

2023

## College Students' Psychosocial Functioning 2 to 5 Years After Death of a Parent

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# Walden University

College of Psychology and Community Services

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Carla Elbel

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Walden University  
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Abstract

College Students' Psychosocial Functioning 2 to 5 Years After Death of a Parent

by

Carla Elbel

MA, University of the Rockies, 2012

BS, Ashford University, 2008

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Clinical Psychology

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May 2023

## Abstract

The purpose of this study is to examine the relationship regarding a loss of parent during adolescence with psychosocial development into early college years (18 through 22 years of age) as measured by the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI). A sample of 15 young college students, ages 18 to 22, completed the MEPSI and a second sample of young college students 18 to 22, who lost a parent, completed the MEPSI. No significant difference was found in the variance of the means; therefore, the null hypothesis was retained. A small sample *t* test analysis was used to compare the means of the scores of the two groups. Recurring grief reactions (regrief phenomenon) were found to be non-significant. The outcome of this study added to the scant existing research showing a possible connection between parental loss experiences and manifesting psychological disturbance, vulnerability to delinquency later in life, and experiencing grief while moving through developmental milestones. This study contributes to positive social change by raising public awareness regarding the impact of recurring reactions to grief and the progression of that grief for adolescents who have experienced parental loss during the early years of college.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### Introduction

Despite the large numbers of individuals who lose a parent during childhood and adolescence, insufficient attention has been devoted to following up with the individuals as they continue to mature (Balk, 2011). At the time of writing, no grief theory existed that was specifically intended to describe the experiences of developing youths experiencing grief. The last decade or so of bereavement research in psychosocial developmental psychology has drawn from stage theories such as Erikson's psychosocial stages of development (Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). For example, it is well documented that parents play a key role in guiding children through development and that individuals will therefore experience grief over parental loss at different developmental phases throughout their lives (National Alliance for Grieving Children (NAGC), 2013; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Erikson's psychosocial stages of development are used to explain how perceptions of death may be conceptualized at each stage of maturation and then related to the experience of parental loss (Leming & Dickinson, 2016).

As the individual encounters each successive developmental stage, a possible crisis may occur due to a fundamental change in perspective (Erikson, 1993/1950). When an individual loses a parent, this fundamental change during each different stage of development may influence the individual's perspective of the loss as a whole. This means that children around 3 to 6 years of age face the crisis of *initiative versus guilt*, according to Erikson (1993/1950). Children at this stage may feel guilt or blame

themselves for the death due to the development of self-consciousness and the desire to mimic one's parents. Children around age 6 years old to puberty face the stage of *industry versus inferiority*, thus meaning that they may view this loss externally. As this external perspective develops, individuals may have the ability to test the reality of the death due to their maturing perspective of social interactions. Erikson described the crisis of puberty and adolescence as *identity versus identity diffusion*. This crisis occurs as youths relive the predicaments of earlier stages and try to connect what they have learned from their parents and social roles with the person they feel they are becoming. Individuals at puberty through young adulthood may have death anxiety after experiencing a parental loss caused by existential angst over the meaning of life and death (Balk, 2011; Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). These young adults often live in conflict, desiring both to maintain their relationships with the deceased parent and to be a unique and independent individual. According to Erikson (1993/1950), the first adult stage sees intimacy vie against self-absorption. The perspective that consequently develops requires developing intimate relationships with others. College-aged individuals who experience a parental loss may struggle as a result of not having these significant relationships to draw upon as they seek out new relationships in their lives (Balk, 2011).

Much of the existing research regarding parental loss in adolescence focuses on the manner in which this death is experienced, which differs depending on the youth's stage of development at the time the loss occurs (Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). However, few scholars have continued the research by working with

the same individuals in order to discover if this loss produces grief again when psychosocial abilities change due to maturation into another stage of development (Erikson, 1993/1950; Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Advancing the research into the effects of losing a parent requires an understanding of the quality components of the parent–child relationship and how the loss may strengthen grief patterns as the individual matures into adulthood. Due to the lack of scholarship on this matter, there is great value in completing research that sheds light on parental loss in the developing individual and the effects that such a loss has at each stage of Erikson’s (1993/1950) model, as I intended in this study. A parental loss that occurs while an individual is maturing may be integral to future grief trends or may influence psychosocial trends that occur with each stage of development.

