I think that everybody has their own life journey set out for them and as I said to you earlier that I believe that I'm supposed to do something and help others get through their own sibling grief. (Nellie, p. 40)

For William, the story of his brother's interaction with an engineer represents an enduring memory of who he was as a person together with a sense of immortality as his brother's words and actions lived on in the minds of others. Anna and Nellie believe that their siblings' legacy can be found in their own contributions or actions to help others.

Research by Batten and Oltjenbruns (1998) identified two types of statements made by bereaved adolescent siblings that embody the relationship they have with their sibling post death. One type of statement reflects the theme of *Re-locating the Lost Sibling* and is based on a continued but changed relationship with the deceased sibling. The second type of statement refers to a legacy left by their deceased sibling reflected either through others or by what their sibling left behind (Batten & Oltjenbruns).   A variation of the latter statement was mentioned by a few participants who expressed a desire to live their life for their sibling or to ensure that their life was worthwhile as a tribute to their sibling.

I think I realised that … I am going to live for both of us and again, I haven't travelled, I haven't done anything exciting, but I've had my kids and I've brought them up knowing about their uncle Yardley. (Elaine, p. 17)

… you sort of have to live your life now not as like always upset because of what's happened but you've got to try and live twice as much, live two lives in memory … (Marvin, p. 9)

I remember just thinking Kiki has died, so now I have to live twice as much for her as well. (Emily, p. 18)

I don't think of I've lived life any differently to what I would have apart from trying to live life for Aaron … I see life from a different angle now. (Scott, p. 16)

References to living a life worthwhile or to live in a way that encompasses experiences for two may be form of 'active' survivor guilt that prompts participants to engage fully in life. This theme also reflects the awareness that life is tenuous and that participants felt the need to make the most of the opportunities afforded to them as their sibling's did not get the chance. Marvin and Emily were a surviving brother and sister pair, therefore, the similar content expressed by both may be indicative of the way they and their parents collectively view the death of their sister.

4.5.4   Loss and Growth

The results reflected in the overarching theme of *Loss and Growth* are aligned to the notion that loss is an event that profoundly disturbs one's constructions about life and shakes the foundations of one's assumptive world (Neimeyer, 2000). Specifically, sibling loss is a unique phenomenon that influences changes in self-perception and the world view of bereaved siblings (Robinson & Mahon, 1997). A change in world view may be represented by an increased sensitivity towards others or an increase in vulnerability (Robinson & Mahon).

4.5.4.1 My Life is Now Split

Bereaved siblings spoke about their world being irrevocably changed and that their sense of self and the world had shifted. Their sibling's death was a marker of this shift and the changes that followed either increased their strength or vulnerability.

> So, before Lisa passed away, I was writing a book, a story book and I also used to paint a lot. When Lisa passed away, I stopped writing, like fully, and I stopped painting and those were my two big passions … Just couldn't do it, couldn't look at a paint set, couldn't because she… she was my biggest fan, she encouraged me more than anyone …. (Anna, p. 16)

> I feel like my life is really split in two, before Connor died and after he died because before he died, while there were still complicated issues, I mean nothing ever will compare to that of losing someone so close. And so, even to myself, I feel like the things I went through before he died were nothing, even the abusive dad - all of that, feel like very small issues compared to that of what we went through losing Connor. (Eve, p.5)

> And I was certainly aware, acutely aware of how life could change in an instant. I don't think I got my licence, my car licence until I was about 25-26 because I was quite afraid of making any errors in the car. I suppose I almost likened a car to a plane, if you just make one little error that may be, you may find yourself on a course for death basically that you can't get yourself out of. And so, I was very sort of insecure and, you know, insecure that life could change in an instant. (William, p. 14)

> I can't really remember what happened but everything changed overnight. It changed my perspective, it changed what I was willing to do and what I wasn't willing to do. It changed my relationship with my boyfriend who I'd been going out with for 5 years at

that point. We didn't break up straight away, but we broke up … Everything, it

stopped, everything just stopped. (Harriet, p. 5)

This theme represented the change experienced by participants in terms of their sense the

world had changed for them overnight. Most of the participants reported experiences within this

theme that related to negative shifts in the way they saw themselves or the world but there were

also examples of positive shifts or changes. Participants spoke of the loss of their sibling being

reflected in a loss of a sense of security, personal safety and confidence in their ability to make

decisions. They expressed feelings of anxiety and that the world felt uncertain or even dangerous

following their sibling's death.

Often, the experience of sibling loss in adolescence was the first significant death

participants had faced and there was limited experience upon which to draw. One participant,

Harriet, who had considerable experience with loss (death of mother, father left home and

subsequently grew up in institutional care) realised that with the death of her older sister, she was

not the cause of the tragic events that had occurred throughout her life and with the event of her

sister's death, she felt that she could grieve for not only her sister but for the many losses that she

had experienced. For this participant, the loss of her sister heralded a significant positive shift in the

way she viewed the world.

According to Davis (2005), the experience of loss and trauma may pose a threat to the way

bereaved individuals perceive both themselves and the world as a result of the death. This shift in

perception has the capacity to dash hopes, destroy confidence and plunge people into enduring

despair (Davis, 2005). The destabilising effect of losing a sibling in adolescence was evident within

the data and evidenced by the shattering of assumptions about the world and themselves (Corr,

Nabe & Corr, 2009).

4.5.4.2 Sibling Loss as a Source of Inner Strength

An overwhelming theme from the participant data was that the experience of sibling loss

provided participants with strength when faced with difficulties.

… it's kind of made me think, I'll get through it, yeah, it does make me think I'll get

through it. I feel very strong, I feel like I'll get through anything. (Anita, p. 16)

… the following year in October I started working … there was bullying at work … I was

on the receiving end of it a little bit but not a lot, I didn't like it but I always put myself

above that and thought "well, no" and I would say, from what I've been through, I'm

better than that … guys who are like 18 to 23 and I'm 16 but I thought, well, no, I'm

better than you guys, bugger you, I don't care, you can say all the smart things you

want, you don't know what's going on in my life and what I've had to put up with, so I

don't care what you say. (Donald, p. 27)

You just think sometimes, well, maybe you do have a little bit extra help whether it's

just a confidence thing that you think you've got somebody helping you out but I think

sometimes that has helped because say I have just lost my job, I have to go and find

another job and I do sort of think well, I have been through a few things in life, that I

will be able to cope, it will be fine. (Linda, p.21)

I find I get a lot of courage in situations where I might have backed out. It's weird, I'll

just hear his voice in my head, it could just be me, a coping mechanism, I'm putting the

voice in my head or I don't know, it could be him. Certain sayings that he used to say

that I would never say, I just randomly say and go 'why did I say that? That's what

Aaron would have said in that situation'. So, yeah, I get a lot of courage, I just think

what would Aaron do and I just do it. (Scott, p.9)

I think I can see that it has changed over time, it actually does get easier. People

always say time heals stuff which I don't really think is true but I think it does actually

make things easier and it is kind of kind in a way. So, I think by stepping back and

looking, I can see in a way that I have progressed or I have thought about things or

been resilient through things maybe. (Nancy, p. 41)

Usually I will, because I am not very spiritual but I will sort of, you know, if things are happening in a certain way, you might, I might be bed or something and sort of ask the question "what's going on?" and either direct it to her or my gran, "what's going on?", you know, "I don't understand" or can they help me get through something. Yeah, but I don't know, it's just, yeah, you still don't really know why things happen … (Linda, p. 18)

Participants spoke about being able to draw on an inner strength at times of difficulty either through acknowledging their resilience or drawing on an inner representation of the deceased sibling. Some participants associated this phenomenon as a spiritual presence whereas others regarded their thoughts and feelings as an inner strength that reflected the resilience developed through the experience of loss. This theme supports research that suggests the experience of the loss of a loved one during adolescence does not necessarily result in dysfunctionality and although there is evidence for negative outcomes, some adolescents experience growth and maturity following the death of their sibling (Balk, 1983, 1990; Packman, et al., 2006). Research with bereaved siblings has suggested that the experience of sibling loss can increase a personal sense of maturity and resilience as well as promote psychological growth (Forward & Garlie, 2003; Hogan & DeSantis, 1994; Packman, et al.).

4.5.4.3 *Increased Feelings of Empathy*

A theme of increased empathy was common within the results of this study and participants relayed that their experience of loss had provided an awareness of the pain and suffering experienced by others.

I would say that as a result of Yasmine dying and all the other things that happened before it, I'm so much more aware of how I am feeling and how other people are feeling around me … you learn every time you feel something, every time something hurts you, you develop an understanding of someone else's pain. And it's been a massive, another benefit as an adult of going through something like this is that you

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come out with, well, I don't know, it depends on the person I guess, I've come out with

a much better understanding of myself and the people around me I hope. (Harriet, p.

17)

I guess, probably just having that experience means that you know what it's like for

other people as well, having some empathy for other people, knowing that things

aren't all rosy, that life goes on …. (Linda, p. 18)

If someone has gone through a similar experience, I'm a lot more open to that, I guess

I can understand a little bit how they're feeling and I want to make sure that they are

feeling okay. (Scott, p. 10)

A number of participants spoke of their experience of grief and loss as providing insight and a better understanding of the pain of others. With this depth of empathy, there were a few who expressed a desire to work with those who were grieving or in pain.

I'm going to create a website that sort of links to articles, to lifeline, to help … to show

people they are not alone in what they feel because a lot of the time, even though you

are surrounded by people, you feel so alone and that the things you're feeling are

wrong or incorrect and I just sort of want to show, even if it's one person out there,

that you're not alone and what you feel is completely valid. (Anna, p. 20)

Participants were able to reflect on their own experience of loss and acknowledge difficulties faced by others. The experience of loss in adolescence appeared to heighten feelings of empathy and connection to another person's pain. This awareness may stem from confronting their own pain and depth of sorrow which enables them to connect with the pain of others and, in some cases, prompts a desire to assist others in need. Research suggests that losing a sibling in adolescence can foster competency in assisting others through a difficult time as well as amplify the expression of empathy, compassion and tolerance towards others (Balk 1990; Balk & Corr, 2001; Davies & Limbo, 2010; Hogan & DeStantis, 1994).

4.5.4.4 Problems were put in Perspective

A number of participants reported that the death of their sibling put other problems in perspective and they sometimes found it difficult to engage with their friends issues that they did not deem important e.g. argument with a boyfriend or parent.

> I think it just kind of changed me in the way that I look at other people's problems and hear them whinging about their boyfriends and stuff like that. I just kind of say there are bigger things and it used to annoy me that they didn't see that but now I kind of understand that they haven't gone through this so their boyfriend cheating on them or whatever is the biggest and worst thing in their life, so, you kind of accept that. (Emily, p. 15)

The experience is another way in which bereaved adolescent siblings may feel different from their peers. The comments above by Emily were reflected by other participants who felt that their own issues and those of others were put in perspective when compared to their experience of loss and the maturity that generated. Adults from Davies' (1991) study of adolescent sibling survivors indicated that they experienced an increased sense of maturity and that issues their friends were concerned over seemed unimportant and trivial.

The themes of strength in this section did not necessarily signify the participants' ability to make sense of their sibling's death or indicate a level of acceptance of the loss. Further, participants who reported feelings of competence or resilience after the loss of their sibling may still struggle with integrating that loss. As mentioned by Bank and Kahn (1982), the death of a sibling may facilitate either sickness and stagnation or maturity and creativity. Balk (2014) suggests that coping with a life crisis provides the opportunity for growth and transformation but that such outcomes are not guaranteed. Although outcomes of growth following adolescent sibling bereavement are well documented in the literature (Balk, 1983, 2009), explanations as to why some adolescents experience growth and others flounder are still not clear.

4.6   The Family's Response to Loss

4.6.1   Impact of Parental Grief

4.6.1.1 Concern about Family Following Loss and Parental Discord

A number of participants voiced concern regarding their parents' relationship or marriage after the death of their sibling. Concerns were fuelled through their observations of parents' interactions or from information they had read or heard about the potential for marriage breakdown following the loss of a child. In some situations, it was a combination of both.

> … it's kind of weird how much things didn't change. I would have expected it to change a lot more than it did. You watch movies and things like that and the families go through a crisis and get divorced or do all this weird stuff and you hear about families that move overseas … and we've kind of stayed pretty much the same, we have just lost one. (Emily, p. 22)

> I guess it was just a weird dynamic in the family as well. I had heard that after people lose their children, a lot of times that they all break up, so that was my next concern thinking, well, I didn't really want to have to then choose who you lived with and all that kind of stuff. (Linda, p. 8)

Both Emily and Linda indicated they anticipated an aspect of change in their parents' relationship or in their family's circumstances. Thoughts of this nature may have increased the participants' sensitivity to the emotional turmoil within the family following loss and amplified indications of discord. Anticipating or expecting disruption within the family may add to the distress participants were already experiencing. Some participants indicated that problems in their parents' relationship became apparent following their sibling's death.

> I find I was my mum's confidant and my dad's confidant because they'll both come to me to complain about the other one and often when we would run into people at the supermarket and they would ask how is (husband)? And she'd (mother) just be like,

"oh" and they're like, well, you know, after the loss of a child there's a big rate of divorce and you're just like, well, that doesn't help. I was really upset because I don't know if that's a statistic but I've just lost my sister, now you're telling me my parents are going to separate. It just seemed like it was a real possibility because they weren't getting along and they weren't supporting each other. (Anastasia, pp. 21-22)

Anastasia spoke of her role as a confidant for each parent and that she felt wedged in the middle of their relationship as she tried to support both. Anastasia believed there was a real possibility her parents might separate due to an inability to come together in their grief. For Anastasia, this situation remained at the time of the study's interview some seven years after the loss of her older sister. Anastasia stated that she felt she needed to continue living at home in an effort to preserve her parents' relationship.

… I really feel in a sense, I can't move out of home … I think that would be really hard on my parents. Last year, I went on a holiday and I bumped into a guy, we got talking and we really liked each other and so we were commuting from (city) to (city) to see each other. And when I first told my dad he didn't want to talk to me because he was worried that I would leave and move to (city). I'd leave him! … And so, I think it would be really hard when I move out and I also worry if that's going to exacerbate them fighting and things when I do … I feel like I've got to be present to make them okay in a way. (Anastasia, p. 22)

Anastasia's reluctance to leave home in an effort to preserve her parents' relationship restricts the development of her independence and separation from parents. Family dynamics in which a parent and child create an alliance against the other parent can be damaging to the integrity of the parental relationship. The alliances between Anastasia and her mother and Anastasia and her father may facilitate the reduction in tension of the parental relationship via triangulation.

Additionally, this dynamic further enmeshes Anastasia in a dependent type relationship with her parents (Bowen, 1991).

The witnessing of discord between parents was described as highly distressing by participants as they also endeavoured to cope with the loss of a sibling. Anita described the shift in her parents' relationship after the death of her brother.

> I just remember we stopped celebrating a lot of stuff … we wouldn't put decorations
>
> up and it just wasn't a happy time … we were always just sad … prior to that we were
>
> always so happy … prior to the passing of my brother, problems between my parents,
>
> they never fought and after that, they just fought all the time and that just caused
>
> huge problems between them two … so, that was difficult to deal with because I didn't
>
> have anyone to speak to about it, ever, because we never knew they were having
>
> problems and then when I found out, I had no one to talk to about it. (Anita, pp. 16-17)

Anita noted changes in the way her parents interacted following the loss of her brother. She indicated that prior to her brother's death, problems in her parents' relationship were not apparent but following his death, her parents started to argue. Anita expressed she felt alone in this experience as she had no one with whom to discuss the situation and could only look on helplessly.

> And blame, blaming, my dad would blame my mum because my dad didn't want my
>
> brother to be a groomsman at this wedding and my mum was the one who convinced
>
> him and made it happen … my dad was so adamant not to have him (brother) as a
>
> groomsman at the wedding, he just didn't want it to happen and then it did and so my
>
> dad would blame my mum and be like "you're the one that made him"… (Anita, p. 17)

Anita advised her brother was a member of her cousin's wedding party when he was killed in a car accident. She stated that her mother had insisted that her brother was involved in the wedding but father did not want him to participate in the ceremony. After he was killed in the car accident, Anita's father blamed her mother for his death. Lieberman (1989) states that marital

relationships can become particularly strained if one partner blames the other for the death of their child or if their grief take different paths.

4.6.1.2 The Parental Grief Dynamic

Many of the participants noticed that their parents were grieving in different ways. Some participants indicated that their parents were able to support each other while other participants detected a disconnection in the parental relationship as each parent took a different grief route.

> … my dad usually tries to kind of be strong for my mum or tries to kind of be more upbeat and positive about it generally … I think my dad is a really strong Christian and so, for him, he just says it helps him, it makes him trust God more because he thinks that God is in control of everything … He believes this he gets to see Lionel again. (Nancy, pp. 30-31)

> Yes, dad is completely withdrawn. He tries to ignore the whole situation whereas, mum's emotional, she's thinking about it day-in, day-out. She's constantly talking to friends about it and people and stuff like that. So, I feel more attached to mum because she can provide that emotional support. (Eric, p. 15)

> … it was waiting for them to come home and then, not wanting them to be home sort of thing. It was a really weird feeling … I think the biggest surprise was that when they came in the door, mum was the one that was always the crier and the hysterical one and dad was always the strong one, who always ruled with an iron fist sort of thing. But he was the one was broken down in tears and mum was just shocked and that was sort of a bit of a shock to us, that the roles were reversed. We were like, whoa, okay. I've not seen that first hand either. It was weird. (Donald, p. 4-5)

Different grieving styles may impact relationships in the family as the variance in expression and openness of grief may create disconnection if parents fail to support each other. Eric described

the different ways in which his parents grieve and the subsequent push and pull within their relationship.

> With mum and dad I guess … they got to a point where they just didn't want to communicate to each other anymore and I know in recent times now they've come back but it's not consistent. There are times where they love each other and they care for one another but then there's days where dad will just go on and on and he wouldn't even talk to mum, only because he's grieving … I've noticed that there's times where that he's grieving and mum would approach him and be a bit abusive … and she takes it. I don't know if she takes it personally but… (Eric, pp. 20-21)

As indicated by Eric, his mother and father appear to be "out of sync" with each other's grief and unable to support the other. Eric advised that his father became abusive towards his mother sometimes when she tried to support him. As noted by Liberman (1989), both parents may be so profoundly affected by the loss of a child that they may not be available to support one another.

Of the participants that identified the theme of *The Parental Grief Dynamic*, some described that one parent tended to express their grief while the other tended to withdraw and not want to talk about how they were feeling. Another scenario described by Emily below is where one family member, in Emily's case, her mother, seeks support elsewhere working through their grief independently and rather than with the other family members.

> … my parents, I guess they're just sadder, dad's, he is not a quiet guy, he is not quiet at all … he doesn't talk about Kiki all that much, to me at least. I am not sure if he talks to mum about it or whatever. I am sure that he does but he was a bit quieter and then mum, I think she has handled it better than a lot of us I think … She started going to Red Kite counselling groups and things like that and made some friends who are also going through losses of children … she kind of grew up this group of friends and I think

that helped her but I also think it made her kind of feel like she had spoken about it and so, she didn't need to speak to us about it as much. (Emily, p. 21-22)

Emily's mother was able to access support via a community organisation that supported parents with the loss of a child. Emily felt that her mother had worked through her grief within this group and did not feel the need or know how to communicate about the death of her sister with the rest of the family.   The impetus for her mother to seek support outside of the family may have been due to differences in coping styles of Emily's parents. This experience left Emily feeling disengaged from the grief conversation with her mother and advised that she recently told to her mother that she didn't think the family seemed to care that her sister had died. Emily advised that her comments prompted further discussion surrounding her sister's death and as a result she felt more connected to her family.

4.6.1.3 *Witness to the Intensity of Parental Grief*

Participants reported an awareness of the intensity of their parents' grief as they endeavoured to cope with the loss of a child. Participants spoke of their understanding of their parents' vulnerability and following the loss of a child.

He goes into his little hole, I call it his little hole, he just withdraws from everything and then he'll get to a point where he's just holding everything back and then he'll just let it go. He will be a bit abusive even towards me. He will just start swearing and I know he doesn't mean it but he just, you know, it's just a release for him. (Eric, p. 21)

I know dad, because he was so high strung … leaving his job and then all the things in hospital. He ended up going on anti-anxiety medication for a week or something. But he said it left him feeling so dead, it stripped all the emotions and he said he'd much rather feel the pain and stuff than nothing at all. Like, he got through it in his own way … (Marvin, p. 16)

She (mother) was just a mess, an absolute mess, never seen anyone like it in my life,

it's incredible. But again, it's so totally understandable, never was anyone ever angry

with her or upset or anything like that … it's not like we were stepping on egg shells

either, we still spoke to her and still "can you sign this?" or "you forgot this for school"

or whatever. There was still interaction and communication … it was about six months

… she learnt that she had to get up and keep moving forward and it wasn't going to kill

her to do that and that things are going to move forward anyway … I think it's given

me a healthy understanding of death and how it can and how devastating it is for a

family … (Donald, p. 16)

My dad, I'd never actually seen him cry before and he'd just become a complete mess.