### **Background**

Of all the losses that a maturing individual may endure, parental loss seems to be most likely to manifest in psychological disturbance, lead to delinquency later in life, and evoke grief when maturing through developmental milestones (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Sensitive, responsive, consistent caregiving is one of the first critical elements that a parent provides in order for a developing infant to establish both trust and mistrust (Erikson, 1993/1950; Oltjenbruns, 2001). The ongoing quality of this parental relationship and the inner trust that continues through the developmental stages may provide a solid foundation for difficult periods later in life (Erikson, 1993/1950).

Parental loss may influence grief patterns that affect an individual's ability to adapt and cope with psychological issues that emerge as one ages during the first 2 years after the death occurs (Cerel et al., 2006). The loss of the reliability of a parent may affect youths' abilities to trust that their needs and desires can be fulfilled. A parental loss may disrupt the solid foundation of inner trust for developmental stages that lay ahead for the individual. Additionally, the individual who experiences parental loss may be predisposed to recurring grief trends while maturing (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Parents guide children while they try to balance the urge to pursue goals that are socially accepted rather than those which are not, particularly during the initiative versus guilt stage (Erikson, 1993/1950). Thus, children who lose parents at this time in the maturation process may find it more difficult to find their meaning or purpose. Parents' beliefs about their children's competencies are additionally associated with their children's own beliefs during the industry versus inferiority stage (Erikson, 1993/1950). Children who lose a parent at this stage may thus feel that they have not learned skills that are valued by society.

Fidelity is an extension of the trust that occurs during infancy. In adolescence, it becomes essential to trust oneself (Erikson, 1993/1950). Adolescents extend their trust to mentors or loved ones and intimacy thus develops through the sharing of thoughts before testing to see if the same ideas are reflected by another. Adolescents who resolve the identity versus identity confusion may find a sense of belonging with loved ones, friends, and companions (Erikson, 1993/1950). Parents guide their adolescents during this stage by helping them to choose occupations and adopt values.

While exposure to parental loss during any one of these stages has been shown to increase the likelihood of psychological disturbance and vulnerability to delinquency later in life (Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013), there is little research about how youths perceive parental loss throughout the rest of their lives. Research involving parental loss has suggested that long-term outcomes may include revisiting grief and the feeling that such an experience is abnormal (Dowdney, 2000; NAGC, 2013). Acute grief may manifest soon after a parental loss. For example, bereaved children may experience such psychosocial difficulties as intermittent sleep, angry outbursts, anxiety, and depression (Cerel et al., 2006). The loss of a parent may shape a person's life for years or an entire lifetime. The social challenge thus lies in cultivating an environment that encourages interactions that are beneficial to maintaining health and well-being for such persons.

There are many aspects of Western culture that diminish opportunities for expressing grief should it return in such individuals (Berk, 2008). In general, Western culture tends to value independence, strength, and competitiveness (Berk, 2008). Discussing grief and loss, in contrast, can leave one feeling stigmatized (NAGC, 2013). The norm seems to be to manage grief internally and to quickly recover from any loss incurred. This *stay quiet* approach may have lasting psychosocial implications for society and, in particular, those who suffer the loss of a parent during childhood (NAGC, 2013).

Even fewer researchers have studied how a parental loss that occurs 2 to 5 years prior to entering college affects the manner in which these students develop psychosocial functioning and coping strategies (Balk, 2011). As such youths mature and begin making

commitments to others or feel isolation, they may again experience feelings of grief. This grief occurs, in part, due to guilt and the bereaved person's inability to bring back a close relationship with a deceased parent (Janowiak et al., 1995). As a result, these individuals may experience not only grief, but also feelings of isolation, due to the fact that in Western culture they are usually expected to have resolved the parental loss and thus often feel uncomfortable sharing such experiences of mourning. Furthermore, these individuals may not feel comfortable talking to others in their lives due to anxiety over the possibility that others who have experienced a similar loss may have moved on or, conversely, that mentioning such a loss may make another bereaved youth feel unhappy again. Additionally, peers in the bereaved youth's life may not have experienced such a loss, leading the individual to feel that others are simply incapable of understanding the nature of this grief (Balk, 2011). As a result, the long-term psychosocial developmental trends of individuals after the loss of a parent offer a significant area for research in the field of psychology, as the recurring impact of the loss on these individuals, termed *recurring grief* by Oltjenbruns (2001), requires greater understanding (Balk, 2011). Such findings may inform experts on the returning grief that some individuals who experience parental loss undergo.

While there exists some research regarding college students and adults who have lost parents during childhood, these studies fail to consider grief during particular stages in Erikson's development model (1993/1950). The intent of these studies was, instead, to determine long-term outcomes of parental loss during adulthood.

The increasing evidence that developing individuals revisit parental loss

throughout their lives highlights the importance of assessing theories and interventions that might inform the development of a new way to approach the developing individual's grief experience. Parents are influential in developing individuals' abilities to adapt and cope throughout the maturation process. Intermittent grief due to parental loss may negatively affect these developmental trends. Parent and offspring interactions offer the means by which an individual learns about the surrounding internal and external world (Erikson, 1993/1950). Parents are thus crucial for an individual's basic developmental needs (Berk, 2008). Certain developmental tasks must be met and mastered at each period in order for normal development to occur (Berk, 2008; Erikson, 1993/1950; Oltjenbruns, 2001). From the beginning of life, infants are dependent upon parents to meet their needs with regard to clothing, shelter, and human contact. They form attachments to adults while these adults, in turn, form attachments to them (Bowlby, 1951). As toddlers become more self-reliant, parents' guide them to keep unsafe impulses in check (Berk, 2008). During childhood, children develop more self-control under a parent's strict guidance. For example, parents support their children with efforts to develop trust again during adolescence as youths search for their identities through personal, sexual, and occupational maturity (Erikson, 1993/1950). Losing a parent at any of these stages can not only add to the number of obstacles encountered but also induce grief as the person matures through each stage. Parental loss has been linked to recurring grief, leading to potential psychological disturbance and delinquent behavior later in life (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013).



Parental loss and psychosocial development may interact to affect the development of an individual's grief reactions as well (Oltjenbruns, 2001). For example, the loss of the relationship with a parent has been implicated in the disturbance of acute adapting and coping abilities (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Recurring grief reactions may therefore be a key factor that leads to disruptions in the maturation process.

### **Defining Grief**

To understand the impact of grief, it is essential to first define what this term means from a psychological perspective. Psychoanalytic pioneer Sigmund Freud was one of the first to study the difference between grief and mourning and depression (then termed melancholia). His work from 1917 illuminated the significance of grief and the long-term effects of trauma. His research involved women and their reactions to loss over time. Freud (1957/1917) studied adult women who were experiencing sorrow and established psychoanalytical research into the difference between grief and depression. Freud defined mourning as a subconscious internalization of the grief that occurs with the loss of a person or object. Melancholia, in contrast, was defined as the same loss resulting in a severe grief reaction that interferes with psychological and physical health. Such an impediment to the individual's ability to function, Freud argued, may eventually come to require treatment. Freud additionally defined mourning as a normal reaction to a loss that, with time, corrects itself and thus does not require treatment. Interference with the process of mourning in and of itself thus can be harmful. Melancholia and mourning, in Freud's study, are given the same basic indicators of extraordinary sadness, a tendency to

pull away from regular activities, loss of ability to fall in love, and a loss of motivation to perform. (Freud, 1917). However, the definition of melancholia goes further to include an exterior force interfering with the ego (later this exterior force is termed the superego), aspects not found in the normal mourning process. Furthermore, the definition of melancholia includes a disintegration of self-affection to a level of telling oneself that that they are worthless that results in the want to reprimand oneself (Freud, 1917). Essentially, in the case of melancholia, the loss of the love object results in a degree of unconscious self-hatred.