He would pace the house just sobbing, it just didn't seem like tears were coming some

days because he was just, he could hardly even say two words to you and I think a lot

of that come from, he had a really harsh upbringing, his dad left them quite young and

because he was the eldest, he looked after his family. So, I think he felt really robbed

that he'd tried to do everything right for his family and it still got broken … it was a

good year before he got better. (Anastasia, pp. 19-20)

Some participants reflected on the enormity of their parents' loss. Participants reported

observable and dramatic indicators of parental grief such as anger, withdrawal, anxiety, intense

sadness and inconsolability. Some of these reactions commenced at the point of the sibling's death

and continued for at least six months but sometimes longer until their parent or parents resumed a

stable level of functioning.

Perceptions of parental coping strategies were evident in the data provided by the

participants. Eric's description of his father's withdrawal from family members and expressions of

anger suggests a level of rumination and feeling stuck in his loss. Eric spoke of the Coroner's Inquest

into his brother's death and the media attention compounding the intense distress his family

experienced over the two years since the loss of his younger brother. The sudden and violent loss of

a son in a motor vehicle accident together with unanswered questions concerning who was at fault is likely to have intensified the family's level of distress.

For Marvin's family, the death of his sister occurred after a chronic illness which was described as an unexpected death as the family held hopes for recovery. Marvin spoke about his father's heightened anxiety following the loss of his sister for which he was prescribed medication but took for only a short time. Families who have experienced the death of a chronically ill child are often overwhelmed by practical and emotional demands and the potential 'benefits' of anticipatory grief are not often realised due to the stressors of the situation (Shapiro, 2008). The death of a child following a protracted illness places a further burden on parental resources available to support ongoing family concerns (Shapiro).   Marvin's comments acknowledged the multiple stressors faced by his parents, particularly his father.

Both Donald and Anastasia spoke of the devastation experienced by their mother and father respectively. Each of their parents was unable to function and fulfil their role as caregiver, provider, nurturer or any other role they had performed in the family. Such a response is likely to disrupt the structure, communication and cohesion of the family. For one participant, Eve, her parents' day to day lives remained affected five years following her brother's suicide.

> Mum developed agoraphobia, she was afraid to go outside for about 18 months to 2 years after Connor passed away. And, so, you can imagine when someone doesn't go outside, it's quite challenging for them to look after themselves but also there's a lot more with that, obviously, it's not the just the fact that she didn't go outside. There were a lot of psychological issues and then dad was suicidal and I think still really grapples with it. They're both addicted to sleeping medication and antidepressants and can't get off them. (Eve, p. 4)

Neimeyer (2014) suggests that finding meaning in the death of a loved one is particularly critical for deaths that are a result of suicide, homicide or fatal accidents. The ability to 'make sense' of a violent death mediates the impact of the subsequent adaptation of the survivor more so when

compared to the impact of 'natural' deaths. In the scenarios described by Eric, Donald and Eve, the death of their sibling was unexpected and violent. The intensity of parental grief witnessed by participants may have been influenced by their parents' inability to make sense of their sibling's death. Donald spoke of his mother questioning her religion and her struggles to make sense of what happened.

> Well, you don't make sense of it, don't be silly. If you can make sense of that, then you
>
> can make sense of everything and not everything makes sense … It just happened, it
>
> was an accident … God, you could kill yourself worrying about that sort of crap for the
>
> rest of your life … I think mum was asking herself those questions though for those
>
> first months and I don't blame her, I don't blame her because it was her first born child
>
> and he shouldn't go before her, was her thoughts. No way. (Donald, pp. 20-21)

Witnessing the intensity of a parent or parents' grief as they struggle to find meaning in the loss of a child was reported as a tortuous experience by participants. Some participants spoke about finding meaning in what they had witnessed in terms of parental grief as described by Donald above. Anastasia's inferred meaning in her father's desperation over the loss of his eldest daughter was that he had tried to provide for his family only to be thwarted by death which consigned the family to be 'broken'.

4.6.1.4 *Helpless Bystander to Parental Grief*

Participants expressed a level of helplessness as they observed their parents' experience of loss. A corollary to this experience was the participants' interpretations of their parents' response in the context of their own grief and what this meant for them.

> I really struggled as well with, because I didn't really agree with the way that they
>
> (parents) were grieving because I really wanted to think of the happy times and they
>
> were really just focused on the fact that he was gone. (Eve, p. 13)

I think that was probably the hardest thing to see … me losing a sister is like, that was very hard but seeing mum lose a daughter was probably one of the hardest things I've seen. Mum and dad losing their daughter, that's weird, they're the people you look up to, you look at them for strength and to see them not doing well … probably one of the most difficult things, I think … seeing them go through that made me see that it's okay not to be alright all the time. (Marvin, p. 20)

And it's hard because sometimes I feel like I shouldn't be in this profession, like a social work profession, if I can't address the issues that are going on under my own roof but there's been a number of times when I try and broach it (mother's drinking) and it just causes a bit of a fight because it always comes back to my sister passing … it's just like seven years later, you need to find a better way of dealing with what we've gone through than drinking. (Anastasia, p. 21)

I do remember mum saying that maybe she should have another baby straight afterwards. I remember her talking about that for a little bit and I just thought, well, that's a bit of a joke. But, yeah, I think it's just that sense of loss that you wanted to replace, whereas, I would go the other way. (Linda, p.10)

I hate seeing my mum cry, I can't even, I can't stand looking at her, it doesn't even, I don't even want to be there when mum's crying. (Anita, p. 5)

The theme of *Helpless Bystander to Parental Grief* illustrates participants' feelings of futility as they were unable to resolve their parents' grief or provide adequate comfort. Their statements also contain a reaction to their parents' difficulties in confronting loss. Eve spoke about the depth of despair she witnessed as her parents struggled following her brother's suicide and advised that she wrestled with the constant loss-orientation characteristics of her parents' grief. Eve remarked that this environment created difficulties for her in processing her grief.

A lack of synchronicity in the grieving styles of family members has been noted as a cause for distance and strain within relationships (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991; 2004). Eve stated the family dynamic made it difficult for her to process grief in a different way to that of her parents. Eve's acknowledgement of the different styles of grieving indicated an ability to separate herself from the despair her parents while she found her own path through grief.   Again, underscoring the individual and unique experience of grief together with the distinctive way each family may grieve and the multiple factors that influence this process (e.g. individual, family, cultural, religious and societal) (Kazak & Noll, 2004).

Marvin spoke of his helplessness in witnessing the pain of his parents and his inability to assist. This experience enabled Marvin to reflect and conclude that the expression of pain is not indicative of a lack of strength and this gave him permission to let others know how he felt. Coupled with participants' feelings of helplessness were also feelings of frustration. Anastasia believed that she should be able to assist her mother's substance abuse issue as she was studying social work but felt unable to do so. Anastasia's realisation of her inability to address issues within her family may have impacted the way she viewed herself and the world. This is likely to have affected how she felt about her competence and confidence in her chosen area of study.

Anita's response to her mother's grief suggests an inability to witness her mother's distress and avoid the emotions triggered by this event. It is likely that Anita found it difficult to confront the loss of her brother and avoided thoughts and feelings associated with his death. Witnessing her mother's expression of grief was linked to her own feelings of loss which she actively tried to avoid.

The themes of *Concern about Family Following Loss and Parental Discord, The Parental Grief Dynamic*, *Witness to the Intensity of Parental Grief* and *Helpless Bystander to Parental Grief* are likely to reflect the destabilisation of the family environment and affect feelings of security for surviving siblings. The death of a child in the family may create fissures in a marriage that otherwise functioned adequately, and was able to contain and tolerate differences between individuals. Additionally, difficulties in the marital relationship may be exacerbated by the different grieving and

coping styles of parents become out of step with each other. Parental discord and grief were identified as factors that negatively impacted adolescents' processing of grief associated with the loss of a sibling (Hogan & DeSantis, 1994). Hence, problems within the marital relationship are likely to have a destabilising influence on family functioning and increase the distress of surviving siblings.

The state of the marital relationship prior to the loss of a child may be influenced by a number of factors that create the post-loss context. One challenge faced by parents during the busy years of childhood and early adolescence, is the struggle to find time to connect and therefore a level of distance in the relationship may evolve. If emotional distance is present at the time of their child's death, the parental relationship may lack the intimacy required to facilitate mutual support. Hence, distance between parents prior to their child's death may be compounded by normal developmental epochs of family life, differences in grief responses and coping strategies employed by each parent.

Despite the common belief that adolescents are focussed on themselves during this development phase, many exhibited insight and understanding of the depth of sorrow experienced by their parent or parents. This experience often overshadowed their own experience of grief as they endeavoured to lessen the grief of their parents and this dynamic provided the context in which they grieved.

4.6.2 Taking Responsibility

4.6.2.1 I felt I had to be Strong

A compelling theme within the participant data was the desire to be strong for parents and to hide the extent of their grief in front of others. The data indicates that this theme remained present in the interactions with parents to this day as participants avoided upsetting their parents by not mentioning their deceased sibling.

> … we went to the funeral parlour to see my sister the day before her funeral and the
>
> man who was like a funeral director … he was handing me the pamphlets and he's
>
> like, when your parents are ready give this to them. So it was like a lot of people

understood that this was really terrible for them but it's not always the person who's crying that's having a hard time ... I think for a while I did have to take on a bit more of a mature role in my family because, not that I had to look after my parents but I have to be strong for them I felt, so, yeah I think I didn't open up. I never used to cry in front of people, I would fight it until my throat was burning because I would just try so hard not to, whereas, now I've really opened up and I don't mind so much. (Anastasia, pp. 8-9)

So, I think that's why I felt I had to be really strong, put on a strong front because my parents weren't doing so well. (Anastasia, p. 20)

… guess I just really didn't talk about it all … I've tried to stay strong because I knew how hard it was and I'd see mum upset and so I tried to stay strong for my sister and things like that. I don't think you need to be strong sometimes, it's important not to be strong sometimes ... (Marvin, p. 18)

… that's the other thing, when your around family, if they are happy, you don't really want to make everybody sad so, it's kind of like, it's a tricky thing sometimes. (Nancy, p. 38)

Because you don't want it out there as if I am dwelling on it and that's all I am thinking about because you do move on. But at the same time, it's still something that happened. She was still a real person that you want to remember. But sometimes it's hard how to do that … I don't necessarily want to bring it up sometimes with mum and dad because I think then it'll upset them. (Linda, pp. 12-13)

The participant comments above reflected attempts to hide their grief from parents and others, and present themselves as coping with significant loss. This strategy was employed for two reasons, firstly, to allow their parents' to grieve without worrying about the participants' ability to

cope and secondly, to avoid any expression of grief which may compound the grief of their parents or upset them if they appeared to be coping.

Anastasia spoke of visiting the funeral parlour with her parents to view her deceased sister and was given instructions from the funeral director to relay to her parents when they were more composed. Anastasia advised that she was also grieving but received the message that she needed to be strong for her parents as their grief was greater. Marvin advised that he endeavoured to maintain composure at a time when his parents were grieving intensely. Additionally, the comments from Nancy and Linda are indicative of continued efforts to hide the expression of grief from their respective parents. Participants indicated that this strategy was important to avoid inflicting further pain on their parents after the loss of a child. Participants stated that talking about their deceased sibling within the family was treated with careful consideration after judging their parents' tolerance. A few participants indicated their sibling could be spoken about freely but this was the exception.

Participants describe the suppression of grief to avoid exacerbating the distress of their parents. This supports research that witnessing the distress and vulnerability of parents compounds the experience of grief and fear of surviving siblings (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). Participants also spoke of messages from others, either overt or covert, shortly after the death of their sibling directing them to be strong for their parents. Implicit in the messages to remain strong for their parents was the sense that their grief was not as important as their parents' grief.

Research suggests that adolescents will endeavour to hide their own pain from parents as a way to minimise any additional pain this may create for of their parents (Forward & Garlie, 2003). The phenomena of 'camouflaged grief' and 'prohibitive mourning' are well documented in the grief and loss literature concerning families (Davies 1984-1985; Robinson & Mahon, 1997). Shapiro (1994) adds that bereaved children monitor their own grief response to what they believe their parents can tolerate.   These statements were supported by the findings of this study.

A few participants described the need to care for their parents or other siblings in the wake of their sibling's death as their parents demonstrated an inability to function as a caregiver or maintain care for themselves.

> … after Connor died, I pretty much looked after my parents for a good two years after that. Yeah, the roles were very reversed. They became my teenage children and I became the parent. Mum hasn't worked since and dad's attempted suicide himself a few times, so, it was very intense but now my parents are my absolute best friends. (Eve, p. 3)

> It just made you probably a little more responsible in terms of looking after a younger brother with mum pretty much being out of the picture because she just was not functioning at all … so there's lot of sort of growing up pretty quickly and looking after (younger brother) … he was only 10, so just making sure that he was okay and if he had homework that homework was done … make sure that people were spending time with him and that he wasn't spending too much time being sad …. (Donald, p. 10-11)

> It's been something that is still ongoing. I guess also because the way that mum and dad coped with it because mum and dad went into complete shock and there was no one to take care of them, I mean. So, I felt that I had to step up and support them as well. So, it was all this process of supporting one another and then I felt I couldn't really support myself. I'm finding that now, harder and harder to do that now. So, if the impact wasn't quite immediate, it's happening now, so it's sort of post. (Eric, p. 7)

Eve spoke of her parents' being unable to care for themselves and left her home in Australia to provide live-in care in New Zealand. She described an intense and extended time in which she cared for her mother and father as she felt it was her responsibility as nobody else was available. Donald and his twin brother facilitated the physical and emotional care of their younger brother as

their mother was unfit to do so and their father was 'emotionally unavailable' as well as distracted by other responsibilities. Eric advised that his parents were in a state of shock and required much support which he provided. He also spoke of finding it increasingly difficult to ignore his own emotional needs and two years later, he struggles with his grief and finds difficult to provide the level of support he previously offered to his parents.

Poor functioning of a surviving parent was found to be a predictor of adjustment in children after the death of a parent (Worden & Silverman, 1996). Although the death of a parent is different from the death of a sibling, the ability of a parent to cope with the loss of a child impacts the context in which the surviving child must grieve. The participants who identified the themes of *I Felt I had to be Strong* and *Stepping Up* adopted responsibility within a changed family structure at a time of intense parental grief. Some participants spoke of pushing away their own grief in order to be there for their parents.

> I spent years looking after mum and dad, never really dealt with it. I didn't cry once till
>
> at least two and a half years afterwards until I actually shed a single tear for him
>
> because I was just completely numbed up. (Eve, p. 5)

Eve's comment above illustrates the level of denial and avoidance she employed so that she may care for her parents who were struggling significantly with her brother's suicide. In a situation where bereaved adolescents are not provided with the opportunity to discuss their loss, avoidance of feelings can lead to an extended period of grieving and it may take years to work through their grief (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Cicirelli, 1995). Bowlby (1980) suggested that this type of disordered grief has the capacity for negative enduring effects on the development of bereaved siblings. Additionally, the lack of parental support coupled with the loss of a sibling is a double loss for bereaved siblings as they have not only lost a sibling but the availability of a mother, a father or both (Bank & Kahn, 1982; DeVita-Raeburn, 2004). Such disorganisation of roles within the family is characteristic of the adjustment to the loss of a son, daughter, brother or sister (Walsh & McGoldrick, 1991).

4.6.2.3 Now it's My Turn to Grieve

Some of the participants who pushed aside their grief to support their parents continued to do so until their parents were able to cope or the participant felt they could no longer sustain the support they provided.

> So, I think really, in a sense, it's only been the last few years that I've really opened up a lot because it's been like my parents now are okay and it's my turn in a sense. My dad was terrible after my sister passed away and my mum … she didn't seem too bad, I think because we felt we had to be strong for my dad and then there were periods where she would have bad day. I think I just had it in the back of my mind, people kept saying you've got to be strong for your parents. (Anastasia, p. 8)

> I think back then, I coped with it not so much well but I kind of just accepted it and kept going because I kind of had to. I had to get through school, I had to stay with friends, so I couldn't just make it harder for mum and dad trying to deal with that up there and me down here, so I kind of coped with it well at the time but I think looking back, I probably didn't express myself enough though at that time and I think I probably cope with it less well now than I did back then. (Emily, p. 12-13)

> … with mum and dad, I really felt like they were both grieving in pretty much the same way and so for me to be different, I didn't want to deflect from how they were feeling and I didn't want to feel how they were feeling and it was very complicated with all three of us grieving. And so when I was able to actually step away and relax and be comfortable with someone who wasn't also going through it, was when I could actually feel it and not worry about how it was going to impact someone else who was also going through it. (Eve, p. 14)

The experience of grief within families is as nuanced and complex as it is for individuals. The three participant comments above represent different situational factors that influenced the

participant experiences of grief. Anastasia advised she remained strong for her father after her

sister's unexpected death as he appeared unable to function within or outside the family. As her

father recovered, her mother began to experience fluctuations of intense grief. During these

periods, Anastasia endeavoured to hide her grief to preserve the functioning of the family.

Anastasia advised she felt there was now an opportunity to express her grief as her parents had

recovered to an extent and it is her turn to grieve openly, albeit seven years later.

Emily's experience differs from the above as her sister was chronically unwell for

approximately one year before her death. Emily's comments reflect some of the challenges of living

with a chronically ill sibling as an adolescent. Emily was billeted out to other families near their rural

home while her parents stayed near her ill sister in a city hospital. In an effort to minimise distress

for her parents in a difficult situation, Emily advised she did what was expected of her while not

connecting with the pain she was experiencing, rather, she operated on autopilot. Emily spoke

about wanting to be with her family at this time but was able to receive updates on her sister's

condition and treatment.

The situation for Eve was also complicated in the aftermath of her brother's suicide. Eve

spoke about grieving differently to her parents as they struggled with day to day life. Eve expressed

that she felt numb for a number of years after her brother's death, unable to access her grief which

helped her to care for her parents. Additionally, Eve felt that she could not reveal or express the

extent of her grief to her parents but later had the opportunity to do so with her partner who was

able to support her in a way her parents had failed.

Oftentimes, participants pushed aside their own feelings and stepped up to support parents

as a strategy to ensure the family's survival. Participants perceived their role to help the family

continue to function and if they succumbed to their own intense grief, this may further jeopardise

the overall functioning of the family. Some of the participants recognised they had denied their own

grief to support their parents and began to acknowledge their grief when their parents appeared to

cope better. Research by Shapiro (1994) suggests that when a family is confronted with grief,

children sacrifice their own integrity to protect the emotional wellbeing of parents as parental stability is essential to the child's survival and in providing the environment for ongoing development.

4.6.3   Communication in the Family

4.6.3.1 The Silence

Participants reported an unwillingness or inability of family members to discuss the death of their sibling. *The Silence* theme represents an unspoken message received by participants that their sibling's death was not a safe topic as it may upset others, particularly their parents.

> Another thing is that my family don't really talk about stuff … my dad talks about how
>
> he feels about stuff … my mum doesn't really talk about stuff, so, I think for the whole
>
> time Lionel was sick, that made it really hard to talk, we didn't talk about it at all. Like
>
> how we actually felt about it. It was just kind of the reality. (Nancy, p. 24)

> … my behaviour didn't change all that much. It obviously changes when you become a
>
> teenager and you're not a little girl anymore, so you change but I don't know, I think I
>
> probably stayed the same most out of the family, mum got quieter, dad got quieter
>
> and Marvin, I don't know, I am not sure about Marvin, we don't talk that much about
>
> that type of thing. (Emily, p. 9)

> I think a big part of that suicide thing (suicide attempts) was I kept a lot of it to myself
>
> initially because I felt like my dad was hurting more, my mum was hurting more.
>
> (Elaine, p. 22)

Some participants reported that the family did not openly discuss the death of their sibling and although they were mentioned from time to time, discussion regarding the pain of the loss was stifled or non-existent. Nancy described the silence which began during her brother's seven-year battle with cancer and continued after his death as 'the reality' of the situation which was something to endure but not speak about. As identified by Walsh and McGoldrick (1998), living with a

chronically ill sibling can consume parental resources leaving adolescent siblings to feel isolated. Additionally, adolescent siblings may be at risk of neglect as parents struggle with the circumstances and stressors of looking after a dying child (Doka, 1993).

As mentioned by Nancy, the period of her brother's protracted illness was not spoken about after his death. It was as if the experience of living through his illness no longer existed and was superseded by the turmoil of his death. Nancy's suppression of her grief may have resulted in her feelings being unacknowledged, ignored and invalidated (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). This experience may have influenced her ability to confront and integrate the loss of her brother leading to a more complicated and protracted grieving process. Interestingly, an older study by Rosen (1984-1985) revealed that 62% of older adolescents and adults who lost a sibling in adolescence or childhood never discussed the loss with their family. This may not be so true of families today but the study highlights the nature of siblings hiding their grief from parents as they felt their grief was prohibited. The findings of this study support that the disenfranchisement of grief remains an issue for sibling bereaved adolescents today and the danger of hiding their grief is omnipresent.