Freud (1957/1917) only briefly mentioned the manner in which a developing individual experiences loss. He defined identification as a preliminary stage during which an individual begins investing emotional energy in a specific person or object. The initial identification process occurs during the oral stage of development and exists between the child and his or her parents. The infant unconsciously identifies the parents as part of him or herself and thus begins replicating their behaviors. Therefore, a parental loss at this stage can result in narcissistic identification, a process by which one blames oneself for a death or otherwise feels guilty about the loss; such an experience can notably lead to melancholia later in life. Freud considered the oral stage of development as a crucial time during which a child begins identifying with his or her parents. Thus, parental loss during this stage of development can greatly influence the formulation of the eventual adult whom the child becomes. The concept of grief that resurfaces at a later time has only recently gained attention among researchers and is discussed in further detail below.

## **Recurring Grief**

Recent studies have just begun to consider the reciprocal aspects of parental loss and recurring grief. Preliminary research in this area is beginning to establish that children revisit grief at different times throughout their life and that the affected youths may view such an experience to be abnormal (Dowdney, 2000; NAGC, 2013). Later in life, some youths exhibit symptoms of conduct disorder, substance abuse, and functional impairment (Kaplow et al., 2010). These effects may be due to recurring grief reactions.

Development, at times, depends upon changes that occur regarding conceptions surrounding the various domains of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development. Each of these areas, in turn, affects the development of the others (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). During the five periods of development (the prenatal period, infancy and toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence), the developing individual has certain needs or tasks that must be met in order to ensure positive development (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Disruptions such as a parental loss may lead to one not meeting such needs or fulfilling significant accomplishments (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Relatively new research is shedding light on parental loss and related grief patterns. In particular, recurring grief seems to be a common theme among these studies (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Understanding grief reactions and patterns regarding how mourning influences individuals as they go through

the five developmental periods is just one step in the process of helping individuals who lose a parent achieve well-being.

The foundation of Oltjenbruns' (2001) grief and regrief phenomena builds upon these key developmental stage theories, together forming the basis of the present research study. The regrief theory views youth grief as interwoven with the ongoing developmental process rather than something that vanishes after a mourning period. Once a youth loses a parent, grief may become a part of the individual's maturation process, as he or she must adapt and cope without the parent as he or she grows. The loss of a parental relationship thus may have a profound impact on the ways in which individuals cope with grief as they reevaluate the meaning of family. This intermittent grief may disrupt psychosocial development (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Understanding the implications of grief passage for individuals as they go through developmental trends may shed light on the counter regulating influence of parental loss and psychosocial development (Oltjenbruns, 2001). The grief process is discussed in more detail below.

### **The Grief Process**

The grief process was first described by Freud (1957/1917) as a succession of actions and outlooks related to coping with the traumatic circumstance of a change in the eminence of a relationship. Since Freud's groundbreaking work, many scholars have attempted to understand coping and grief. In particular, Elizabeth Kubler-Ross (1969) tried to summarize the response to a loss through death by outlining the five stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. However, it has since been found that not all bereaved persons experience every purported stage and that the grief process

may be highly subjective (Maciejewsk et al., 2007). Drawing upon critiques of Kubler Ross's work, Robert Kavanaugh (1972) described a variety of behaviors and feelings that are part of the grief process for adults, producing change in the homeostasis of the bereaved. The homeostatic changes referred to included shock and denial, disorganization, volatility, guilt, loss and loneliness, relief, and reestablishment. These changes were deemed positive functions in the social process of adaptation to loss (Kavanaugh, 1972). *Denial*, Kavanaugh argued, can be a temporary safe place to shelter an individual from normal living. *Disorganization* is the stage in the bereavement process during which the individual may feel out of touch with reality. *Volatility* refers to the stage during which the bereaved may go into fits of rage as his or her inner world begins to feel threatened by external forces due to the death of a loved one. *Guilt* is a social mechanism utilized by the bereaved in order to resolve the discord that he or she may feel when trying to explain why a loved one has died. Feelings of *loss and loneliness* refers to the stage during which social situations begin to feel different due to a loved one's absence. Over time, *relief* may come to bereaved persons if they realize that they can accomplish social situations without their lost loved ones. Finally, Kavanaugh explained that *reestablishment* involves extensive adjustment and time, the process of adapting to life without the deceased.