Emily related a sense of 'the unspoken' within her family which may reflect an uncertainty of what the family could tolerate in terms of confronting loss. Emily's comments regarding changes in the family since her sister's death suggest her parents communicated less and a distance grew between her and her brother after the loss. Similar to Nancy, Emily's sister experienced a chronic illness that resulted in the physical separation of family members as parents moved to care for her sister. Findings from a study by Fanos and Nickerson (1991) indicated that the family goes through a process of reorganisation as it endeavours to manage the child's chronic illness and the impending death of the sibling results in the withdrawal of emotional resources from the well sibling. As highlighted by the authors, changes in the family alter the developmental environment of the surviving sibling.

In the last example, Elaine's comments suggest she pushed aside her grief to avoid exacerbating the pain experienced by her parents. However, her pain manifested as acting out

behaviours in the form of suicide attempts. Raphael (1983) suggests that adolescent acting out

behaviours may be driven from bereavement-generated stresses in order to seek care and relieve

tension as indicated by Elaine.   Linda described her family as being not close or expressive prior to

her sister's death. *The Silence* theme was not solely the result of a tragic family loss but is likely to

have existed in the family prior.

> I do find possibly the English and Scottish background might also not help when you
>
> want to express emotions and talk about things because it's still a little bit, we don't do
>
> that. The family was never a big huggy kissy kind of family that kind of thing. (Linda,
>
> pp. 1-2)

The family's grief process may be helped or hindered by the type of affect, openness of

communication and level of cohesion within the family (Shapiro, 2001). Although this study did not

investigate aspects of functioning in the participant's family prior to the death of their sibling, data

was analysed regarding the participants' perception of change in family functioning since the death

of their sibling.

Linda's description of the family's repression of emotions, lack of closeness and

communication prior to her sister's death are likely to have dictated the way the family coped and

functioned after the death. Linda's family demonstrated more of a closed system of communication

which would decrease the opportunity for expression of thoughts and feelings, and subsequently,

negatively impact the closeness of family members.   As identified by Horsley and Patterson (2006),

open communication within the family following the loss of a child ensures surviving siblings do not

feel overlooked or alone in their grief.

The Silence theme represents a pattern of closed communication in the family after the loss

of a child. Charles and Charles (2006) suggested the silence that surrounds the loss of a child in the

family facilitates the avoidance of confronting the loss and inhibits the family's ability to integrate

that loss. The lack of communication about the loss intensifies the isolation felt by bereaved

adolescents. It is possible this pattern of communication existed in the families of participants who

spoke about *The Silence*. Therefore, further research to investigate changes patterns of closeness,

cohesion and communication within families prior to and following loss would be worthwhile to

evaluate changes to family functioning following the loss of a child.

4.6.3.2 Avoidance of Conflict

In some families a blanket of silence existed together with a desire to avoid conflict.

Participants spoke of avoiding conversations that might upset their parents or siblings and,

therefore, conversations that may create conflict often went unaddressed.

> We were certainly careful with each other and we didn't want to in any way contribute
>
> anymore to the grief each was experiencing. Perhaps, at times, there were issues that
>
> we probably needed to discuss openly with each other, you know, anything that might
>
> have been a point of conflict, we didn't necessarily bring up with each other because
>
> we didn't want to hurt each other anymore than we in a way had been hurt. So, yeah,
>
> it probably stifled some communication. (William, p. 18)

> … it got better I think after my dad started improving in a sense but my mum also took
>
> to drinking a fair bit … until recently no one really knew about it because my dad and I
>
> wouldn't tell anyone but she would leave bottles of alcohol in the cupboards, like skol
>
> a glass of it and then go sit down, so, she'd think that we weren't aware of it … that
>
> was hard to deal with that your mum was getting drunk every night … (Anastasia, p.
>
> 21)

Unexpressed differences were noted in a general sense by William but more specifically in

the comment from Anastasia. Anastasia spoke about her mother's substance use or abuse while she

and her father turned a 'blind eye'. An inability or unwillingness to broach difficult issues is likely

due to the desire to not inflict any further pain as captured in William's comment. Bowen (1991)

notes that when a significant person in the family dies, the family automatically shifts from an "open

relationship system" to "closed relationship system" and results in the restriction of communication

between family members as a mechanism to avoid upsetting others in the family. The shift in the relationship system inhibits the expression of grief and may generate feelings of loneliness and isolation for family members (Biggs, 2002). The lack of communication and transparency in Anastasia's family is likely to keep family members locked in ineffective patterns of communication and maladaptive coping behaviours.

4.6.3.3 Her Name's Not Taboo

Only a couple of participants reported that there was a level of open and frequent communication in their family about discussing the deceased sibling. This was not the norm for most participants as their deceased sibling was not frequently mentioned by family members even after many years since their death.

> It was fairly regularly (spoke to mother about Yves) … I think it would have been on some level, not always about the grief but just about him as a person, it would have been, I reckon, once a day because mum, between about 1998 and 2001, she wrote a book about Yves's life and also some of the struggles with the (defence force) in getting answers. Yes, she was writing that and so I think that meant that we spoke further about him because it was about getting ideas down on paper and getting incidences down on paper and all. So, yeah, there was a lot of discussion about him. (William, pp. 9-10)

> I don't know many other families who have lost that actually speak about their departed the way we do. She's, there's no taboo in our family at all even amongst extended relatives, not taboo one bit. She can be mentioned quite freely without anyone crying, it can be in a laughing way but yeah, she… she definitely hasn't been forgotten. (Anna, p. 15)

The participants who reported speaking frequently about their deceased sibling typically engaged in conversations with their mother who seemed the most open and encouraging within the

family. In the two cases reported above, an ongoing connection or attachment with the deceased sibling was encouraged by the participant's mother. William advised that his mother wrote a book about his brother's life and subsequent death while in the defence force. William indicated that his mother's writing enabled discussions about his brother as well as generally talking about his feelings of grief. William's mother's book may have represented a legacy for her deceased son and William may have invested in this legacy as well. For Anna, her mother encouraged her to greet her dead sister upon arriving home by paying tribute at the door of her sister's room or kissing a photo as a way of acknowledging her sister. Perhaps these two examples illustrate the encouragement by a family member to remain connected to the deceased through ongoing communication. Some researchers (Packman, et al., 2006) suggest that bereaved siblings fare better if an ongoing connection with their deceased brother or sister is encouraged by family members whereas other researchers question whether this approach is helpful for all (Field, et al., 2005; Neimeyer, 2014). Field, et al. suggest that an *ongoing attachment* to or *continuing bonds* with the deceased may compound rumination for some bereaved individuals intensifying their grief response and/or represents an inability to accept the death.

The openness of parents to discuss the deceased sibling appeared to influence the willingness of other family members to engage in conversation. The openness to talk about the deceased sibling in the two cases above did not necessarily align with the participants' ability to recover from the loss of their sibling as both Anna and William went onto experience an extended period of intense grief and reported symptoms of psychopathology (i.e. depressive symptoms, disordered eating, substance abuse). Perhaps there is a level of openness that is more adaptive and an exaggerated level of expression or discussion intensifies rumination regarding the loss. For both William and Anna, their sibling's death was unexpected and lacked sufficient explanation as such this may have hindered their ability to make sense of the loss.

Both Anna and William's comments were not typical of the participants in this study as the majority reported that it was difficult to talk about their sibling with other family members.   One

participant, Marvin, alluded to a more moderate expression of loss within the family which he advised was helpful:

> … mum talks about it so openly now with people but I can talk about it now openly now as well. Mum is sort of happy to talk about it with people I think. (Marvin, p. 20)

Marvin reported that his mother possessed the ability to talk about his deceased sister with a level of openness and this provided a context in which he felt comfortable to express his feelings as well. Davies' (1991) research suggests that a family environment where there is open communication and support makes it possible for bereaved adolescents to continue their development.

4.6.3.4 Constructed Meaning of Death

As discussed in the theme *Making Sense of the Death*, some participants constructed meaning on an individual level in relation to their sibling's death. Similarly, some participants reported that the family had ascribed meaning to their sibling's death or, together, they made sense of the loss.

> … we have a funny little story that some people may find silly but just before my sister passed away, she'd been collecting coins … she had this massive bag of five cent coins and she gave it to my mum and said next time you're at the bank can you just swap it over for me and she never got around to it before my sister passed away, so, we put $1.80 of five cent coins in the casket with her because my sister was always shopping … we kind of made a little joke that it's to catch heavens bus to the shops or something. And now I find when I have a terrible day or a real exciting day, I always manage to find a five cent piece in unusual places. The other day I started at my placement and I was given a desk and in the drawers were stationery and pens and there was one five cent piece and it's not overly unusual but to me it seemed like a

sign … she was with me on my first day of placement or something. (Anastasia, pp. 11-12)

Anastasia's story is laden with meaning. It indicates the family's view that her deceased sister's presence continues in some way. Anastasia and her parents talked about placing money in her sister's casket, a story relevant to who her sister was in life and incorporated humour. Anastasia's interpretation of finding five cent pieces provided comfort and a connection to her sister particularly at a time when she felt vulnerable or was excited about the day. Anastasia may have discussed the discovery of the five cent piece on her first day at placement with her parents and this would have helped to create cohesion and communication within the family as well as fostering a continued family relationship with her sister.   The family's ability, particularly the parents', to foster a sense of ongoing attachment to the deceased sibling has a significant impact on the recovery of surviving siblings (Packman, et al., 2006).

Anastasia's comments illustrate an example of a family systems view of 'shared meaning making'. The process of constructing a shared meaning by family members enables them to make sense of the death and facilitates communication and cohesion (Nadeau, 2001). In this study, only one member of the family was typically interviewed except in one case of a brother and sister sibling pair. Collecting data at one point does not allow for verification of shared meaning themes in the family. Analysis of data from the brother and sister sibling pair, Marvin and Emily, evidenced common themes concerning family meaning making. Such results suggest familial factors at play that influenced the pair's interpretation of meaning and this is explored in the following table that outlines the corroboration of themes and meaning from the sibling pair.

Table 5.

Common Themes from a Sibling Pair Concerning the Loss of a Sister.

Common Theme	Marvin	Emily
Unexpected Death	… in the start of the New Year, it was meant to be like all good and she came home … then it was like instantly that it had spread everywhere … she went up in an ambulance one afternoon because she wasn't feeling well at all and then mum and dad came back that morning and told me because I was at home by myself. That part was heaps sudden … they thought it was good and then that happened, so that was unexpected. (p. 4)	I think it was kind of a shock because she was home for about a few days and she was getting better and then she just took a turn and died within 10 hours or something and she got rushed back up to the hospital and we said goodbye to her at our local hospital and then she got rushed up to Sydney and I think she arrested in the ambulance and, so, we kind of said goodbye, but we hadn't, and so, after that it was kind of a shock. (p. 10)
Gained a Different Perspective	It was weird I think, that changed my perspective on a lot of things because how am I supposed to see dating this girl as a big deal when I've got that going on? So, it sort of changed my perceptive on life heaps, like small things that other people might see as oh, I'll go and stress and cry over it and stuff and I'm sort of, like, get over it, it's trivial. (p.5)	I think it just kind of changed me in the way that I look at other people's problems and hear them whinging about their boyfriends and stuff like that, I just kind of say there are bigger things … and it used to annoy me that they didn't see that, but now I kind of understand that they haven't gone through this so their boyfriend cheating on them or whatever, is the biggest and worst thing in their life, so, you kind of accept that. (p. 15)
Minimised Mental Health Concerns	… the girl I have been seeing at the moment, she sort of gets anxiety and, like, I sometimes have trouble seeing that because she says she feels down for no reason and I'm, like, well, why? (p. 14)	That's why I kind of, like, you look at people who commit suicide, you just kind of go, like, I understand that you were going through something but think about everyone around you before you choose to end your life and realise that other people don't have a choice and they die when they could have experienced an amazing life, it just doesn't sit well with me, suicide. (p. 19)
Live for Her	I think what I said about, like, Year 12 before is you sort of have to live your life now not as, like, always upset because of what's happened but you've got to try and live twice as much, like live two lives in memory or whatever. (p. 9)	I think like, back then, I remember just thinking, Kiki has died, so now I have to live twice as much for her … (p. 18)

Marvin and Emily both expressed that the death of their sister was unexpected although she had been receiving treatment for cancer over the preceding 12 months. Often, when if the death of a loved one is due to a chronic illness, individuals may feel shocked or think the death was unexpected as the exact time of death is unpredictable (Davies & Limbo, 2010). However, data suggests that their sister's potential death was not discussed by their parents and, subsequently, they were both shocked and unprepared when it occurred. As such, this may indicate a lack of openness in communication within the family as 'open systems' shifted to 'closed systems' in an effort to preserve family functioning and minimise distress during Kiki's long term illness. Additional to this theme, Marvin and Emily both expressed sentiments concerning the unfairness of cancer and how they made sense of this. Emily expressed anger towards others who take health risks despite warnings, whereas, Marvin was more circumspect and noted a perceived unpredictability of life and an intent to take advantage of opportunities. Their responses may have played out differently due to a number of factors including age, personality, resilience and development phase.

The participant sibling pair evidenced a level of mental toughness in their responses with the two common themes, *Gained a Different Perspective* and *Minimised Mental Health Concerns*. The *Gained a Different Perspective* theme suggested that the experience of their sister's illness and subsequent death changed their perspective on what was important in life. The *Minimised Mental Health Concerns* theme suggested that mental health concerns such as anxiety or suicidal ideation were not within their understanding. Earlier in the chapter (refer to theme *Witness to Parental Grief*), Marvin spoke of his father's initial use of anti-anxiety medication after his sister's death and that his father ceased medication after a week stating that he would rather feel pain than nothing at all. Marvin's father's comments may have conveyed the message that mental toughness is required at this time and has been reinforced within the family. The *Minimised Mental Health Concerns* theme could have been reaffirmed by the silence in the family and limited the expression of painful emotions as members endeavour to appear strong.

The last theme from the participant sibling pair was that of *Live for Her* which was a theme expressed by other participants in the study and is suggestive of an ongoing connection with their sister and a symbol of her sibling legacy. Marvin and Emily's similar comments in the interviews are suggestive that a family narrative surrounding Kiki's death has been constructed in order to make sense of the experience and gain a sense of control over events (Nadeau, 2001).

4.6.3.5 Finding the Humour In Grief

A couple of participants spoke about the value of humour and its use as a coping mechanism during difficult times.

… one day we were at Ronald McDonald House up in Sydney and on Christmas, this was when Kiki was still alive and even though it was a pretty sad sight, she was sitting there not very well at all … but they gave a mixed hamper bag of things like boy ones and girl ones. So I got wrestling figurines … it was pretty funny because I was a little older and Kiki's sitting there with a completely shiny head from Chemo, she gets a hair brush set and we were just sort of laughing … the fact that they (parents) can have a laugh about that and Kiki can laugh about that … I think it is a good example that you can have a laugh over things like that. (Marvin, p. 17)

Yeah, we talk about, just funny stories and stuff that have happened and I think talking about it is important because then, even just doing stuff like this (the interview), it's okay to talk about it and it does help you. (Marvin, p. 20)

Oh, I just want to point out, our family uses humour in really dark times, so if I say anything that may seem inappropriate, it's just sort of my way. (Anna, p. 10)

Her photos are all over the house, she's spoken about very often, even with my dad but dad and I usually just share the funny stories unless I'm really down and he knows, okay, I have to sit and listen, she needs a moment. (Anna, p. 15)

Although a minor theme found in the data, humour was used to manage intense emotions prior to or following the loss of a sibling. The ability to express positive emotions has been cited as helpful in processing grief (Folkman, 2001). At times of family bereavement-related distress, humour may also be helpful in facilitating closeness between family members and alleviating stress.

4.6.4   Support Within the Family

4.6.4.1 *Parental Over-Protection or Intrusion*

Two sub-themes were apparent in data being *Parental Over-Protection* and *Parental Intrusion*. The first sub-theme, *Parental Over-Protection,* related to the response of parents immediately following the death of their child whereby they endeavoured to fiercely protect their only surviving child. The second sub-theme, *Parental Intrusion*, described a level of intrusion by parents in the participants' lives.

> … it made my dad and I close or closer, I was always dad's little girl but with Yardley gone, I felt responsible in a lot of ways to, no, I didn't feel responsible at first. My dad wrapped me in cotton wool and I think that's why I did some of the things I did. And because it was too much pressure, like dad didn't want me going out, he didn't want me doing anything because he was scared he was going to lose me too, and I think that's why I attempted suicide because it was just so much pressure and I felt like, if I cannot just be a normal 17, 18 year old, what's the point of being here … (Elaine, p. 21-22)

> … my mum was on Zoloft and, so, that numbed her a bit I think … But then after that, it was like, okay, you're all we've got so let's just focus on you … So, they go through phases of they wouldn't let you do anything, I wasn't allowed out just out of nowhere ... I remember once we were at the airport and he (father) saw me talking to a couple of boys which I had just met and he was just like okay, from now on you are have to wear t-shirts, no singlets, nothing tight, nothing revealing … (Anita, p. 12)

… they've been very protective, not in a sense that they won't let me do things

because they're worried about what will happen but, yeah, I think they worry a lot

more than they let on and things. (Anastasia, p. 23)

The theme of *Parental Intrusion* seemed to occur with participants who became the only

surviving sibling. Protective behaviours demonstrated by parents were often reflective of the

developmental phase of the participant at the time of their sibling's death and the steps parents

took to ensure their only child remained safe. Elaine reported that her father's behaviour after the

loss of her brother became stifling and she found it difficult to be a normal teenager. Research by

Fanos and Nickerson (1991) has suggested that the age of the bereaved adolescent at the time of

their sibling's death was statistically significant. The authors suggest that mid adolescents (13

through to 17 years of age) may experience being torn between concern for their parents and the

own development needs. They suggest that such a scenario may cause resentment and anger, and

subsequently feelings of guilt. This may have been the case for Elaine as she struggled against her

father's overprotectiveness and this may have culminated in feelings of hopelessness and guilt

triggering suicidal behaviours.

This theme was also reported by Anita who spoke of feeling thwarted by her parents when

exhibiting typical teenage behaviour and Anastasia acknowledged her parents' continued concern

for her into her adult years some seven years after her sister died. Anastasia did not provide an

example of her parents' protective behaviour but indicated a level of awareness that they worry

about her.

Overprotection of a surviving adolescent child by parents following the death of their

brother or sister has been reported in the literature as a risk to the adolescent's ability to separate

from the family and develop their own identity (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). Hence, bereaved

adolescent siblings endeavour to stay close to their parents both physically and emotionally during a

period of intense pain (Rosen, 1991). This process may inhibit opportunities for growth and

development as the adolescent fuses more closely with the family (Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Rosen).

The second sub-theme of *Parental Intrusion* was described as an over-involvement of parents many years after the participants' experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. Comments below illustrate evidence of a dynamic that exists for participants today.

I feel as though my parents want to do a lot more for me than what they probably would have done before the … I feel as though they're a lot more involved in our lives than what might be considered normal for parents and my wife sometimes gets a little bit upset that they always want to do stuff with us. Yeah, just, yeah, on holidays they invite us on some of their holidays and we go along. They ring me every day … We didn't speak everyday beforehand so that's probably, yeah, I mean they're trying to get into our lives a lot more than what they would have if Aaron hadn't passed away. (Scott, p. 19)

You can never accuse our family of not loving enough … the fact that my mum hasn't arrived earlier (from interstate) is only because I begged her to not to come until Monday just because of work and I'm going to be hung over on Saturday. But if she had it her way, she would have been with me for the year. (Anna, p. 23)

I don't smoke that much but they've never accepted the fact that I smoke … whenever I smell like smoke it's just like "my God, you know, I'm going to lose you, too". But really passionate about it like "no, why are you doing this?" (Anita, p. 12)

Scott spoke about a level of over-involvement by his parents in his life with his wife to the point that it had become intrusive and was a source of concern for the couple. Anna indicated that her mother was highly responsive and inclined to insert herself in Anna's life and Anita spoke of her mother's concern about her smoking. Scott, Anna and Anita were aged in their late 20's at the time of the interview therefore this theme reflects the response of parents towards their adult children many years after the loss of a sibling. As such, the continued intrusive behaviour of parents

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illustrates the enduring nature of concern they hold towards their surviving children and although it may lessen over time, it remained part of the participants' lives and their sibling's legacy.

Hence, the theme of *Parental Over-Protection or Intrusion* offers a continuum of parental concern that differs in relation to the participants' age. Over-protectiveness was characteristic of a parental response following the death of a sibling when participants were in mid or late adolescence. Whereas, over-involvement was a feature of the parental response towards their adult children as they matured.

4.6.4.2 Parents Not Available

For some participants, the pendulum swung the other way and they spoke of feeling alone in their grief as their parents were unable to support them at the time and/or following the loss. Additionally, feelings of neglect were evident with a few participants whose parents were unable to support them during challenging times in their lives.

> I think pretty much as soon as we found out Kiki had cancer, mum and dad both went
>
> up to (city) … we had to stay at school and so, basically, from the first or the second
>
> night, we went to a friend's house. I was with one of my best friends … they are pretty
>
> much like my second family anyway and so it was comforting because you are with
>
> your friends and you're kind of distracted but you are also not with your family which
>
> is probably what should have happened. It was different and Marvin was at a different
>
> family, so, we weren't together either. (Emily, p. 5)

> … it was great that we got that support because we didn't really get it at home. My
>
> dad, terrible, didn't know how to deal with emotion and feeling … he was not a very
>
> emotional person or supportive sort of person in that respect. Mum was always the
>
> one who did all that but then she, I'd say she was pretty much non-functional for
>
> about 6 months. I don't think she got out of her pyjamas or nightie and dressing gown
>
> for at least 6 months and didn't go anywhere. (Donald, p. 7)

I suppose I sometimes felt some level of sadness in that during Yves and (sister's) early

20s, mum and dad had been able to be strong supports for them, whereas, I felt they

could only be half a support for me. (William, p. 19)

Participants who evidenced this theme conveyed varying situational contexts in which they felt unsupported by their parents at the time of their sibling's death. Emily advised that her experience of living separately from her parents during her sister's battle with cancer was alienating as she felt disconnected from her family. Emily spoke of not knowing what was happening concerning her sister's illness or treatment. Emily felt removed from her brother who was living with a different family and expressed a preference that her family had remained together during this difficult time. This type of experience was identified by Adams and Deveau (2007) who stated that parental encouragement of independence at a time when closeness was sought may generate feelings of isolation. Emily's isolation may have been increased when she was not provided with information and updates regarding the treatment and progress of her sibling.

Donald also experienced a level of alienation from his parents as he felt his father was emotionally unavailable and his mother, who was typically the nurturer in the family, was unresponsive to his emotional needs as she was in a state of shock. William described a situation where he felt a lower level of support was available within the family for him compared to that received by his older siblings when they were his age. His comments are telling of his insight of the impact the death of a child has on family functioning and the reduction in familial resources. The quote below from Elaine was included under the theme of *Parents Not Available* as the content illustrates the tendency of distracted parents to respond in the context of their own grief rather than considering the needs of their surviving child.

When Yardley died I'd finished business college … I was job hunting like mad and I got

my first job a month after he died and I remember when I got the phone call to say

that I had got the job, the first thing I did when I hung up was I rang my mum's house

and I was all excited and I said "is Yardley home yet? I need to talk to Yardley" and she

started screaming at me and I was like, "oh, yes". So, that was really hard because I

sort of felt like, you know, he used to say to me, "you've got to get a job, get a good

job"... (Elaine, p. 9)

Elaine's comments do not address the dismissive nature of her mother's response nor does

she elaborate on her response to her mother. Although the content of the Elaine's comment was

focussed on why the telephone call was important, the interaction with her mother illustrates the

theme of *Parents Not Available*. During times of intense emotions, parents may overlook the needs

of their child or children as they are hurting and cannot attend to other demands. Research also

suggests that an individual in a family can act as a "flag" to the difficulties experienced within the

family (Crehan, 2004).

I remember my step-dad saying to me, I wanted to kill you that night and if that car

wasn't coming up the street, I probably would have. And I said why, what did I do, and

he said, I don't know. Okay, yeah. Because I just sort of let it go, I sort of swept it all

under the carpet and I just sort of accepted that he's grieving and I don't know what

made me think that a step-father's grief was more important than mine for my brother

but that's what I did. I always forgave my mum and always just dismissed any horrible

things that she did and I don't know why, I don't know if that's just me being loyal

because she's my mum. I haven't spoken to her now for 12 years. (Elaine, p. 24)

Elaine reported that her relationship with her estranged mother and step-father was

problematic prior to and following her brother's death and this represented a very difficult family

dynamic when confronted with loss. It is possible that Elaine's role in her mother's new family was

that of a scapegoat and this helped to diffuse tension and enabled the family to function by directing

animosity towards her. This theme was not explored in the literature review, however, further

research suggests that a sibling may act as a scapegoat within the following loss. A child as a

scapegoat has been identified as a defensive mechanism whereby the surviving sibling attracts the

displaced hostility of the mourning parent which is usually the result of unfortunate factors such as the narcissistic pain of the loss of a child together with the availability of another child who evokes the memory of a bad child (Crehan, 2004).

4.6.4.3 Support of Siblings

There were mixed responses to the helpfulness of siblings in supporting participants in their grief. Typically, participants indicated that siblings were not particularly helpful but a few indicated that siblings were a key resource for support.

> … I think, suddenly after that (the funeral), Marvin, he moved out, he had to go to uni, so he had had to move up to Wollongong … we didn't lose touch but we never really got much closer, we were never that close because we are the brother and sister. When I had a little sister who I didn't get along with more, but I could relate to more I guess, and she could relate to me and Marvin was always that little bit older … So I think we kind of not grew apart but we just didn't talk as much and I think now we just probably don't talk as much as we should but that's alright, yeah. (Emily, p. 21)

> Me and my sister don't talk about it that much at all which I want to change because I know she's had a pretty rough time at some stages and I don't know, she said something to mum, like "none of you guys care", because it can be even harder for a sister losing a sister and they were even closer as well cause of like their age as well. And that was hard to hear because I obviously care completely, I just don't really show it as much ... So that's hard I think … I want to try and make an effort to talk to her about it more but that's hard I think … it brought our family together a lot more which is good. (Marvin, p. 10)

> I feel that I've let him (surviving brother) go. I feel that he's gone his own way and there is nothing wrong with that but I feel that I haven't set a good enough example for him and I think it's just too late now to fix, so, we talk to one another. We're still

brothers and we're not as close as anything that Adrian and I were. Yeah, it's just, I haven't, for me, I'm lost, I don't know. (Eric, p. 14)

I think we probably got each other through it a lot better than we thought we would have … because we were always there to talk to. I don't remember ever holding anything back from him. Saying, "hey, how are you feeling?" Because we talked about all the stuff that was happening but that was normal for us to always talk about stuff that was happening, we always did because we were always together … there's always someone there to talk to, so I think that's probably one of the reasons why it was probably easier. I would suggest that if it was just Neil and I, he was my brother and there was just me that I wouldn't have got through it as easily as I did at all. (Donald, pp. 17-18)

I think as siblings we've gotten a lot closer … I think we kind of recognise that Mum doesn't really talk about stuff so, we have to do that ourselves … I think (sister 3) and I are really close and she is the one who is five years younger than me … we are just that bit more open with each and just go 'well, mum's never going to talk to us about it', I think she might a bit more now than she would before but still I think we've all just grown up a bit too. We realise that some of that stuff we have to do ourselves. (Nancy, p. 30)

Those who found the support in a sibling relationship following loss indicated the strength of the sub-system functioned independently of parents. The sibling dyad possessed a level of closeness and support that was present prior to the loss of their sibling. In the instances where sibling support was the main source of family support, participants advised that parental support had been lacking. This was not the case with all participants as some indicated a distant relationship with their sibling(s) and did not seek support from them. In the case of the participant sibling pair, Marvin and Emily, there was a chasm in their communication prior to and post the loss of their sister. Both

indicated they wanted to communicate more but were unsure how to do this. Recently, Emily had suggested to her mother that Marvin did not seem to care about the death of their sister and Marvin expressed that he was hurt by this.

> I went to try out for a defence gap year and I had psych interviews for that and they are like 'I don't know how you did it'. And I'm like 'I don't know what I did really'. I don't know, it's hard to explain. I guess that's why Emily might think sometimes I don't care but I don't show it. I've always been one to bottle things up and then when I lose it a bit, I just cry and sort of, yeah, I'm not sure. (Marvin, p. 11)

A number of the participants were now the only surviving sibling in their family. One of these participants wondered if having another sibling would have helped them to cope with their sibling's death as they would have had someone to talk to.

> And perhaps if you had another sibling that you could talk about it, you know, if there was three of you and you've lost one, at least there is still two and you are going through a similar thing or you could talk to them about it instead of having just mum and dad. (Linda, p. 27)

This comment by Linda reflects a commonly held belief that siblings are key resources when confronted with the loss of a brother or sister. However, Balmer's (1992) research indicated that siblings are often the least supportive family member. Findings of her study indicate that siblings felt an inability or unwillingness to express their grief to their surviving sibling and felt alienated in their relationship.

4.6.4.4 Family Dynamics of Support

Oftentimes, after the loss of a sibling, participants gravitated to the person with whom they were the closest within the family. Paradoxically, the person they thought would be most helpful was not always able to provide the support needed. Confronted with such a dynamic, alliances or sub-systems changed to reflect relationships that facilitated support for participants.

I think, in terms of family, we could only help each other so far before the enormity of our own individual grief kicked in and perhaps clouded over how well we could support each other … I think that mum felt she needed to be a support for me in the same way I felt I needed to be a support for her. I also felt I needed to be a support for (sister). I didn't quite know what I needed to be for dad and I don't think he knew what I needed either. So, dad and I were a bit of a mystery to each other really … certainly (sister), mum and myself felt that we needed to be supports for each other. (William, pp. 18-19)

I used to be closer to dad and further from mum. Well, now I'm the opposite. I'm closer to mum and further from dad. So, it's only because mum provides the emotional support. Dad doesn't provide that support anymore. (Eric, p. 15)

… if my mum is telling me something, I know she's not sugar coating it and when she's telling me it's okay for me to be happy and enjoy life, I believed her and mum and I grew quite close after Lisa passed away and I trust her with my life and so, she's only got my best interest at heart so why would she lie to me about that? (Anna, p. 18)

I used to see mum as like mum and dad … and now I see them more as friends. I'm not sure if that's just a change you go through normally when you get older. But I can talk to mum pretty much about anything now - mum and dad. And just because we've been through something like that, we can just talk about anything really and it's sort of like an unspoken bond about, we always know what happened so, we can sort of get through better things ... (Marvin, p. 13)

… she (step-mother) stuck by us, her and dad have been together now for 30 years so she's pretty cool and, yeah, two of the times, when I say I attempted suicide, I sort of, looking back and I think I knew that she was coming over, so it was probably more a cry for help a lot of times … (Elaine, p. 12)

Dad was just trying to keep things together, obviously, and keep things going and work

at the same time but then there's also a 10-year-old so, of course, (younger brother)

needed attention and care and that fell on us (self and twin brother) as well. So we

were sort of the ignored ones and to our credit, we had each other as well, so that

always helped though we could talk with each other and we also had our friends from

school and the youth group … (Donald, p. 8)

William's comments suggest that his mother, sister and he supported each other while his

father was adrift in terms of support within the family. It is likely that the structure of pre-loss

relationships influenced the way in which alliances and support structures evolved. Eric advised that

he became closer to his mother after his brother's death, a common pattern for participants with

this theme. Mothers tended to provide emotional support for these participants, if that support was

lacking, participants looked elsewhere for emotional closeness (i.e. siblings, friends) or received very

little support at all.

Elaine advised that her father had embarked on a new relationship a few of months prior to

her brother's death. She indicated that a strong relationship was forged with this woman who

became her step-mother. Elaine described reaching out to her step-mother during some particularly

dark times and being supported by her.

Marvin spoke of viewing his parents, particularly his mother in a different way after the

experience of loss. He described the evolution of what could be described as a friendship or meeting

of equals. Marvin indicated that he was unsure whether this was a natural part of maturing or due

to the loss experience that he felt galvanised their relationship. In families where there is open

communication and support, it is possible for bereaved adolescents to continue their development

(Cicirelli, 1995).

Participants indicated that mothers were a strong source of support within intact families.

Some participants in families where parents were no longer together reported their ally for support

was the parent they lived with at the time. These findings support research that suggests mothers

are often the main support for bereaved adolescents following the death of a sibling (Mahon &

Page, 1995).

When parental support is unavailable, this may leave the surviving adolescent sibling in a

vulnerable situation. For Donald, there appeared to be a lack of parental support and, fortunately,

he and his twin brother were very close and able to provide support for each other as well as their

younger sibling.

Participants often spoke of some level of support within the family and although one parent

may not have been coping, the other parent, a sibling or member of the extended family may have

been available. According to Christ, Bonanno, Malkinson and Rubin (2003), families may draw on

resources and protective factors that enable bereaved siblings to build resilience and adapt to life

without their sibling. Therefore, individuals and/or families can emerge from the experience

changed but not broken (Bonanno, et al.). On some level, the participants' comments above

reflected a level of support within their family as individuals adjusted to the loss.

4.6.4.5 *Mixed Response to Loss from the Extended Family*

Participants reported mixed responses by their extended family of aunts, uncles and

grandparents to the death of their sibling. As with individuals, the response to grief from extended

family members was complex and nuanced.

> I mean, she's (mother) also dealing with a lot of her family's side. They're grieving as
>
> well. You know, her parents and stuff and so she's trying to support them as well. So,
>
> she's like the middle person. I feel like I don't want to put too much onto her because
>
> she's an emotional…she's a wreck. (Eric, pp. 19-20)

> Twenty minutes after Connor died, mum was getting her stuff together to go down to
>
> Auckland, her mother said "well, he is gone now, move on". So, that's something
>
> that's very of the sort of generation of the depression and, you know, sort of "oh, it
>
> happened, now move on". (Eve, p. 21)

… when I was born, mum rang nanna and said you've had a granddaughter and she said 'oh, well better luck next time' and when Yvonne died 'it was a shame' and that was it. They didn't visit, they did nothing, so whether that's just their upbringing, I don't know, a bit strange, very standoffish. (Linda, p. 2)

Eric spoke of his mother's family being distressed and required support from his mother. This scenario is indicative of a Catholic European family likely to have a high level of closeness and emotional reactivity within the extended family. In this scenario, intense grief is almost contagious as the family gathers together to support each other. Therefore, family members who are open to high emotional involvement from each other receive support together with the potential for emotional reactivity that can have negative effects such as rumination and fused relationships.

The *Mixed Response to Loss from the Extended Family* theme indicates that each family possesses different levels of cohesion, openness and communication with their extended family. Hence, these variables influence the availability of support from aunts, uncles and grandparents towards the family following the death of a child. Culture is likely to play a role in the way death is viewed and this may be reflected by generations within the family. Eve and Linda's grandparents appeared matter-of-fact and communicated their approach to loss which was to 'move on'. This approach may be reflective of their generation's experience with loss during the depression of the 1930s as well as Australia's losses at war when the culture was that of disengagement from loss and repression of one's grief (Devita-Raeburn, 2004). The older generation's view of loss may not be synchronous with society's view of grief today. Differences in the response to loss can cause a disconnection across generations and between family members.

4.6.5 Changes in the Family Environment

4.6.5.1 A Sense of Vulnerability

Participants spoke of feeling as though their family was somewhat 'broken' and irrevocably changed by the loss of their sibling. The family endeavoured to rebuild itself but in a changed form that potentially lacked the robustness of the pre-loss state.

I've done everything that's right by my parents and they're happy for me and I've looked back and said well, I don't feel I'm in the right position at the moment and I have also noticed that since his death the family has been torn apart. We've come together, we don't communicate as well … (Eric, p. 13)

… my family has always been supportive of everything and whatever I wanted to do and not push me to do things I didn't want to. I'm not sure, they were still just the same as that but it was definitely different, there's always just that hanging, what's the saying? Like a shadow over it because we knew that, it didn't feel like a family anymore but we're sort of getting that back lately, I think. (Marvin, p. 18)

… once the funeral was over, we just kind of "right, that happened" and got on with life like it was normal but it wasn't and I think that made us all sadder but I don't think it made us closer, I don't know, I think we are just the same, but there is one less of us. (Emily, p. 7)

I think we were more vulnerable, to use that fairly modern term, we had less resilience. So, there was less of a sense of personal resources to fall back on, personal or social resources to fall back on … we felt more insecure because we felt less able to bounce back from whatever daily events life threw at us. I think I'm speaking fairly for other family members as well. (William, p.18)

Some of the participants advised their family was functioning differently after the loss of their sibling. Eric expressed that his family has been 'torn apart' by the tragedy and Marvin referred to a metaphor of a shadow hanging over the family since his sister's death. Emily, Marvin's sister, stated that the family remained affected by grief although it pretended that it was the same as before. William noted the family's resilience was reduced and less able to bounce back from what life threw at them. Overall, participants who evidenced this theme acknowledged the impact of

sibling loss on the family and recognised the ongoing struggle to come together in terms of communication and closeness as well as confidence in the family's future.

4.6.5.2 Change in Relationships

A few participants reported changes in family functioning that had been enduring and changed the nature of the way in which members interacted.

> I really want to always support them (parents) but they're adults too and, you know, I mean now, it has been nearly six years, I can't spend every moment of my day worrying about how they're feeling or whether mum's had a shower today or anything like that. (Eve, p. 4)

> … mum came down and stayed with me for a weekend while (husband) had to go away for work and she said to me at that point, that she knew that I meant more to her then than work does and that she would be prepared to come and look after me even though she had to go back to work. And I just sort of thought, after this long, being that I was, what 36, that you've only just realised now, that your family is more important than work and especially after losing Yvonne. I just thought that was a little bit strange that … but perhaps because they lost her that they focused a little bit more on work as well because that was their way of dealing with it. (Linda, p. 19)

> My mum was really quite placid, she was, she is to this day, a really caring person and really looks after people but she kind of got a little bit more argumentative towards people … I'm glad she's been able to stand up for herself and not just become a pushover … but in a sense, I missed what she was before when she was just happy and would just brush things off ... She's a little more negative which I guess, it's been a bit harder to deal with, get used to, I guess.   (Anastasia, p. 20)

The themes of *A Sense of Vulnerability* and *Change in Relationships* reflect changes in relationships and resources within the family. Feelings of vulnerability within the family following

the loss of a sibling may have been due to the participants' immersion in the context within which they grieved. Dyregrov and Dyregrov (2005) suggest that difficulties for bereaved siblings are contextually dependent, and relational and social in nature. The authors' study revealed that younger siblings bereaved by suicide who were still living at home experienced more difficulties than older siblings and parents. This may be due to older siblings being better able to avoid exposure to parental despair and reminders of the dead sibling (Dyregrov & Dyregrov). This study was not restricted to adolescents who experienced sibling loss although may have some utility in this context. Protective factors for sibling grief identified in the study were age, marital status and life circumstances.

Although the cause of death for participant siblings in Dyregrov and Dyregrov's (2005) study was suicide and age of the participants varied from adolescence to adulthood, their study may hold some generalisability to the participants in this study. A high percentage of participants in this study lived at home or returned home at the time of their sibling's death or shortly following. Based on the data from this study, those who appeared to do better i.e. managed the impact of grief, were able to re-engage in life, relationships and the future, tended to either not live at home at the time of their sibling's death or had moved out of home shortly afterwards. Those who remained at home in the years following the death tended to struggle more with loss and were faced with the continued grief legacy of the loss in the interactions with other family members and physical reminders.

4.6.5.3 We Became Closer

A couple of the participants remarked that their family had become closer as a result of the death of their sibling.

> … we became a lot closer through it because nobody else really understands I think
> and you lose a lot of people out of your life and so, we really, we had each other and
> that was it … we really, all of us on my dad's side and with my mum, just became a lot
> closer. (Eve, p.24-25)

We're not a quiet family and we say what's on our mind even if you don't want to hear

it but my family is just nothing but love and we're all closer I think because we all just

realise that shit, anything can happen at any time and we all just protect each other so

fiercely, so, yes. You know, it's sad that that had to come out of sort of that situation

but I'm glad it did. (Anna, p. 20)

For Eve's family, the struggle to cope with the suicide of their son and brother as well as the

stigma experienced as a result of the way he died was compounded by their unanswered questions

and disappearance of supportive friends in the aftermath of his death. Eve felt that those outside

the family found their experience difficult to understand and, therefore, the three of them had only

each other and her father's side of the family, upon which to rely. For Eve's family, closeness was

tied to the marshalling of resources in order to survive. Anna spoke of a different reason for her

family's closeness being the unpredictability of life and that her family had learnt to value each

other.

Although this theme is indicative of a level of increased closeness between family members,

it may also point to a heightened emotional reactivity where individuals become enmeshed in

dependent type relationships. Both Eve and Anna described their family environment as intense and

emotional. A pattern of high family cohesion may lead to maladaptive outcomes for family

members as family stability is threatened by individual self-assertion, or in the case of grief, grieving

in a different way (Shapiro, 2001). Hence, Eve and Anna may mirror their parents' high level of grief

intensity and this then may feed their emotional reactivity and enmeshment within the family.

4.6.6   The Sibling's Presence

4.6.6.1 The Deceased Sibling's Room

Participants spoke of their sibling's room being left as it was as of the day they died and this

was maintained for some time. Their sibling's room was a place of sensitivity and their belongings

were treasured. Some participants indicated a haunting feeling that accompanied their sibling's

vacant room, unable to be changed until a level of acceptance within the family was reached and potentially surrendered to another inhabitant.