This understanding of the process of grief was built upon in 1982 when the results of the Omega Project (also known as the Harvard Bereavement Study) were published. This study found that mourning is necessary for anyone who experiences a loss and that four tasks must be accomplished to resolve the grief that accompanies loss such grief

(Oltjenbruns, 2001). Unlike Kavanaugh (1972), the Harvard study scholars found that grief resolution was not a given, but that conscience grief work must be applied in order to progress beyond mourning. According to Oltjenbruns (2001), the researchers argued that the first task in grief resolution is to accept the loss. The second task is to experience the pain of grief. The third task is to adjust external circumstances to make sense of phenomena without the deceased person's presence. The last task is to withdraw emotional ties to deceased and progress to another relationship.

Since the initial work of these researchers, it has been found that children grieve in a manner that is similar but also quite distinct from adults (Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). There has been some research into the manner in which bereavement is experienced differently depending upon the stage of development the individual is progressing through immediately after the parental loss occurs (Oltjenbruns, 2001). However, few studies have addressed whether or not individuals who have lost a parent experience grief again when their psychosocial abilities change due to maturing into the next stage of development as depicted in Erikson's model (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Even fewer researchers have studied the manner in which a parental loss that occurs 2 to 5 years prior impacts college students' psychosocial functioning and how they eventually attempt to cope with the parental loss (Balk, 2011). The developmental trend of making commitments to others or feeling isolated may evoke feelings of grief as the previously bereaved youth feels guilty and the inability to reinstate a close relationship with the deceased parent is truly realized (Janowiak et al., 1995). As a result, these individuals may experience not only grief, but also feelings of isolation due to the fact that they are

usually expected to have resolved their grief. Additionally, these individuals may not feel comfortable talking to others in their lives due to the feeling that companions who have experienced the same loss may have adjusted or may become despondent again upon discussion of the loss. Furthermore, many peers in the bereaved's life will not have experienced this type of loss, thus further alienating the individual (Balk, 2011). As a result of these issues, the long-term psychosocial developmental trends of individuals after the loss of a parent more than 2 years previously offers an important area for research for the field of psychology (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001). This understanding may inform experts further regarding the returning bereavement experienced by some individuals who have suffered parental loss.

### **Addressing the Limitations of Previous Research**

The little research available on this topic comes from the United Kingdom (UK) and studies conducted by Oltjenbruns (2001) in the U.S. As discussed above, these studies have found that youths may revisit grief at different times throughout their lifespans and that such individuals may not feel that such returning grief is normal (Dowdney, 2000; NAGC, 2013). Psychosocial functioning may offer a communication link between grief reactions to the parental loss; such communication may be vital to the establishment of grief processes that influence the susceptibility to damaging effects in later developmental stages (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

Psychosocial trends may elicit grief reactions due to a prior parental loss that affects such functioning. Just as prior parental loss has been linked to psychological functioning in one's adult life, it may be possible that returning grief processes years after

a death may affect psychosocial functioning throughout the development process. If, in fact, recurring grief processes due to a prior loss of a parent are stimulated by psychosocial developmental trends then, perhaps the loss of the relationship with the deceased is an integral part of the adaptation of the maturing psychosocial functions. Research in attachment theory suggests that childhood experiences with parents deeply affect the nature of future experiences with significant others in later life (Bowlby, 1951). Furthermore, parental loss while maturing may influence psychosocial development through intermittent grief patterns. The loss of a parent who provided care, comfort, and direction for psychosocial trends may lead to the disruption of psychosocial function as a developing individual must learn to adapt and cope without this parent at developmental milestones. Thus, this absence may induce recurring grief reactions. The influence of this recurring grief at each stage of psychosocial development is just beginning to be explored. What is yet to be established is why 1 in 5 children who experience the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological disturbance, why such persons are vulnerable to delinquency later in life, and how individuals experience grief while moving through developmental milestones.

### **Statement of the Problem**

As of the time of writing, no grief theory specifically addressing youths who lose one or both parents exists. Current research has instead delineated long-term outcomes regarding increased vulnerability to psychological disturbance, delinquency, and depression later in adult life (Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011). The majority of parental loss research has focused on the acute grief response or long-term outcomes



without giving equal attention to developmental trends. According to Leming and Dickinson (2016), few have studied the relationship between growth through the stages depicted in Erik Erikson's (1993) psychosocial development theory and the perception of death. Despite this lack of research, studies have documented the negative long-term implications of parental loss on children later in their adult life, including psychological disturbance and vulnerability to delinquency. However, a greater understanding of how children and youth experience parental loss in the moment and over time is needed to inform the development of treatments and programs that may assist in assuaging these negative long-term impacts. This lack of insight into the experiences of bereaved youth has left an opportunity for future research, including that which was undertaken in the current study. In addition, there is a need within the field of psychology to improve understanding of how a parental loss affects psychosocial development and grief patterns in maturing individuals, as this study also strove to do.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this quantitative study was to discover whether or not psychosocial functioning in individuals who have lost a parent 2 to 5 years previously is affected over time as hypothesized in Oltjenbruns' (2001) regrief phenomenon. The independent variable (IV) in this study was the experience of a loss of a parent during adolescence. The dependent variable (DV) was the degree of disruption in psychosocial functioning when the same individual goes to college and manages additional separation and individuation from his or her parents. However, the additional variable of recurring grief reactions (regrief phenomenon) may affect the degree to which psychosocial

functioning disruption occurs.

### **Research Question**

The research question and hypothesis for this study are as follows:

#### **Research Question 1**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population psychosocial development and grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ1: Are there differences in psychosocial functioning as measured by the MEPSI between college students (18-22 years of age) who experienced a prior loss of a parent during the stage of adolescence (2-5 years before going to college) and college students (18-22 years of age) that did not experience the prior death of a parent if grief returns.

#### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the variance of all the scales of the MEPSI between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:  $H = \eta = \eta$ .

*H<sub>01</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the identity achievement subscale.

*H<sub>02</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the intimacy subscale.

*H<sub>03</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the total scale score of the MEPSI.

### **Research Question 2**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population and their returning grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ2: If a parental loss occurs during adolescence, will grief return to disrupt psychosocial development when the individual separates from home and goes to college?

### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>0</sub>*:: There is no significant difference in the variance of the scales of the TRIG between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:  
 $H = \eta^2 = \eta^2$ .

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by a central theory, Oltjenbruns' (2001) grief/regrief phenomena. The regrief phenomenon described by Oltjenbruns takes a developmental stance when it comes to grief. This theory posits that a developing individual who

experiences death may cope with such a loss by utilizing tools from the development stage they are undergoing when the death occurs. Then, as the person matures, the loss may take on new meaning due to advances in developmental milestones. As a result, the grief process may start afresh. For example, the loss of a parent may have different implications depending on the stage of development in which a youth finds oneself at the time. This recurring grief may moderate coping and adapting skills that are acquired during each stage of development, ultimately impacting both the youth's well-being and self-identity. Disruption or the inability to acquire coping and adapting trends thus may have lasting effects on psychosocial development.

The ability to manage grief also depends upon an individual's maturity level (Oltjenbruns, 2001). This capacity is contingent upon an individual's adapting and coping abilities, as well as environmental factors experienced at the time of the parental loss (Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Most children, unlike adults, do not have prior experience with grief that help them react to and understand a loss. The death of a parent itself will thus serve as the impetus for learning about death and how to handle grief.

### **Nature of the Study**

This quantitative study utilized an exploratory and descriptive design due to the fact that none of the variables could be manipulated. This design is appropriate when variables cannot be manipulated or controlled and when participants are not randomly assigned to groups. This study has one independent variable (IV), the loss of a parent during adolescence. The first dependent variable (DV) is the degree of disruption in

psychosocial functioning when a previously bereaved individual attends college and further separates from his or her parents. A possible second DV is one or more recurring grief reactions (regrief phenomenon) that may affect the degree to which psychosocial functioning disruption occurs. The study encompassed two different groups, one group of individuals who lost a parent during adolescence and one control group of individuals who did not lose a parent during adolescence. The rationale for this grouping was to determine whether a covariate of recurring grief, as measured by the TRIG, disrupts psychosocial functioning. Because the IV, the previous loss of a parent, is a preexisting condition, participants could not be randomized into groups.