> … my brother's room was the same for all those years and that was haunting to be, to go in there and not see him, it was nice but it was also haunting because you think, how long do you stay in the past? How long do you leave his stuff? How long do you leave his room exactly the way it is? But in saying that I can't even imagine how my mum felt. (Nellie, p. 23)

> Wasn't too long after, or it didn't feel like it was too long afterwards, that I actually moved into Neil's room … I was a little bit apprehensive about moving into that room because first of all, for the first 6 to 8 months it was a bit of a shrine. Nothing was touched in there and nothing was moved in there, so that was a process that mum had to go through. (Donald, p. 13)

> But when they moved to the new house … dad in particular created this, where his bedroom was supposed to be, all the stuff went in there … they closed it off and it became this very "don't go in Connor's room" … although he had never been there, they still kind of pulled that weird feeling across with them and we got him cremated and they have his ashes and a few of his things sitting down next to TV and it's just, it's very shriney and that's, I don't know, that's not how I've kind of processed and dealt with it. (Eve, p. 13)

> I think about her every day. So, I do think about her a lot. I still live at home with my parents, I'm 22 but her room is still pretty much exactly the way it was when she passed away and even though I feel in a sense, I've dealt with her death the best between my parents and myself, I'm still very protective of that space … I'm still very, very connected to her things. (Anastasia, p. 11)

… under the house we have got boxes and things and a lot of that is her bits and pieces, maybe a couple of her toys or some of her clothes that I've still got but I don't want to throw them out. I am not too sure what to do with them … (Linda, p. 12)

The deceased sibling's room acted almost as a barometer of acceptance of the sibling's death, particularly by the participants' mothers. Some participants referred to their sibling's room as a shrine in which their sibling's possessions had been preserved. Eve described an eerie scenario where her family managed to create a room for her deceased brother in a new house that he had never lived in.   Belongings of the deceased sibling earned significance and were often treasured by participants and other family members. Anastasia and Linda spoke about retaining their sibling's possessions and feeling connected to those items, not knowing what to do with them but not wanting to part with them either.

The ability of parents to express and foster continuing bonds or ongoing attachment with the deceased a sibling may be a key predictor of adjustment for bereaved siblings (Packman, et al., 2006). Ongoing references made of the deceased sibling promote the fluidity of communication within the family whereas the preservation of belongings and/or the sibling's room for a long period of time may be indicative of maladaptive adjustment to loss.

4.6.6.2 Reverence Towards the Lost

A theme that emerged from the data concerned references about the deceased sibling that indicated he or she was revered and beyond reproach. Participants who voiced this theme felt that their sibling was immortalised in a way that they became untouchable and without fault.

And there was a couple of times that I did remember saying to mum and dad "hang on a minute, I know that we have lost her and that was a big thing but she was still not an angel" and as mum would call her, "a bugger of a child" because she was hard work. That they do need to remember that she was a person and not this perfect creature that has left too early. (Linda, p. 20)

I said some stupid things, truth, but mum didn't need to know. A couple of things that

he did that he shouldn't have done and I told her which I just should have kept to

myself. There was no reason she needed to know. So, certainly change that … I

remember at the time, too, that I was thinking maybe it needs to come out. Maybe it

needs to be out there, I didn't know. He did something bad not long before he died, he

stole something and mum and she quite rightly said "that's something I don't need to

know and you shouldn't be telling me at this time" and I just thought "well, it's true"

and just walked away. Then realised later, well, I probably should not have said

anything. (Donald, p. 26)

… anytime I got up to any mischief, they'd (parents) be like "Leon always told us that

you were going to show us". Because I was always the 'good girl' and he was always

the 'naughty boy'. He's just like "just wait, just wait till she grows up, she's going to

show you, she'll be trouble". And stuff like that. So, whenever I did get up to any

trouble, they would let me hear it. (Anita, p. 18)

Linda advised that she felt challenged by her parent's references to her deceased sister

following her death. Linda reflected on her sister's personality and expressed to her parents that her

sister was not as much of an angel as their comments inferred. Linda also spoke about feeling

compared to her younger sister by thoughts of what she would have achieved and by when. Donald

also spoke about his deceased older brother being beyond reproach but he provided his mother with

information regarding his brother's past misdemeanour. He indicated that he was uncertain why he

did this but felt it should be known. Donald's disclosure of his brother's misdemeanour possibly

encompassed his desire to express that his brother was a 'normal' child and had flaws just like he

did.

Anita's experience of her brother's immortalisation was the advice he provided to their

parents in reference to her. Any time her behaviour was viewed as questionable, his words were

repeated to her by her parents and she felt admonished and reprimanded by a brother whom she

admired and subsequently lost. She advised the way her parents used his words was upsetting. As stated by Bank and Kahn (1982), the dead child can no longer carry dreams for the future or the wishes of a parent. The dead child may become revered or idealised by the parents and the surviving child is confronted with an inability to live up to expectations.

4.6.7   Other Family Losses

As participants recounted the impact of their sibling's death on the family and its functioning, some spoke of other losses associated with the death. These participants advised that their sibling's death had a financial impact on the family and in some cases interrupted the professional life of a parent. These other family losses had knock-on effects with the capacity to affect the participants' family environment as they struggled to cope with the death of a sibling.

4.6.7.1 Lack of Resources

And I think for all of us, my mum, my dad, my sister as well, we hadn't really found our footing, our social footing in (larger regional city) and so, when Yves' death occurred, we didn't really have a very strong social network. And even though I hear of people who had strong social networks and had felt let down by those social networks, I just wondered if our experiences following Yves's death might have been a bit different if there had just been a few more people who knew Yves. For instance, no one in (larger regional city) knew Yves so they didn't really know what we had lost. You know, they didn't really know him. So, that was one factor. (William, pp. 4-5)

William spoke of the isolating effect of losing a sibling not long after moving to a new city where the family lacked social support and resources. Moreover, William felt that those they had connected with at the time did not realise what they had lost as they had not known his brother and did not have a history with the family. William's comment above speaks to the alienation he felt and observed within his family in their solitary struggle to cope with loss. This was not a common theme in the data but represents a potential risk for those who feel alienated in the community.

4.6.7.2 Financial Impact of Loss

The death of a sibling not only has an emotional cost but involves a financial aspect as well. Participants made a number of references to the financial strain incurred by the family as a result of the death of a child.

> … I had (friend), he would be 70 this year … he is a great friend and when Yasmine died, he and his wife just picked me up and looked after me, they were amazing … my boyfriend and I were living in their house at the time because we were renovating our house and they literally took over and did everything, they fixed everything, like as much as they could. They put me on a plane, got me to (country) … because obviously finances are a massive issue in these situations as getting someone back from another country is huge and I had no money. And financially, they supported me and took care of all the insurance issues … things like this are a bit of a mess and they were just amazing. (Harriet, p. 9)

> … dad was in a business partnership with another guy, an electrical business and a pretty successful one but that year or the year before, having to go up to (city) most of the time, he ended up getting out of that because it was too much. And mum had a fair bit of time off work as well I think and so, it was live on savings and things like that … I'm glad it wasn't America because when that sort of thing happens, the treatment, you've got to sell your house and so on. (Marvin, p. 7)

> They (parents) were both suicidal, mum developed agoraphobia, dad was still working but they ended up, Connor's funeral cost them $26,000. They ended up in financial strain over that and they both really went down the intense grieving, sadness … I switched off and, so, it was easier. It made sense for me to look after them because nobody else would look after them. (Eve, p. 9)

… we hear about mental health plans these days and I know that for myself and for my

parents, financially we weren't in any great position to seek out help of counsellors …

my mum, she's been very fortunate in that the counsellor only ever charged her a very

low rate. And I don't think we even really thought of accessing sort of community

services of any sort. I think we all just thought ongoing counselling support would be

well beyond what anyone could afford … because the air force was originally going to

pay for mum to see a counsellor and then they said no, we're not going to do it and

the counsellor said to mum, well don't worry, you still come to see me and I'll sort it

out with the defence forces. Well, it was never sorted out but he still continued to see

mum at a very, very, very low rate. But yes, I think for dad and my sister and myself,

we just sort of saw that a bit beyond our rather low income bracket at the time.

(William, pp. 17-18)

… he can't wait to retire now and only because the death itself has caused a lot of, how

you say, financial debt going through the courts, paying for the funeral and all that.

So, he's at a point where he just wants to retire sell up and move into a smaller house

and just forget about the whole thing … (Eric, p. 15)

The theme of the *Financial Impact of Loss* is an important aspect to consider as it is likely

that the loss of a child was not anticipated and if it was, the associated cost of medical treatment for

a chronic illness within the family would also be substantial. The financial impact of loss is likely to

contribute to further strain within the family. Additionally, participants spoke of their parents taking

leave from work, either paid or unpaid, as they endeavoured to cope with the loss. Some parents

had more control over this process than others but it could be assumed that the financial impact of

loss was beyond the cost of funeral expenses and added to the distress the family experienced.

4.6.7.3 Parents' Professional Focus Impacted

A few of the participants identified that their parents had become disengaged in a

profession that they once enjoyed following the loss of their sibling. This theme was observed by

two participants who felt dismayed by their father's disconnection with a profession that once held their passion.

> … looking back on, I think, gosh, it was a rotten time and for a number of years it was a really rotten time because mum and dad were both struggling. Dad wasn't really talking about his grief … he had been a school teacher and he loved his profession, after Yves's death, he tolerated working and would come home and would just, he was unhappy. (William, p. 9)

> … he (father) basically convinced me to do engineering and I trusted him being the father and I loved it. I absolutely loved coming to Swinburne, studying and I felt there was a really close connection between me and dad because I'd go home and he would teach me stuff and we would do the projects together and I was an A+ student here at Swinburne. Got out of uni, loved it, absolutely loved the field and then, since the death … between me and him, we've been torn apart … I feel he's at the point of retirement and he can't wait to get out. (Eric, p. 14)

Eric expressed his disappointment at his father's disengagement from the profession of engineering as it was their shared interest prior to his brother's death. Eric followed in his father's footsteps, selecting a career as an engineer after much encouragement from his father. After the loss of Eric's brother, Eric felt their connection falter and they no longer spent time discussing engineering. Subsequently, Eric spoke of his loss of interest in the profession and that his work no longer felt meaningful.

Aspects of loss regarding family resources, financial implications of sibling death and professional or career losses are not captured in the literature relating to adolescent sibling bereavement. Further investigation is required to understand some of the secondary losses associated with the changing status of the family at the time of a loss of a child.

The collection of data from one source, a surviving child in the family, in the exploration of family functioning does not provide the complete picture of family dynamics. This study analysed retrospective data from the perspective of the surviving siblings but does not provide a holistic view of family functioning at the time of the sibling's death and in the years that followed. As noted by Liberman (1989), an individual's perspective does not translate into accurate statements about families. Therefore, the results in this section should be considered within the context from which the data was gathered.

4.7 Death and the Challenges of Adolescence

4.7.1 Bereaved Adolescents' View of Life

Participants spoke of their experience in the months and years following the death of their sibling. Some voiced feelings of a momentum in life that enabled them to overcome challenges, whereas others expressed a sense of futility or hopelessness that restricted possibilities. This section explores the assault that grief delivers and its erosion of the adolescent's progression with development tasks as their identity is potentially ravaged by loss.

4.7.1.1 Feelings of Resilience

A number of participants spoke about a level of resilience in the aftermath of their sibling's death. Resilience may have been an innate factor within themselves or facilitated by resources around them.

> It never occurred to me that anything would stop, that things would still go forward,
> even with mum. Even though mum shut down for a period of time, it was always going
> to be that she was going to move on at some stage. I think that was sort of a maturity
> that we always had that life has to go on, we all know that and we just got to ride
> through it. And that's what we did and we rode through it as best we could and made
> the best of it as well. (Donald, p. 15)

I've just been so lucky, like everywhere in my life when things have gotten really tough

there's always been something, have you ever run a marathon? … When you are

running a marathon, every time it gets hard there is always someone going "yeah, you

can do it, you'll be right" and it's like that. I feel like every time I've gotten caught,

there has always been someone just to give me a push. So, there's been, in terms of

getting stuck in it, only for as long as the next person came along and gave me a little

push and helped me. (Harriet, pp. 19-20)

Donald seemed to hold a belief that he and his family would eventually move through the

tragedy of loss and, at some point, the equilibrium would be somewhat restored. Adolescence is

typically described as a time in life where everything moves toward possibilities and growth

(Raphael, 1983). This sentiment was reflected in Donald's comments that there was never a

question life would not move forward. For Harriet, she attributed her ability to move forward in life

to the support provided offered by others who helped her through difficult times. Harriet's analogy

of grief as a marathon depicts the relentless and arduous task of moving forward despite a level of

exhaustion and defeat that one may experience at certain points along the way. This theme

represents a sense that things will move forward despite the enormity of loss. However, other

participants expressed feeling lost in the futility of life in the aftermath of their sibling's death.

4.7.1.2 Feelings of Vulnerability

Another equally present theme was the participants' expression of vulnerability following

the death of their sibling. This feeling was described as pervasive, extending to a number of areas in

their lives.

So, any of the things you hear about males in their late teens, early 20s of that sense of

invulnerability, well, I didn't get even a smidgen of that sense of invulnerability. I think

even just going back to the idea of futility and hopelessness, I think that was

something that his death really made very clear to me how you can be as fit, healthy,

seemingly in control of life but it can change in an instant and I think that that did

contribute to a sense of futility at times. (William, pp. 14-15)

And also a futility related to the isolation that was part and parcel of grief, feeling that

sense that no one could understand and it was as though that grief, that feeling that I

associated with Yves's death, that no one could understand, that almost infected my

other interrelationships with people. If I needed to sort out an issue with someone, I

would feel a futility that the issue could not be resolved and the other person would

not be reasonable. And it was as though that no one can understand infected just daily

events as well. So, it was like a mindset that sort of kicked in. (William, p. 10)

… prior to my brother's death, I used to wake up, go to work, I'm earning money and

I'm going to get somewhere. I want to have a family, I want to have kids. I want to,

now I don't know what I want. I wanted to travel, do a lot of travelling; travelling

interested me, doesn't interest me anymore. So, I used to wake up thinking I'm doing

this for, a good deed for myself. I wake up now, I get into work and just another day

and just, I don't know. I'm lost, I'm completely lost. I don't know what I want. So, I

don't have any passion or desire for needs anymore or wants or anything. (Eric, p. 17)

The theme of *Feelings of Vulnerability* is connected to themes evidenced in the *Loss as a*

Crisis and Growth chapter, namely, *Inability to Make Sense of Death* and *Sibling Loss as an Existential*

Experience. However, this theme relates directly to the impact of sibling loss on identity during

adolescence. William advised that feelings of futility and hopelessness impeded his sense of

optimism and agency towards the future. Eric's expressed confusion about what he wanted in life

following the loss of his brother is indicative of feeling lost in life. Both William and Eric conveyed an

experience of hopelessness and feeling lost in a world that no longer makes sense.

The two themes within *Bereaved Adolescents' View of Life* are potentially two sides of the

same coin and likely to represent the global sense of self following the loss of a sibling. It is difficult

to determine differences between the participants who spoke of *Feelings of Resilience* and those who evidenced *Feelings of Vulnerability*. One explanation may be found in the participants' ability to make sense of the death. Research suggests that an inability to find meaning in the death of a loved one may promote greater intensity and duration of grief, plant the seeds of self-doubt and create feelings of turmoil (Balk, 2014; Coleman & Neimeyer, 2010). This explanation may be relevant for participants represented in the theme of *Feelings of Vulnerability* as the deaths of both William and Eric's brothers shared some similarities. William and Eric were both confronted with the loss of their brothers in an accident and this was followed by an inquest drawn out over a number of years. Both William and Eric expressed feelings of futility, anger and heightened grief as a result of the inquest. Hence, this experience may have had a detrimental effect on their ability to make sense of the death and process their grief, and this experience colours their world view.

Further research is required to better understand the factors that enable growth and resilience versus stagnation in the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. The themes that follow in this chapter illustrate various aspects that may contribute to the bereaved adolescents' view of life as they attempt to navigate adolescence concurrently with the challenges of grief.

4.7.2   Death and Identity

The themes below relate to participant experiences of sibling loss in the midst of adolescent development and encompass the simultaneous processes of identity development and adaptation to a life crisis. The themes outlined in this chapter provide a starting point for future studies on the simultaneous processes of death and identity development in adolescence.

4.7.2.1 *The Sibling Comparison*

Participants were asked to describe their deceased sibling in the interview, many of whom incorporated a description of themselves with that of their sibling. These descriptions often provided insight into the nature of the sibling relationship and the way in which the participants viewed themselves.

She is always being the loud one, me and Marvin were kind of more reserved … they say that the last child is always the terror child and she kind of was, she just always wanted her way … She was very close with mum and dad, I don't know if it was because she was younger, I am not sure if I was like that when I was her age, I don't remember … she had a lot of friends, like a lot of friends and think what she would be like now and see her as like the popular blonde and sporty one … I guess there were two sides, there was her big, funny, happy and then her screaming, tantrums, fighting, biting, kicking, the side that me and her shared. (Emily, p. 12)

She was really strong minded, very 'that's what I want' and even though she was quite young, she had just started working at (supermarket) independently, whereas, mum and dad always had a shop so, I always worked in the shop with them on weekends and school holidays and things like that, whereas she has gone out and done her own thing. She wanted to be a journalist. She wanted to save the orangutans. She was into a lot of reading and things like that. We were very different but she was very strong willed and knew what she wanted to do. (Linda, p. 3)

I was very much his kid brother. He was seven years older than me. Yves was a real all-rounder, sort of anything he tried his hand at … good at the sciences, good at math, good at English, a good athlete, all of that. He had a very self-effacing sense of humour which in our family, we found that very winning … I think since about the age of 12 or 13, he wanted to fly planes and so he got into the air force and I guess really achieved his goal of wanting to fly fighter jets … he really achieved what he wanted to. (William, p. 3)

… it's funny because when we were kids, I was always the really strong one and she was always the one who probably needed more nurturing or got more nurturing and

then as we grew up, it sort of turned back the other way when we were older. Yasmine

became much more of a nurturer for me … (Harriet, p. 2)

… there were certain characteristics that I'd always been like the strong one or I was

always the one that got the good marks at school whereas Yasmine was always more

the fun one who was more athletic and these sort of things, they're silly qualities,

they're childish qualities to talk about but they're significant qualities when you are

young … (Harriet, p. 13)

When asked to describe their sibling, participants often included a comparison of

themselves in order to highlight the similarities and differences in their personalities and behaviours.

This theme revealed the participants' sense of their sibling's place within the family and their

perception of the relationship they shared. Emily perceived her younger sister as more outgoing and

demanding than either she or her older brother. She indicated that her sister had a close

relationship with their parents and noted the duality of her sister's personality. Emily's comparison

of her sister focussed on their differences and the way her sister was perceived by others. Linda's

description was similar to Emily's insofar as it offered a picture of a sibling relationship fraught with

complexity. Linda described her sister as determined and independent with a desire to find her own

path which was a different approach to Linda's experience of life. Conversely, William described his

brother in adoring terms, identifying as the much younger brother who felt in awe of his brother's

achievements. Harriet spoke directly to the ways in which she and her deceased sister were

different but noted the roles they played changed and were often interchangeable.

The comments from the three participants above reflect the research on sibling

identification and differentiation. Both Emily and Linda appeared to have had a difficult relationship

with their deceased sibling and described themselves as being different from each other, whereas,

William spoke of his brother in positive terms and indicated a level of admiration. Bank and Kahn

(1982) state that siblings are intrinsically linked in their search for identity and use each other as a

reference point to aid their understanding of the world around them.   Additionally, sibling identities

are intertwined in a shared history and the loss of one is a loss of part of themselves (Davies, 2002; Devita-Raeburn, 2004).

The results of this study suggest that participants continued to use their deceased sibling as a reference point as a way of understanding themselves. Participants' descriptions of their deceased sibling were not restricted to the past as some imagined what their sibling would be like had they lived. Some participants demonstrated a process of sibling identification which describes the way siblings learn new behaviours via interactions, and observe and imitate sibling behaviour (Balk & Kahn, 1976; Wong, et al., 2010). William's description of his relationship with his brother Yves presents their relationship as warm and positive. It is likely that William admired his brother and aspired to imitate his success.

The process of sibling differentiation occurs when siblings diverge in their development and find different ways to carve out niches that highlight their competencies and interests (Feinberg, McHale, Crouter & Cumsille, 2003). This process enables siblings to create independent identities and helps to minimise the competition for parental attention and love (Feinberg, et al.). Sibling differentiation is evidenced in the comments by Emily and Linda as they describe the ways in which they were different from their sibling. Research suggests that siblings closer in age often attempt to differentiate themselves from each other as opposed to those with a greater age difference as they already feel different (Wong, et al., 2010).

A review of literature revealed a scarcity of research on adolescent sibling bereavement and whether the process of sibling identification or differentiation continues after the death of a sibling. The results of this study suggest that sibling identification or differentiation does continue after the loss of a sibling in adolescence. It is unclear, however, whether this process is helpful as it may be influenced by feelings of survivor guilt and/or an idealised sense of the deceased sibling.

Beyond the participants' own comparisons were those participants interpreted from messages received from their parents. A few participants not only compared themselves to their

deceased sibling but felt they were yet to fulfil the hopes and wishes their parents had for their sibling.

> I remember when I was having (daughter) and my dad said "oh well, if Yvonne had of been here, she would have a family and kids earlier because she knew what she wanted" and I am thinking, yeah, but if she was wanting to save orangutans in Borneo who knows, she might be living there, living with orangutans, who would know … I think sometimes that's probably spurred me on a little bit thinking, well, she wouldn't have just sat around, time to get up and do something or let's do this because she has been unable to experience it. (Linda p. 24)

> Like, little things, they'll say jokingly but dad will be like when are you going to start having babies and stuff? I think he really wants, because my sister and her boyfriend were so close, I think it seemed like something that would be in the next few years that they would start having kids so, I think he's really, it was on his mind he'd have grandkids soon … I think they really want to build on our family and stuff. (Anastasia, p. 23)

In some situations, the comparisons made and shared by parents were interpreted by participants as personal deficits whereas others felt the comparisons were reflective of the expectations their parents had for their deceased sibling. Linda expressed that the comparisons her father made between herself and her deceased sister prompted her to feel that she needed to do more with her life. Anastasia spoke about feeling pressure from her parents to start a family as she felt this would have been something that her sister would have done by now. Such comments allude to the hopes and dreams once held by parents for their deceased child and the many losses they grieve as they witness a surviving child achieving significant milestones (i.e. marriage, birth of a child).

The results from this study support the continued influence of the deceased sibling on the way participants viewed themselves and reconciled inherent differences in both their and their sibling's attributes. For some participants such as Linda, the comparisons made by parents left them feeling helpless in a competition with the deceased sibling.

The comment below reflects a sense of "have I done enough?" or "am I worthwhile?" This variation within the theme of A Sibling Comparison is likely to have its roots in survivor guilt.

> I often try to imagine what I would have been like if he had been here … I often wonder if he would be proud of me, everyone says he would be looking down on, he'd be watching over you and he would be so proud and I think oh, I haven't done anything, I haven't done anything for him to be really be proud except keep going I suppose. (Elaine, p.12)

Elaine's comment reflects a sense that if her brother had survived, she may have been different in some way. This is a poignant thought as it suggests a disruption to a sense of herself due to the loss of her brother and the subtext is that she questions if her life has been worthwhile. The importance of sibling relationships in identity formation has been recognised by researchers (e.g. Balk & Kahn, 1982; McHale, Updegraff & Whiteman, 2012; Wong, et al., 2010) but few have examined the impact of sibling loss in adolescence on identity development. Participants in this study offered data indicative of ongoing identification or de-identification processes with their deceased sibling. Results also suggest that the negative comparisons held by participants detract from their sense of self maybe damaging to their self-esteem and confidence.

4.7.2.2 Integrated Aspects of Their Sibling

A number of participants advised they adopted aspects of their sibling's personality or roles their sibling had played in their shared lives. Some participants described mimicking their sibling in some way or thinking in a way that reflected their sibling's view of the world.

I remember when Yasmine died, I changed … my role in life and the role that I had

played alongside Yasmine changed as Yasmine wasn't there anymore playing that role

so I got to be the parts of Yasmine that I wanted to be that she had always owned.

(Harriet, p. 8)

… Aaron, he wouldn't hold back, if someone was annoying him, he'd usually say what

he felt. I guess at times; I've picked up that I think …. say we're going to the Easter

Show in (city) and it was really busy and lots of people, Aaron would just say "move"

and just keep walking which way he wanted and we'd just wait but sometimes I just

feel as though Aaron would do it so why can't I? Yeah, just get a bit short with people

but I very quickly pull it back and go no, I can't do that, that's not the right thing to do.

(Scott, p. 21).

He was big on 'think positive' and 'make things happen' … he used to write, to scribble

notes on a piece of paper, inspirational things and stuff like that … he had two that

really struck me, one was 'take shit from no one' and another one was 'be happy

always'. So, I am going to get that tattooed on my arm in his writing … I think I tried to

do that, everybody who has met me over the last nearly 30 years don't believe that I

have gone through all this because I try to just be happy or to appear happy at any rate

… (Elaine, pp. 9-10)

The data from Harriet's interview was perhaps the most remarkable in exemplifying

characteristics of this theme. Harriet articulated the various roles that she and her sibling had

played, and that she stepped into some of these roles after her sister's death. Harriet advised that

she adopted the admired aspects of her sister's personality and felt this was a cathartic process,

healing old wounds of the past and providing a sense of comfort. Scott indicated that he frequently

reflected on his deceased brother's straightforward attitude, sometimes adopting some behaviours

and other times realising their differences. Elaine spoke of the inspiration she derived from her

deceased brother's philosophies and endeavoured to embody his attitudes about standing up for herself and being happy.

Some participants described a process of continued identification or de-identification with their deceased sibling. This process enabled ongoing comparisons of differences or similarities and helped participants to define themselves even in the absence of their sibling.

Whether as a child that's your whole identity, that you classify yourself really clearly and as soon as you allow yourself to take on the other roles as well and most people do, most people play more roles than those but I wasn't confident enough to do that, I stuck to what I thought I should be doing and what I thought I knew and it opens up so many opportunities and makes your world such a brighter, broader place to be able to play out a range of whole different roles in your life rather than just being specifically things that I do. And not being such a tough guy you know. I was such a tough guy, I was so tough, it was a real relief to let that go. It sounds funny talking about Yasmine dying and I am talking about relief, opportunity and all these different things, it doesn't make sense but … (Harriet, p. 13)

The process of identification or de-identification is salient in the comments below from Donald. After the death of his brother, he and his twin and deceased brother's friends continued to discuss his brother's likes and dislikes in the context of their day to day lives.

… it was huge, I mean just your older brother being there then gone and just all the little things that were then happening after that he wasn't a part of. We're talking 1978, so we're talking Star Wars, he never got to see Star Wars … and he just would have loved Star Wars. I know that he would have loved that sort of stuff and we, (twin brother) and I would have lengthy discussions about that and one of Neil's best friends became one of our best friends and we'd go along to these movies and things with

(friend) and have a ball with him, talking about how Neil would have loved that sort of stuff. (Donald, p. 9)

Donald's continued process of identification or de-identification with his deceased older brother is evident in the above comment. Despite his brother's absence, Donald projected thoughts about what his brother would have enjoyed through an understanding of his interests. This process enabled Donald to feel close to his brother and either differentiate himself or identify with commonalities he believed he shared with his brother. This continued process of identification or differentiation may have helped to hone Donald's perception of himself as he compared himself to his brother, potentially galvanising his identity.

The importance of the sibling relationship is reflected in the way in which siblings relate to each other and etch out a niche for themselves within the family. Their relationship, whether closely identified or differentiated, reflects a proximity to each other that may be close or distant. The deceased sibling may act as a continued reference point for the surviving sibling and, as illustrated in this theme, may prove to be an adaptive process that helps to define themselves in the context of their deceased sibling. The phenomenon of adopting characteristics of a deceased sibling was not a salient theme in the review of literature. However, a study by Rindt (2001) identified that the participants in the study who reported having similarities with their deceased sibling adopted certain characteristics of the deceased sibling after death. Rindt (p. 12) suggested this was consistent with Balk's (1983) finding that surviving siblings "tend to idealise the deceased and take on the role of the deceased in an attempt to replace the individual". Further, this theme may represent Erikson's (1963) notion of "identity versus role confusion" or the adoption of Klass, Silverman and Nickmans' (1996) *continuing bonds*.

4.7.2.3 Fractured Identity

A few participants conveyed a sense that their identity had been fractured in some way after the loss of their sibling and inherent in their comments was a loss of confidence and feelings of increased vulnerability.

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I think I have made so many stupid decisions … sometimes feel like I cannot put a foot right and I think I depended so much on him guiding me through everything and don't do this and don't do that and that was gone, it was like a bit part of me was like, I am 17 and it's like, I don't know, I never had to worry about making certain decisions … and not having someone made it hard for me to sort of trust people, sort of feel like they'll probably get up and die too. (Elaine, pp. 8-9)

… my brother Leon was really popular, he had a lot of friends, everyone, a lot of people knew him, he was a real extrovert, he was really well-known for his good heart and things like that and yeah, everywhere I went people would know who he was, people would be like "oh, you're Leon's sister" … I've felt protected by him all the time and then afterwards I just felt like I have lost that protection. (Anita, p. 7)

I was also unemployed for a number of years which just sort of knocked my confidence further. In about 1999, I went back to university and actually found that, really nervous about doing it because again, at that point, I was so lacking in any sort of confidence in my abilities but then found that I actually could concentrate a bit more and take things in … but, I mean, that was five years after his death that I discovered that I was able to undertake tasks and sort of pull through with them. (William, p. 5)

I feel lost in life now … coming from a European background, mum and dad were not pushy but there's expectations there to lead the way, show your brothers or your sisters what it means to be a good person, what it means to basically get somewhere in life and I know Adrian was following in those footsteps, he was going very well with school … we were so close, we paid attention to one another but with my other brother because of the age difference and all that, I guess I didn't pay as much attention to him and he had a few issues with drugs and stuff like that. So, I wasn't as good as a role model I believe for him and he's going down the path he's gone down …

I think I have let my myself down and in that regard now that he's passed away, it's absolutely lost … (Eric, p. 13)

Participants, Elaine and Anita, expressed a feeling that their sense of self had diminished in the wake of their sibling's death. Elaine and Anita's struggles were evident in their comments as they were left to develop competencies that they relied on their deceased siblings to fulfil. If unable to accommodate or adapt to this loss, surviving siblings may lack the required attributes for individuation. William spoke about a loss of confidence borne by the enormity of his grief and inability to cope with the loss of his older brother. Eric related that he felt lost in life without his younger brother with whom he had a very close relationship, shared interests and friends. Eric relayed a sense of failure, no longer able to see himself as a successful role model for his surviving younger brother. He expressed that he felt lost without the brother who had mirrored his successes in study, vocation and life.

The *Fractured Identity* theme illustrates the participants' distortion of self, experienced as the crumbling of their self-image as they grappled with the loss of their sibling. Their identity may be intertwined, merged or fused with a sibling who is no longer here. *Fractured Identity* possibly reflects the unsuccessful achievement of the development task attributed to mid-adolescence (ages 14-17), "competency, mastery and control" (Fleming & Adolph, 1986) or termed by Bandura (1977) as self-efficacy. However, the age of participants who demonstrated this theme ranged from 15 to 25 years of age. Only two participants were within the mid-adolescence age range at the time of their sibling's death. Results from this study are not generalisable given the small sample but suggest that an adolescent's sense of competence may be affected by the loss of a sibling despite their stage of development (early, middle or late adolescence).

Erikson (1980) described the critical psychosocial stage of development in adolescence as "identity versus role confusion" where individuals explore possibilities and make commitments towards identity. Marcia (2002), who extended on Erikson's identity development theory, suggests identity development is a continuum with diffuse at one end and identity achievement at the other.

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Marcia believed that adolescents faced core issues of development such as defining sex roles, vocation, religious beliefs and political ideology. In their journey of identity consolidation, adolescents experience a pattern of identity statuses towards maturation categorised as: identity diffusion, foreclosure, moratorium and identity achievement (Marcia, 2001). In the context of adolescent sibling bereavement, participants in this present study may have regressed in their journey towards identity achievement, revisiting prior stages of development and re-evaluating their beliefs.

Another explanation for the theme of *Fractured Identity* can be found in literature that explores the connection between identity and a life crisis such as grief. Grief theorists, Neimeyer and Anderson (2002), outlined a framework for *meaning reconstruction theory* in which identity reconstruction is one of three core dimensions. The authors suggest, the bereaved must reorganise a sense of self and re-author their lives. This ability appeared to be lacking in the participants who identified this theme.

Self-concept is another way to explore the theme of *Fractured Identity*. Self-concept is thought to be the basis of a confident self-image and sense of mastery and control (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). These attributes are thought to enable adolescents to cope with the challenges of grief and loss (Hogan & DeSantis, 1996). Further, research by Hogan and DeSantis (1992) found an inverse relationship between high self-concept scores and low intensity of grief in their study of bereaved adolescent siblings. Hence, adolescents with low scores on self-concept tended to struggle with feelings of inadequacy and low self-confidence, and lacked the resources to cope with grief (Hogan & DeSantis, 1992). Evidenced in the theme of *Fractured Identity* is a duality in the experience of sibling loss, namely, the participants' expressed loss of sense of self and their lowered self-confidence.

The theme of *Fractured Identity* is similar to that of *The Lost Role of the Sibling* in the *Coping with Sibling Loss in Adolescence and Beyond* chapter. Within the mentioned chapter, participants grieve the loss of the role that their sibling played in their lives alongside them; whereas, the theme

of *Fractured Identity* concerns the disruption of identity consolidation in the participants' struggle to redefine themselves without their sibling.

4.7.2.4 *Consolidation of Self*

Some of the participants spoke of a changed perspective of themselves or their role in the family. A few of these participants indicated that losing their sibling affirmed their identity as this experience had irrevocably changed them.

> … apart from a few small things, I don't think I'd change anything because it helped me figure out how I want to remember her, the kind of person I want to be, the kind of people I want to be around and what a true friend is and nothing is perfect and especially not grief, it's just messy and apart from a few small things, why change anything because it's made me who I am today … I'm pretty happy with who I am … (Anna, p. 19)

> I really struggle to define myself because I don't like to define myself by the events that have happened in my life. I've learned a lot from everything and I, as much it feels really yucky to say, I am a better person and a bigger person from going through things even though I would give anything to have my brother back and anything not to have grown up in an abusive environment. (Eve, p. 4)

> … thinking back on it, it was probably the time between when the cops, well, when I went down there (to see brother's body on the road) and when I got back and the cops got to our place, I told them off which I would never have done … it was that time when I knew my brother was gone, I'd been down there, I told this idiot off for making my other brother cry, I said "we know what's going on, don't be an asshole about it". I made sure (younger brother) was okay in the other room … I think that's probably when I thought, well, okay, you're now responsible for things, make sure that things are okay. (Donald, p. 26-27)

… I'm the older brother, I had to be the strong one for my sisters and things like that and try and lead like a good example or whatever and I always think it would be so different, imagine if I was the younger brother and an older sister passed or someone I was looking up to. It can be so different but, yeah, like I said, it does change your perspective on a lot of things. (Marvin, p. 20-21)

I think a lot of people say I'm quite mature for my age and I think I can see that in certain senses compared to some of my friends. They just don't seem to know what they want in life and I do, I want to get my career and save and travel, buy a house. I want to settle down quite quick and work towards doing that. (Anastasia, p. 18)

I was at a really formative time in my life and I did a lot of really fast growing up when she died and I learnt a lot about things that I would never have learnt about until my 50s if I hadn't had her die, mortality and understand the fear of your own mortality. (Harriet, p. 18)

Unlike the previous theme in which participants experienced a loss of sense of self, the theme of *Consolidation of Self* represents a theme of growth and maturity. Anna and Eve reflected on the insights gained after the loss of their sibling and that some growth had occurred through the experience of coping with loss. Their comments also contain a sagacity of wisdom concerning life, loss and an imperfect world. Both Donald and Marvin reflected on their role as a brother together with a sense of responsibility for their siblings. Inherent in their comments was the awareness of their own siblings' experience of loss and a desire to support them. This perspective exhibits an extension of concern beyond that of themselves and potentially driven by feelings of competence. Lastly, the comments by Anastasia and Harriet indicate that the experience of sibling loss triggered a deeper understanding of themselves. For Anastasia, this manifested as clarity towards what she wanted out of life and for Harriet, it was the resolution of an existential experience and facing her own mortality.

In the context of identity development, this theme suggests a relationship between adolescent sibling bereavement, increased in self-concept, psychological growth, increased maturity and resilience (Davies & Limbo, 2010; Hogan & DeSantis, 1996). Balk's (1983) exploration of sibling bereaved adolescents found that adolescents coping with sibling bereavement were able to develop levels of maturity beyond that of their non-bereaved peers. Additionally, sibling bereavement was found to prompt adolescents to re-define their identity and roles (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1999). The above research and findings from this study suggest that the differences between the participants represented in the themes *Fractured Identity* and *Consolidated Self* may be due to varying levels of self-concept. It could be said that high levels of self-concept enable resilience, psychological growth and increased maturity, and ultimately, better coping capability when faced with sibling death in adolescence.

A caveat to the hypothesis above is the impact of time since the death. The data collected for this study ranged from 2 through to 35 years since the participants' sibling's death and this variable is likely to affect coping capability across time. For example, some participants indicated that they were better able to cope with the death of their sibling over the passage of time during which they were able to re-define themselves within the experience of loss.

4.7.3   Sibling Death and Adolescent Identity Tasks

The loss of a sibling in adolescence and the subsequent experience of an existential crisis could be what Marcia (2001) referred to as a "disequilibrating factor". Marcia believed that the capacity for adolescents to reach *identity achievement* through the adolescent process of exploration and commitment could be disrupted and in such situations, adolescents may be unable to find adult direction. Marcia's theory of adolescent development suggests that an interruption to these processes could result in unrealised tasks associated with sex roles, occupational choice, religion and/or political ideology. Other researchers suggest that identity achievement can be disrupted by the developmental context and environmental support of adolescents (Kroger, 2007).

The three main tasks to be addressed in adolescence are that of emotional separation from parents; competence, mastery and control; and intimacy and commitment (Balk, 2009b). The following themes are related to the abovementioned identity tasks.

4.7.3.1 Difficulties Navigating Autonomy

Themes related to participants' separation from parents during adolescence after the death of their sibling were reported in *The Family's Response to Loss* section. Themes such as Stepping Up, *A Sense of Responsibility to Support Parents*, and *Parental Over-Protection or Intrusion* were identified and explored in this section. The theme of *Difficulties Navigating Autonomy* relates to the participants' feelings of uncertainty in key relationships, particularly with parents and romantic partners, as a result of sibling loss.

> I get anxious at the thought of something happening to me in terms of what would happen to my mum. What would happen to my mum if she lost me? So, I worry about that, I don't blame them for thinking that at all (being concerned) so, I think it's fair. Losing a child can be very hard. (Anita, p. 13)

> I have been very insecure until recently so, always afraid that they are going to leave at the drop of a hat. So, yes, just afraid of them leaving, even if a little argument "oh, you're going to break-up with me". (Anita, p. 14)

> The first one (counsellor) was when I was 22, yeah, and I think the counsellor that I saw later on, I think that was a lot of deep-seated grief and stuff still going on. I was having trouble in a relationship with jealousy and insecurity, my jealousy and insecurity that stemmed from my loss of my brother and my upbringing and stuff like that. (Elaine, p. 2)

> I think I was really worried that if something happened to my parents, how that would feel as well? Just everything, I guess it was a bit of anxiety in a way, like someone was

taken away so quick, no explanation and then, so, everything else that I felt was

secure, sort of was in doubt a little bit. (Anastasia, p.6)

The theme *Difficulties Navigating Autonomy* refers to feelings of insecurity in key

relationships for a number of different reasons. Anita was 28 years old and still living at home with

her mother at the time of the interview. Not having left home is likely to have hampered Anita's

experience of making her way in the world. Anita's choice to remain at home may have been

influenced by the cultural expectations of her Egyptian/Armenian heritage as well as the subsequent

loss of her father after her brother's death leaving her mother and Anita the only surviving members

of her immediate family. Anita spoke of feeling anxious about her mother's wellbeing as well as

feelings of insecurity within a romantic relationship. Insecurity in romantic relationships was also

mirrored by Elaine who advised that she experienced a lack of trust and potentially over-

dependence on her father following the death of her brother. Elaine, spoke of ongoing problems in

romantic relationships that she attributed to feelings of jealousy and insecurity she believes are

partly rooted in the experience of the loss of her brother. A different take on the same theme was

found in Anastasia's comments as she reflected on the insecurity she felt after the death of her

sister. Anastasia's comments are indicative of the common challenge experienced by adolescents as

they attempt to emotionally separate from their parents.

Typically, the development task of early adolescence is that of "emotional separation from

parents to determine own identity" and has been utilised as a measure of successful development

task achievement by theorists (Fleming & Adolph, 1986). Results from this study suggest that most

adolescents found it difficult to separate from their parents after the death of their sibling however

younger adolescents (i.e. those who were aged 15-17) were more likely to experience feelings of

insecurity and voiced a desire to stay close to their parents. As explored in the *Family's Response to*

Loss section, many of the participants felt a level of responsibility towards family members and

remained close due to concern for their parents and the survival of the family rather than their own

need for security.

The results of this study suggest that the death of a sibling has a substantial impact on the apparent achievement of separation from parents but this is mainly due to the family dynamics that exist following a sibling's chronic illness and/or death. Hence, evaluating the maturation of an adolescent on the achievement of this key identity task in the context of sibling bereavement may risk the oversimplification of processes at play that reflect the complexity of historic, personal, situational and family variables. However, failure to separate emotionally from parents may have mediated and impeded the experiences for some participants as they remained at home or stayed close to their parents sublimating their independence. Participants who advised that they remained close to their parents and spoke of a sense of responsibility did not appear to struggle with feelings of insecurity. For purposes of comparison, the participant comments below illustrate the typical attitude of participants towards parents and their desire to embark on their own lives after the loss of a sibling.

> I think moving out brought us closer as well … it can bring families close together. I've seen heaps of people, like, "oh, my God, I just can't wait to move out, I just want to get out of my parents' house". I'm pretty sure I was probably like that as well, I was like I can't wait to move but once you do move out there is so much you take for granted, that parents they only do those things that might seem annoying because they love you. (Marvin, p. 19)

> Although, I was bit older and really, I was thinking of moving out and things soon but I, being the way that I was, I just kind of shut down a bit, did my own thing, they (parents) would possibly be in one lounge room watching tele, I'd be in the other one watching something else, just didn't really want to associate too much with people. (Linda, p. 8)

These comments illustrate a level of independence as the participants navigate their way towards living independent and autonomous lives. Marvin moved out of home to attend university

in another city and acknowledges that the relationship with his parents had changed together with an appreciation of their support. Linda suggests that she was ready to leave home but remained living with her parents for a time. It is difficult to ascertain Linda's thoughts behind this comment but she seemed comfortable to remain at home for a time after her sister's death. A level of companionship may have been present in which Linda and her parents were able to reside together and afford each other the emotional and physical space they both required.

The above comments as well as the themes from *The Family's Response to Loss* highlight the contextual and unique challenges faced by the participants endeavouring to find their independence when faced with a family tragedy. Therefore, the event of sibling death in adolescence may keep an adolescent close to their family but does not necessarily indicate a level of insecurity particularly in the case of older adolescents. Research by Fanos and Nickerson (1991) found participants who were aged 13 through to 17 years (mid adolescence) at the time of their sibling's death, may feel caught between concern for their parents and their own development needs, and may feel unable to separate from their parents resulting in feelings of anger and guilt.

4.7.3.2 Avoidance of Romantic Relationships

An overwhelming theme in the data was the reluctance of participants to become involved in romantic relationships following the loss of their sibling. Some participants expressed that the thought of experiencing the pain of a relationship that ended was too much to bear. Others described a desire for validation from their deceased sibling on their choice of partner.

> I didn't have any relationships for a long time, I didn't want, you know, after feeling as bad as you do when you lose somebody, I didn't then want to put myself out there into a relationship where you breakup and you have that similar sense of loss. I just couldn't, couldn't do that. (Linda, p. 10)

> I just felt that the emotional stakes were too high with relationships and that whole thing of not wanting to get too close to a person because what if the relationship doesn't last? … if a relationship didn't work out, it just felt like a similar sort of

desolation to when Yves died … when things didn't work out, I felt as though a lot of

the stuff relating to Yves' death was being activated again. (William, p. 12)

I think a lot of my friends … we all seem to be actually a little bit of late bloomers but I

got really withdrawn from even guy friends and things like that. I think I was worried

that if I loved someone again that would get taken away or I couldn't deal with it if we

broke up or something like that … I still haven't really been in a relationship … when

my friends were going to parties or hanging out, I was really withdrawn from all of

those things. (Anastasia, pp. 13-14)

Participants spoke about avoiding relationships due to the fear of experiencing feelings of

loss if the relationship did not work out. Both Linda and William advised they felt that the emotional

stakes were too high to risk entering a romantic relationship. William disclosed that if he did enter a

relationship and it did not work out, this may activate the feelings associated with the loss of his

brother. Anastasia also spoke of feeling that she would not be able to cope with the potential loss of

a failed romantic relationship and at 22 years old, was yet to embark on a serious relationship.

The avoidance of romantic relationships during late adolescence as evidenced by this

participant theme of *Avoidance of Romantic Relationships* may reflect the development task of late

adolescence, 'intimacy versus commitment' (Balk, 2009b; Fleming & Adolph, 1986). The challenges

of interpersonal closeness and intimacy were evident in the data as a number of participants

avoided romantic relationships. Such avoidance may be due to a fear of intimacy as suggested by

trauma researchers who state that trauma has a deleterious impact on an individual's ability to form

and/or maintain relationships (Kauffman, 2007; Van der Kolk, 1987). Another explanation may be

found in attachment theory and sibling loss in childhood. Charles and Charles (2006) found evidence

for a relationship between sibling loss in childhood and relational difficulties in young adulthood.

The authors suggest that the coping style of sibling bereaved children focussed on *support seeking*

rather than *withdrawal* but their support was compromised as their primary care givers were

unavailable to provide support due to their own grief.

Further, Fanos and Nickerson's (1991) study of the long term consequences of sibling bereaved adults aged between 13 and 17 at the time of their sibling's death (due to chronic illness), found qualitative support for surviving siblings experiencing difficulties in establishing intimate relationships. Similarly, findings by Fletcher, Mailick, Song and Wolfe (2013) suggested that females were more affected than males by the death of a sibling in childhood with sisters less likely to be married if their sibling died in infancy or as a result of a long term illness. Hence, the experience of sibling loss may provide a barrier to developing romantic relationships in late adolescence and early adulthood for some individuals who lost a sibling in adolescence.

The results of this study do not support either gender differences or cause of death as influencing factors for bereaved adolescent siblings in romantic relationships. The sample for Fletcher, et al.'s study was drawn from two substantial data sets in the United States of America and provides statistical significance for the results outlined above. However, this qualitative study revealed results of the lived experience of adolescent sibling bereavement in a much smaller participant sample and contains idiosyncratic responses, the basis for interpretative phenomenological analysis.

A couple of participants spoke about wanting the approval of their deceased brother of their choice of partner.

> … how could losing my brother affect me having romantic relationships because it was not as I was romantic with my brother but it was almost like his approval would mean everything or because we were so close and such good friends and he had all these awesome qualities and traits and I think maybe that's what I am looking for and not finding. (Elaine, p. 28)

> I wish they'd met (brother and boyfriend) and I wish they gave me their approval because I did seek his approval, so I wish they met each other and said, "yeah, he's a good guy". (Anita, p. 11)

Another component of the *Avoidance of Romantic Relationships* theme was evidenced by the above comments from Elaine and Anita. The content of these comments suggest these two participants lacked confidence in their judgement of a partner and sought the approval of their deceased sibling. Not all data relating to this theme focussed on avoidance of relationships, rather, one participant spoke of her deceased sibling's expectations for her and that this caused her to rethink a relationship she felt she had 'settled' for.

> … when Yasmine died, two years later I broke up with my boyfriend and that was a relationship that started when I was 18 years old and went until I was 25 and massive security blanket for me … when Yasmine died it changed me so much and gave me these opportunities to think about myself and what I wanted and what to expect from life and all these sorts of things that eventually I got to the point where I couldn't be with this person anymore, somebody that I assumed I would end up getting married to a one point because I deserved better, which I would never of seen that before Yasmine died because Yasmine would have expected better for herself but I wouldn't have … (Harriet, p. 12)

Harriet believed that the death of her sister was instrumental in defining what she required in a significant romantic relationship and found the relationship she was in was not up to par. This realisation enabled Harriet to step away from the security of a long relationship and seek the relationship she 'deserved'.

4.7.3.3 Death Interrupts Vocational Identity

A few participants indicated that the loss of their sibling affected vocational pursuits, either in terms of selection a vocation or impeding success in their professional life.

> … I have probably through my adult life; have sort of struggled a bit to find an area, of going into some profession in a way. I certainly found after Yves' death, I was 19 when he died and that whole thing of when you're 19, your world is sort of supposed to be

opening up and all these opportunities opening up and I think I just thought, well,

none of these things really hold an appeal, the thought of doing a course or going out

and finding a job held little appeal without him there. (William, p. 2)

I deferred again and found some odd jobs but I was also unemployed for a number of

years which just sort of knocked my confidence further. In about 1999, I went back to

university and actually found that, I was really nervous about doing it because again, I

was so lacking in any sort of confidence in my abilities but then found that I actually

could concentrate a bit more and take things in and so, that was quite eye-opening.

So, I thought, oh I'm obviously in a different place. (William, p.5)

I did feel like it got to the point where it was affecting my life in a negative way. Not

being able to focus meant I wasn't really able to keep a job or progress in a job, not

really able to develop relationships professionally and I dropped out of school, I

dropped out of uni. I wasn't really able to finish anything … (Eve, p. 16)

I just go to work and I'm just, you know, just doing numbers, just doing what I've been

taught but I'm just thinking to myself is this what I really wanted to do? (Eric, p. 14)

William expressed a level of disillusionment towards the future following his brother's death

and this culminated in a disinterest in planning for or engaging in any career choices. William and Eve

both identified that the experience of loss had manifested as a barrier to development within their

professional life. Both indicated that they struggled to concentrate at university and subsequently

abandoned their studies. William advised that he returned to university some years later and found

that his ability to concentrate was intact. This enabled him to continue with his studies and restored

his self-confidence. Eve spoke about continued problems in the workplace such as concentration and

difficulties in professional relationships. After a number of years, Eve came to the realisation that

she would need to address her grief or continue to experience stagnation in this area of her life. The

comments of William and Eve demonstrate the potential stalling effect that grief can wreck on the vocational pursuits of sibling bereaved adolescents.

Eric provides an example of the impact of grief and its ability to shake the foundations of previously held goals and aspirations. Eric spoke about no longer being engaged in his career as an engineer, a job that he enjoyed very much and found meaningful prior to the death of his brother. In a study by Rosenberg, et al. (2015), results indicated that half of bereaved siblings stated that their current educational and career goals had been impacted by the loss experience. The results of this study suggest that the impact of sibling bereavement in adolescence has the capacity to derail career goals and aspirations.

4.7.3.4 *The Experience of Grief Changes Vocational Choice*
Some participants evidenced that grief had the capacity to influence a change in vocational choice via the lived experience and understanding of loss. Most participants who identified with this theme moved toward the intention of working with individuals affected by grief.

> I have a big interest now in grief and loss and that's what I want to do is to try and help people who are experiencing those issues, I know that it's going to probably be years to come like down the tack when I feel confident being able to sort of social work people who are experiencing those issues but, yeah, it's something that's really driven me to complete this course because I think, like, just a bit of empathy and understanding on what they must be going through. (Anastasia, p. 18)

> I guess Rory's death makes my fear and anxiety go through the roof but it also makes me question what I do … As I said, I've just got my real estate licence because that's what I've always done … But I know now that I want to do something that involves sibling grief. I still think I'm probably a little bit too young because if I'm going to, say, become a grief therapist people might look at me first off and say who are you? Like, you've got no life experience. Without knowing my story they, I think, would judge me on my age. So, I'm not ready to do that yet as such … (Nellie, p. 42)

I kind of looked at heaps of people that maybe went through the same headspace as

me and other people and wanted to help them get through grief and I think after I met

that psychologist back in the day, I was like that was terrible, I need to kind of be a

better one than them. (Emily, p. 16)

The comments above highlight the influence of the lived experience of grief and the

adolescents' ability to withstand the grief of others. The participants expressed feelings of empathy

towards others experiencing pain and a level of confidence in being able to provide assistance after

training in the area of grief support.

Conversely, the experience of grief affected Scott's vocational choice in a different way.

Scott was finishing his degree in nursing and concluding his placement rotations at the time of his

brother's sudden death. After the loss of his brother, Scott altered his area of specialisation in

nursing.

… I was originally interested in mental health, that's what I was going to do, I guess

after what happened I just felt as though I didn't want to be open to anyone and that

kind of changed my career path and that's when I chose theatres … I think that's the

only thing that would be different with me now, I wouldn't have worked in theatres, I

would have pursued mental health … (Scott, pp. 23-24)

Scott advised that he did not want to be open to the vicarious experience of distress from

mental health patients and changed his initial nursing preference from mental health to working in

surgical theatres. Scott indicated in his interview that the loss of his brother had coincided with the

timing of his specialisation decision for nursing. Scott advised that he has recently started to think

about further study in mental health and potentially transferring back to his initial preference.

Research suggests that adolescents who have experienced significant loss in adolescence often have

the capacity to endure someone else's pain (Balk & Corr, 2001) which can add to others through

difficult times (Balk, 1996).

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

Adolescence represents a period of accelerated physical, cognitive, emotional and spiritual growth. During this phase of life, adolescents embark on key tasks of identity development, namely, separation from parents, autonomy, initiating intimate relationships and defining vocational preferences or goals. It has been suggested that siblings use each other as touchstones in their search for identity (Bank & Kahn, 1982) and, hence, the loss of a sibling during adolescence has the capacity to disrupt the life course trajectory of the surviving sibling (Fletcher, Mailick, Song & Wolfe, 2013).

The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of adolescent sibling bereavement and the impact of sibling loss on psychosocial development, specifically that of identity development. Additionally, this study explored the influence of sibling loss on the psychological wellbeing of surviving siblings. Interview data from 15 participants who were aged between 14 to 25 years when they lost a sibling was analysed using IPA. The themes derived from the data have been set out in the previous section. The summary below sets out the main themes as they relate to psychological wellbeing and psychosocial development, the two main foci of this study.

5.1 Psychological Wellbeing

5.1.1 Traumatic Loss

Adolescent sibling bereavement has been identified as a tragic event but not necessarily recognised as a potential precursor to traumatic stress or bereavement related psychopathology. The results of this study introduces the notion that trauma is very present in the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement. Traumatic loss inhabited the circumstance of both anticipated and sudden death of a sibling as well as the way in which adolescents managed their grief. Comparison between anticipated and sudden death of a sibling cannot be made within this study as results are not generalisable but the argument can be made that, in both contexts, trauma is likely to be experienced and for different reasons.

Research attests that only a small percentage of those who experience trauma will develop a traumatic stress response and if they do, symptoms tend to remit within one month (Raphael, 1999; Regehr & Sussman, 2004). However, results from this study suggest that trauma has a place in the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and has an imprint in the deviation of the 'normal' grief trajectory with the capacity to precipitate the development of psychopathology (Spuij, Reitz, et al., 2012).

5.1.2 Disenfranchised Grief

A consideration for the bereaved adolescent sibling population endeavouring to cope with this experience is the challenge presented by the disenfranchisement of their grief. Disenfranchisement acts to isolate and alienate an already disadvantaged and vulnerable group.

The experience of adolescent sibling bereavement does not occur in a vacuum and results suggest that surviving siblings are greatly affected by the responses from those around them. This finding mirrors the proposition by Neimeyer (2014) who suggests that the transactional nature of mourning is influenced by the way in which others respond or fail to respond to the individual who is grieving. Participants spoke of consciously presenting to others that they were coping with the loss of their sibling but, privately, they advised they struggled to adjust to their loss. Their private grief was often due to feeling "shut down" when speaking with peers about their sibling's death or wanting to appear as responding appropriately, often for the sake of their parents.

The very nature of sibling death in adolescence could be viewed as an aberration of the natural order of things (Crehan, 2004). The death of a young person may be unexpected and sudden or anticipated with potential suffering. A significant aspect of adolescent sibling bereavement relates to the ability of the surviving sibling to process their grief. Cultural attitudes towards grief may influence the context within which adolescents grieve the loss of a sibling and potentially curtail the expression and processing of that loss.

Grief is a natural reaction to loss and encompasses psychological, behavioural, social and physical reactions (Rando, 1993). It is recognised as an individual experience influenced by various

personal factors and experiences (Attig, 1996; Hall, 2014). The ability to experience grief is fundamental to the processing of such and assists the adaptation to the loss of a loved one. When bereaved individuals are unable to relate fully to the meaning of their loss or the significance of their loss is not recognised by others, this constitutes forms of disenfranchised grief.

Results of this study suggest that sibling bereaved adolescents are a marginalised group presented with challenges that inhibit their ability to access their grief particularly in the presence of distraught parents. The perceptions of others regarding the depth of their pain may be underestimated and the significance of their lost relationship often misunderstood. The section on *The Disenfranchisement of Adolescent Sibling Grief* underscores the many ways in which the grief of the surviving sibling is often unacknowledged. Participants spoke of feeling theirs was a lesser grief, one that was unrecognised in its significance. Additionally, the themes evidenced within the section *The Family's Response to Loss* such as *Impact of Parental Grief*, *Taking Responsibility* and *Support Within the Family* speak directly to the experience of surviving siblings sublimating their needs in order to meet the needs of others, often those of bereaved parents.

5.1.3   The 'Perfect Storm'

The 'perfect storm' of adolescent sibling bereavement encompasses a number of themes illustrated in the results of this study and represents a detrimental outcome such as the experience of psychopathology following the loss of a sibling. Such an outcome may be precipitated by one or some of the factors mentioned above although the results of the study suggest a maelstrom of potential variables that may come together to negatively impact psychological wellbeing. Themes identified in the study that when combined may have a devastating impact for the bereaved are detailed within *The Trauma of Adolescent Sibling Loss*, *The Disenfranchisement of Adolescent Sibling Grief*, and the *Uniqueness of Sibling Loss*.

The variables that place bereaved adolescents' long term adjustment at risk and the variables that facilitate positive adjustment to their siblings' death are yet to be determined (Walker, 1993). The themes identified in this study point to personal, situational and contextual

factors that have the capacity to disrupt or block the grieving process of adolescents after the loss of their sibling many of which are discussed above. The majority of participants in this study indicated ongoing mental health concerns that continued two years after the loss of their sibling. A review of literature on adolescent bereavement by Valente, Saunders and Street (1988) identified that unresolved adolescent bereavement may lead to ongoing mental health problems and found bereavement was linked with morbidity and psychopathology as well as adult emotional difficulties. Mental health concerns such as depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress symptoms, prolonged grief disorder and suicidal ideation following the loss of a sibling in adolescence have also been reported by researchers (Balmer, 1992; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; Moos & Moos, 1986; Spuij, Reitz, et al., 2012). Hence, unresolved sibling bereavement presents a potential risk to the mental health of adolescents and their adult selves.

5.1.4   Uniqueness of Sibling Loss

The unique experience of sibling adolescent bereavement was overviewed in a section by the same title. The themes evidenced from the data suggest that the experience of sibling loss in adolescence is a lonely experience and the grief re-emerges at significant times in their lives. Bereaved siblings may be confronted by a change of role within their family as they become the only surviving child and/or traverse the comparisons that are unconsciously or consciously made by others against the potential held by their deceased sibling. The role that their sibling played alongside them has gone and many grappled with the void left behind. This process may cause them to doubt themselves and question the meaning or purpose of life.

The question "do you have any siblings?" posed a common challenge for participants in this study. Not wanting to deny the existence of their sibling but endeavouring to balance disclosure against the implications or impact of their answer left many participants in a conundrum as to the best way to answer. A common theme was that their sibling faded from existence as the years went by as those who spoke of them or knew them thinned in ranks and new relationships formed with

individuals who had never met their deceased sibling. The loss was described as a loss of part of themselves.

5.1.5   Stuck in Loss Orientation

Some participants became 'stuck' in the experience of loss, unable to move forward in their life and spoke of their world no longer making sense. Those who were very close to their sibling or had a dependent type relationship with their deceased sibling seemed to struggle more with integrating their loss. For some, their grief was redirected towards rumination, searching for answers or living in the aftermath of unanswered questions surrounding the death. Hence, sibling bereavement in adolescence may result in an existential experience that lends to vulnerability or, if resolved, can provide a platform for growth.   For a number of the participants who spoke about the inability to make sense of their sibling's death, searching for meaning was a hallmark of long term suffering from which a few had emerged with a renewed sense of self and the world.

5.2   Psychosocial Development

As part of this study, literature on adolescent development models was reviewed (Adolph & Fleming, 1986; Erikson, 1980; Marcia, 1966) together with numerous models that encompass identity change as part of coping with life transition or crisis such as grief (Balk, 2014; Stroebe & Schut, 1999). This study illustrates the nexus of age-related development tasks and grief related challenges that strike simultaneously. Hence, it is difficult to tease apart the processes associated with adolescent development from those of the experience of a life crisis such as adolescent sibling bereavement. However, this study was able to identity themes suggestive of the disruption of identity development tasks and the role that grief played in these experiences.

5.2.1   Development Tasks of Adolescence

As adolescents mature, it is expected that they will develop the skills and competencies that enable career choices, ability to enter into and maintain intimate relationships and to form an autonomous identity (Balk, 2011). Themes from the data suggest that sibling death in adolescence has the capacity to generate complications that hinder mastery of development tasks and the

subsequent emotional transition into adulthood. Findings from this study indicate that the participants' concern for their parents was followed by feelings of responsibility, the need to 'step-up' and take on more responsibility at home or, in some situations, care for their parents. Ultimately, these feelings, thoughts and behaviours inhibited the ability to separate from parents and embark on an independent life for some participants. There was evidence of adolescent sibling bereavement as a disrupter to education attainment and its influence on vocational choice. An inability to complete studies can short-circuit previously held aspirations and impact their vocation, economic status and future in general. Those who were working at the time of their sibling's death advised that things became more difficult although some adjusted and continued as before.

5.2.2   Avoidance of Intimate Relationships

A number of findings from this study that relate specifically to identity development tasks have not been well researched to date. The theme *Avoidance of Romantic Relationships* following sibling death in adolescence has had minimal attention from researchers and the mechanisms that drive the reluctance to embark on intimate relationships are not known. Research by Charles and Charles (2006) suggests that sibling loss in childhood impacts the attachment style of bereaved siblings which can then impede their ability to attend to their own needs or those of another. Hence, difficulties in establishing or maintaining relationships may occur. Fanos and Nickerson (1991) found evidence for difficulties in establishing intimate relationships for adults who had lost a sibling in adolescence as a result of a chronic illness. Although now dated, a review of literature by Valente, Saunders and Street's (1988) documented evidence linking loss with avoidance of intimate relationships.

5.2.3   Anxious Relationships

From a relationship perspective, another theme from this study, *Anxious Parenting,* is likely to encompass similar mechanisms that promote the fear of loss. Participants who spoke of *Avoidance of Romantic Relationships* and *Anxious Parenting* acknowledged that the loss of their sibling had left them feeling vulnerable to other equally devastating losses. Three of the four

participants who had become parents spoke of the anxiety associated with the fear of losing their child. Again, attachment theory may best explain this phenomenon and underpins the premise that siblings may act as key attachment figures (Robinson, 2001). The quality of the sibling relationship seemed to be a moderator of existential loss for some participants, i.e. if the sibling relationship was very close or possessed a level of dependency, the participant found it difficult to define themselves after the loss and often struggled with issues of identity.

Data from the participant interviews suggests that sibling loss is an enduring grief that re-emerges throughout life and also focuses on important events that are yet to occur and the sadness that their sibling will not be present. Their grief appeared to be ongoing and reflects the isolation and loneliness of a shared life lost. The theme was particularly poignant with sibling dyads that were identified by the survivor as close.

5.2.4 'Continuing Bonds' and Identity Consolidation

Perhaps one of the most important findings of this study is the participants' continued identification or de-identification with their deceased sibling. This finding incorporates the continued relationship participants had with their deceased sibling and the adoption of some of their siblings' traits or behaviours. Participants' identity appeared to remain linked to their deceased sibling as they still spoke of themselves in the context of their deceased sibling.   The section *Death and Identity* outlines a number of themes that evidenced a continued reference to their sibling in identity formation and consolidation. The section alludes to the adaptive process of *continuing bonds* in promoting spiritual proximity with the deceased. This process is likely to facilitate identification processes with the deceased sibling whereby participants endeavour to incorporate aspects of their sibling's identity or affirmed their own identity by reference to their sibling.

5.3 Recommendations for Future Adolescent Bereavement Research

The influence of siblings on identity development has been documented in literature however the ongoing influence of a deceased sibling on the identity development of the surviving

adolescent sibling is unclear. The process of sibling identification or de-identification assists identity development in the context of siblings.   From a developmental perspective, it is not clear how the process of identification or de-identification is affected when the sibling relationship is interrupted by the death of a sibling.

Further research is required for the adaptive use of *continuing bonds* in identity development for adolescent bereaved siblings. It is likely that identity processes are encompassed in some way in the *ongoing attachment* model by Hogan and DeSantis (1996) and the *continuing bonds* model by Klass, Silverman and Nickman (1996) although these could be further developed specifically for bereaved adolescent siblings. Such models present a process of constructing a world of meaning following the loss of a loved one (Hall, 2011) and enable the ongoing connection with the deceased (Klass, 2006).

Additionally, further research is required on the nature and quality of the sibling relationship as a moderator of adolescent sibling bereavement outcomes. This study suggests that the depth and intensity of sibling relationships can be overlooked and that some participants shared a particularly close or dependent relationship. In these situations, the loss of a sibling was a hugely impactful and destabilising event which impacted their sense of self and the world. Those who had a 'not too close but close enough' relationship with their sibling seemed to fare better in terms of identity development. More research is required to understand the types of sibling relationships that foretell greater risk for the bereaved.

5.4   Implications for Psychological Practice

Results from the analysis of this study illustrated variance in individual, situational and environmental factors within the participant data. Davies and Limbo (2010) suggest such factors act as mediating variables that interact and influence the surviving sibling's response to loss. The results of this study highlighted factors that may have influenced the themes within the data and either compounded or alleviated the participants' experience of loss. Participants' pre-existing individual factors such as the quality and nature of the sibling relationship, potential mental health

issues, their experience of previous destabilising events and level of family functioning or dysfunction 'sets the scene' for the experience of loss. Individual factors such as coping style, attachment style, available support and the participants' progress towards individuation at the time of their sibling's death appeared to influence their capacity to adapt to the loss. The sibling's cause of death, time since death and the participants' responses to parental grief also seemed to contribute to their reaction to sibling death.

Bereaved sibling adolescents and their adult selves who have managed to process the grief and/or trauma of the loss of a sibling may move through this experience if key contextual factors are present and possess the resilience and resources to cope in a healthy and adaptive way. Those who remain stuck in the loss, unable to process their grief and/or trauma may be best assisted via therapeutic interventions that endeavour to help bereaved individuals to process trauma in conjunction with the complications of unprocessed grief. Practitioners working with those who have lost a sibling in adolescence should be cognisant of the highly individualised experience influenced by the individual's historical, personal, familial and environmental context.

Further, practitioners should note the section on *Supporting Sibling Loss* and the themes contained therein. Themes in this section suggest that the ability of another to listen to their story was therapeutic. This empathetic individual may have been a partner, friend, relative or health practitioner. The themes of *Ineffective Professional Support* and *Lack of Community Support* speak to the participants' experience of not being able to access appropriate mental health and community support. Adolescent sibling bereavement is a complex phenomenon that requires consideration of many aspects such as adolescent development, grief, particularly disenfranchised grief, potentially trauma as well as family functioning. Regardless of the practitioner's preferred approach, the first step is to understand the individual's story of loss and grief.

5.5   Limitations

Certain limitations of this study must be considered. In this investigation of adolescent sibling bereavement, the lack of "pre-event" data is a limitation in the study. The lack of such data

has been suggested by researchers such as Rando (1993) as limiting the interpretation of findings. Developmental issues may have occurred for surviving adolescents even if the death of their sibling had not taken place (Lohan & Murphy, 2002). Additionally, retrospective data can be subject to respondent biases such as embellishment or reconstructed memory as well as social desirability.

A large percentage of the participants were recruited through advertising with The Compassionate Friends Victoria and The Compassionate Friends NSW, a worldwide support organisation for families after the death of a child. The Compassionate Friends organisation states that it has no affiliation with any religious or philosophical organisations. Participants who responded to advertising via The Compassionate Friends are likely to be open to discussing the death of their sibling and inclined to access support or have a family member who has accessed support via the organisation. A number of individuals contacted the researcher but decided not to participate in this study and it is likely that only those who felt comfortable describing their experience participated. Hence, the data collected from those who chose not to participate may have provided different results.   Additionally, the participant sample was sourced in Australia and may not be generalizable to international settings due to cultural influences on attitudes towards grief and loss. This qualitative study did not offer a wide range of causes of death and it is recommended that larger samples are utilised in future quantitative studies drawn from different sub groups in order to explore the influence of variables such as cause of death and the nature of the sibling relationship on adolescent sibling bereavement adaptation to loss.

Another limitation is time since death. Some of the participants were still in adolescence at the time of interview whereas others were significantly older. This is often the case with retrospective qualitative studies as this methodology may present issues with the participants' potential decay of memory, the influence of cultural milieus of different generations, religions and ethnicity as well as increased maturity of the participants over time and the influence this has on their interpretation of events.

Lastly, the small sample size of this retrospective study limits the ability to discern commonalities of the most salient features of grief across personal differences such as age, gender, context of their sibling's death, life experience, nature of the sibling relationship and sources of support as these all can affect the experience of grief. Consequently, it is difficult to draw conclusions regarding typical responses to sibling loss for early, middle and late adolescence. Hence, the results of this study should be considered with these limitations in mind.

5.6   Final Comments

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of sibling bereavement on psychosocial development and wellbeing. The research findings suggest that sibling bereavement is predominantly a story of intense grief and, in some cases, encompassed the ongoing experience of trauma and complicated grief. Adolescent development plays a role in the way in which participants expressed and processed their grief. Additionally, the way in which adolescent grief was responded to by others greatly influenced whether sibling survivors remained stuck in their grief or went on to find a place in the world without their sibling. Key players in the ability to manage grief were parents, friends, support groups and society in general, in their attitudes and understanding concerning the intense experience of sibling grief.

The grief reactions of adolescents may be influenced by their personality, life experience, communication skills, personal circumstances as well as normative development tasks they are experiencing (Corr & Balk, 1996). Potentially, it is both the context in which adolescents must confront and process their experience of trauma and/or grief as well as developmental challenges associated with this stage of life that may interfere with the trajectory of adolescent sibling bereavement. The combination of the bereaved adolescents' personal and situational contexts together with their developmental phase is likely to influence their ability to cope.

The experience of grief is shaped by many factors such as the relationship with the deceased, coping capabilities and other personal factors (Attig, 2001; Bonanno, 2009; Neimeyer, 2000, 2001). The impact of sibling bereavement is enduring throughout the survivor's lifetime and

the bonds of siblinghood may continue and be able to offer some comfort (Packman, Horsley,

Davies & Kramer, 2006) as well as agency in ongoing development.

One of the salient features of healthy adjustment of sibling bereaved adolescents is the

maintenance of the relationship with their sibling although research is yet to determine what is

adaptive or maladaptive in terms of grief models such as *continuing bonds* (Neimeyer, 2014). This

study suggests that the identity development processes that typically play out with siblings may

continue after the loss of a sibling and could be facilitated through the processes of *continuing*

bonds or *ongoing attachment*. The results of this study provide some crucial insights into the lived

experience of adolescent sibling loss and illuminate the complexity of this highly individual

experience.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Ethics Approval

On Monday, 24 June 2013 5:39 PM, Keith Wilkins <kwilkins@swin.edu.au> wrote:
To: Assoc Prof Roger Cook/Ms Jan-Louise Godfrey, FLSS

Dear Roger and Jan-Louise

SUHREC Project 2013/034 What is the impact of adolescent sibling bereavement on psychosocial development?

Assoc Prof Roger Cook, FLSS; Ms Jan-Louise Godfrey, Dr Roslyn Galligan
Approved Duration: 24/06/2013 to 30/04/2016 [Adjusted]

I refer to the ethical review of the above project protocol by Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC). Your responses to the review, as per your email of 22 June 2013 with attachment, were put to a SUHREC delegate for consideration.

I am pleased to advise that, as submitted to date, the project may commence in line with standard on-going ethics clearance conditions here outlined.

- All human research activity undertaken under Swinburne auspices must conform to Swinburne and external regulatory standards, including the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research* and with respect to secure data use, retention and disposal.
- The named Swinburne Chief Investigator/Supervisor remains responsible for any personnel appointed to or associated with the project being made aware of ethics clearance conditions, including research and consent procedures or instruments approved. Any change in chief investigator/supervisor requires timely notification and SUHREC endorsement.
- The above project has been approved as submitted for ethical review by or on behalf of SUHREC. Amendments to approved procedures or instruments ordinarily require prior ethical appraisal/ clearance. SUHREC must be notified immediately or as soon as possible thereafter of (a) any serious or unexpected adverse effects on participants and any redress measures; (b) proposed changes in protocols; and (c) unforeseen events which might affect continued ethical acceptability of the project.
- At a minimum, an annual report on the progress of the project is required as well as at the conclusion (or abandonment) of the project.
- A duly authorised external or internal audit of the project may be undertaken at any time.

Please contact the Research Ethics Office if you have any queries about on-going ethics clearance, citing the SUHREC project number. Copies of clearance emails should be retained as part of project record-keeping.
Best wishes for the project.
Yours sincerely

Keith

Keith Wilkins
Secretary, SUHREC & Research Ethics Officer
Swinburne Research (H68)
Swinburne University of Technology
P O Box 218
HAWTHORN VIC 3122
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Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

IMPACT OF ADOLESCENT SIBLING BEREAVEMENT

Did you lose a sibling when you were aged between 15 to 25 years?

A study on the impact of sibling loss is being conducted by Swinburne University of Technology. If you are you comfortable sharing your story and are interested in contributing to the better understanding of this experience, please consider participating in our study on adolescent sibling bereavement.

If you would like to contribute, you are invited to participate in a one-on-one interview (approximately 1-2 hours in duration) and share how this experience has impacted your life.

For the purposes of this study, a sibling is defined as a biological or adopted sibling. To participate in this study, ideally, you would be 20 years of age or older.

For further information on the study, please contact:

Jan-Louise Godfrey
Student researcher
Swinburne University of Technology
Email: janlouisegodfrey@swin.edu.au
Tel: 0419 828 449

IMPACT OF ADOLESCENT
SIBLING BEREAVEMENT STUDY

INFORMATION SHEET

A team of researchers including Associate Professor Roger Cook (principal supervisor), Coordinator, Counselling Psychology Programs, Swinburne University of Technology, Dr Roslyn Galligan (associate supervisor), Lecturer, Swinburne University of Technology and Jan-Louise Godfrey, student researcher, Swinburne University of Technology, is currently conducting a study to gain a better understanding of what aids or hinders the psychological development of bereaved adolescent siblings. The aim of the research is to identify supporting factors and resources that will assist professionals, families and friends in providing support to adolescents at the critical juncture of coping with both loss and growth.

The sibling relationship can be a source of protection, support or fulfil the role of an ally (Marshall & Davies, 2011). In the event of sibling death during adolescence, the bereaved sibling is forced to cope with both the developmental crisis of adolescence and the grief associated with the loss of a sibling (Hogan & DeSantis, 1996). Hence, sibling loss has been identified as one of the most tragic and least understood events that can occur for an adolescent (Balk, 1991; Hogan & DeSantis, 1992).

If you experienced the loss of a sibling (defined in this study as being a biological or adopted sibling) when you were an adolescent (aged between 15 and 25 years), please consider sharing your experience of adolescent sibling bereavement and its impact on your life. If you are willing to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in a 1-2 hour (approximate timing) interview with the student researcher. Responses in the interview will be audio recorded and transcribed at a later date. All information obtained from this study will be controlled by the principal supervisor, Associate Professor Roger Cook. Results of this study, may, upon completion, appear in psychological publications and reported as either group data or de-identified qualitative data. Your participation in this study provides an opportunity for you to tell your story in your own words and potentially contribute to research that may be of help to others. The study is partly to satisfy the requirements for the student researcher's academic qualification.

If you would like to participate in this study, please contact the student researcher, Jan-Louise Godfrey via email janlouisegodfrey@swin.edu.au or on 0419 828 449.

This study has been approved by or on behalf of Swinburne's Human Research Ethics Committee (SUHREC) in line with the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research.

Thank you very much for your interest.

Jan-Louise Godfrey
Student researcher
Swinburne University of Technology
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, VIC, 3122
Ph: 0419 828 449
Email: janlouisegodfrey@swin.edu.au

IMPACT OF ADOLESCENT
SIBLING BEREAVEMENT STUDY

CONSENT FORM

Principal Investigators:

Associate Professor Roger Cook	Dr Roslyn Galligan	Jan-Louise Godfrey
Principal supervisor	Associate supervisor	Student researcher
Director, Swinburne Psychology Clinic,	Lecturer	Swinburne University of Technology
Coordinator, Counselling Psychology	Swinburne University of Technology	PO Box 218 Hawthorn, VIC, 3122
Programs	PO Box 218 Hawthorn, VIC, 3122	Ph: 0419 828 449
Swinburne University of Technology	Ph: 03 9214 5345	Email:
PO Box 218 Hawthorn, VIC, 3122	Email: rgalligan@swin.edu.au	janlouisegodfrey@swin.edu.au
Ph: 03 9214 8353		
Email: rcook@swin.edu.au		

1. I consent to participate in the study named above. I have been provided with a copy of the study consent information statement to which this consent form relates and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction.

2. In relation to this project, please circle your response to the following:
   - I agree to be interviewed by the student researcher　　　　　　　　Yes　　　　No
   - I agree to allow the interview to be audio recorded　　　　　　　　Yes　　　　No
   - I agree to make myself available for further information if required　　Yes　　　　No

3. I acknowledge that :
   a. my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw from the project at any time without explanation;
   b. the Swinburne University study is for the purpose of research and not for profit;
   c. any identifiable information about me which is gathered in the course of and as the result of my participating in this project will be (i) collected and retained for the purpose of this project and (ii) accessed and analysed by the researchers for the purpose of conducting this study;
   d. my anonymity is preserved and I will not be identified in publications or otherwise without my express written consent.

By signing this document I agree to participate in this project.

Name　　　　……………………………………………….

Signature　　……………………………………………..

Date　　　　……………………………………………..

THANK YOU

Appendix E: Interview Schedule

IMPACT OF ADOLESCENT
SIBLING BEREAVEMENT STUDY

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Demographic Information:

Name:	
Age:	
Education:	
Occupation:	
Religion / Spirituality:	
Ethnic Background:	
Psychological Therapy (specific / general):	

Opening Questions:
- Can you tell me a little about yourself?
- What was your brother's / sister's name? Can you tell me a little about them?
- What age were you when xxxx died?
- How long ago did your brother/sister die?
- Can you talk about the relationship you had with your deceased sibling (use sibling's name)?
- How did xxxx die?
- What was happening in your life when xxxx died?

Sibling Bereavement:
- Can you describe the impact that the death of xxxx had on your life at the time?
- Can you talk about your response to the death of your sibling? How did it affect you on a day to day basis?

Grief:
- When you look back on your grieving process, how would you explain it?
- Did you seem to get stuck in any phase of your grief?
- Have you been able to make sense of xxxx's death?
- Does xxxx have a place in your life today?

Psychosocial Development:
- Is there anything you stopped doing or delayed due to the death of your sibling?
- What impact do you think the death of your sibling had on study / work / relationships?
- In what way does xxx death affect you today?
- Is there anything that you would change in the way that you coped with xxx's death, knowing what you know now?
- Have you ever sought psychological support / counselling / psychiatric care?
- Has there been any positive outcomes from the tragedy of your brother's/sister's death?
- Have you experienced any other significant losses in your lifetime

Family:
- What was different in your family after the death of xxxx?
- What roles did family members play before and after the death of xxxx?
- What would you consider were your sources of support following the death of xxxxx?

Appendix F: Opening and Closing Statements

SIBLING STUDY – OPENING STATEMENT

Today I will cover some questions regarding the loss of your sibling, we will cover things like:

- your relationship
- how you coped with your sibling's death
- your experience of grief and
- questions about your family's response.

Some of the questions may prompt an emotional response and we'll talk about this at the end.

SIBLING STUDY – COMPLETION STATEMENT

What does it feel like to say that to me today?

Have you said it before?

How did you manage your response previously? What has worked?

What have you noticed about yourself in telling your story?

What have your found is different now to before when you've discussed your sibling's death?

These are serious questions today, are you surprised by your responses?

Was there any question that impacted you and has left you with something unanswered? What might you do with that?

Is there something that has become alive in you as a result of today – is it troubling you?

What do you need right now? What are you going to do about that?

What has been helpful?

It would be very normal to be thrown back into the initial rawness. You may feel sad, feel the loss, be taken back into the past. Look out for signs i.e. feeling sad, being more reflective than normal.

Provide handout sheet.

Adolescent Sibling Bereavement Study

Sources of Support

Dorothy Wheller

Dorothy is an experienced counsellor who specialises in grief and loss. Dorothy is familiar with the Adolescent Sibling Bereavement study. She is located in Armadale, Victoria, and can be contacted on 0412 760 784 to discuss one-on-one counselling.

Swinburne Psychology Clinic

The Swinburne Psychology Clinic was established to provide a range of low-cost psychological services to the Melbourne community.

It is now the largest university psychology clinic in Australia and it has achieved an enviable reputation, not only for the services it provides, but also for its teaching and research. Each year the Swinburne Psychology Clinic provides over 500 individuals with access to low-cost counselling, psychological assessment and group therapy treatment.

The Swinburne Psychology Clinic is located at the Hawthorn Campus. If you plan to attend the Clinic via public transport, it is located only a short walk from Glenferrie Station and Glenferrie Road. If you plan to drive to your appointment, parking is available in the surrounding streets and carparks.

Contact the Psychology Clinic

Email: psychclinic@swin.edu.au
Phone: (03) 9214 8653
Visit: Level 4, George Swinburne Building

http://www.swinburne.edu.au/lss/psychology/pc/

Lifeline

Lifeline provides all Australians experiencing a personal crisis with access to online, phone and face-to-face crisis support and suicide prevention services. Find out how these services can help you, a friend or loved one.

Telephone 13 11 14.

Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement

Grief Support

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling and Support Service provides a statewide specialist bereavement service for individuals, children and families who need assistance following the death of someone close to them. The service offers face-to-face bereavement counselling most of which is office-based, as well as bereavement support programs such as support groups, meditation and creativity workshops, information evenings, massage therapy and an annual Ceremony of Remembrance. In addition the service provides advanced training for bereavement counsellors by providing a supervised internship for experienced practitioners. Counsellors at the service come from a variety of disciplines including social work, psychology and psychotherapy.

The Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement Counselling and Support Service is located at 253 Wellington Road, Mulgrave, Victoria 3170. For further information phone (03) 9265 2100, fax (03) 9265 2150 or email counselling@grief.org.au

http://www.grief.org.au/grief_and_bereavement_support

The Compassionate Friends

TCF is a non profit organisation, registered as a charity. Its purpose is to offer friendship and understanding by reaching out to bereaved parents, to surviving siblings and other family members to support them in the grief and trauma which follows the death of a child from any cause and at any age.

TCF has a 24 hour telephone support service provided by volunteers. You can contact them on (03) 988 4944 or Toll Free number 1800 641 091.

http://www.compassionatefriendsvictoria.org.au/

BeyondBlue

beyondblue is working to reduce the impact of depression and anxiety in the community by raising awareness and understanding, empowering people to seek help, and supporting recovery, management and resilience.

1300 22 4636

beyondblue.com.au