Psychosocial functioning was defined through the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI), a self-report scale that quantifies the progress of individuals as they go through the developmental stages described by Erikson (1993/1950). College students (age 18–22) reported on their progress regarding resolving the conflicts identified at each of Erikson’s developmental stages ending with the Intimacy-Isolation scale that measures identity achievement, commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, interpersonal commitments, and intimacy. This study aimed to improve the samples utilized in previous studies with the inclusion of a non-bereaved control group. Furthermore, this study matched participants from the bereaved group with the control group by considering elements such as age and socioeconomic status through the use of a family history questionnaire. This element was included to help control for other variables that may play a key role in the scores of the DV. The MEPSI scores were

compared among the two groups. The level of grief the individual is feeling while at college was determined through the Texas Revised Inventory of Grief (TRIG).

Quantitative analysis of results from the MEPSI and TRIG aimed to help build a vigorous body of knowledge surrounding adolescents' grief experiences in the years following a parental death. Scores of the MEPSI from the group of participants who have lost a parent were statistically compared to the scores of the MEPSI from the group of non-bereaved participants using a small samples T test in order to determine if there is a significant difference between the two groups before the scores of the TRIG. Then a small samples independent T test was run on the scores of the TRIG to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups on grieving. Due to the fact that the IV cannot be manipulated, causation was not assessed. Internal validity is weaker for quasi-experimental designs than experimental designs; therefore, participants were not randomly assigned to groups.

### **Definitions of Theoretical Constructs and Terms**

While terms like *grief*, *grief trends*, and *grief processes* are similar, it is important to understand the distinction between these concepts for the purpose of this study. The central terms that were utilized in this study and their definitions for the purpose of this research are given below.

*Adolescence*: The stage of life defined by the onset of sexual maturity (Erikson, 1993/1950).

*Developmental approach:* Social science concerned with the domains of the physical, psychosocial, and cognitive aspects of going through developmental stages (Berk, 2008).

*Grief:* An emotion that induces sadness at the loss of a loved one (Leming & Dickinson, 2016).

*Grief trends:* A coping process that requires actions and energy in response to the grief induced by the loss (Leming & Dickinson, 2016).

*Grieving process:* A psychological construct encompassing a series of behaviors and emotions related to coping and adapting to the stressful situation of a change in the status of a relationship (Leming & Dickinson, 2016).

*Regrief phenomenon:* A construct that interweaves the grieving process with the developmental approach (physical, psychological, and social processes) of growth stage (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

*Young adulthood (or early college age):* Persons aged 18–22 who may or may not be attending a college or university (Balk, 2011).

### **Assumptions and Limitations**

I assumed that the willingness of the volunteers to participate in this study did not bias the study, and that those individuals who may experience higher grief levels did not refrain from participating as a result of their mourning. I also assumed that the participants of this study completed the scales honestly and to the best of their ability. Lastly, I assumed that the TRIG and MEPSI were appropriate means for measuring the chosen variables.

The generalizability of this study may be limited to similar populations of young adults (college aged individuals, aged 18–22) given the sample population included in this research. There are potential limitations to studies such as this one that depend on the memory of participants. For this and other reasons, recalling the relationship between adolescents and their parents may be difficult for some of the participants. These difficulties may result in inaccurate or biased answers. However, this study will be more recent in the participants' minds than retrospective studies due to the time limitations of 2 to 5 years.

### **Significance**

The gap in the research that this study sought to fill was identified through a vigorous review of the literature, presented in the following chapter; such literature simply failed to account for the reasons as to why 1 in 5 children who experience the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological disturbance, why such persons are also vulnerable to delinquency later in life, and how individuals experience grief while moving through developmental milestones (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Therefore, individuals may not be receiving or be aware of available resources if and when grief over parental loss returns. Hence, this research was intended to provide essential new information to facilitate understanding of developmental trends of the process underlying change to an individual's grief over the loss of a parent as an individual matures over time.

The results of this study may further substantiate the regrief phenomenon theory described by Oltjenbruns (2001). The scant studies that have investigated whether or not



grief is ongoing or happens during key stages of a person's development have yielded contradictory results (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Some researchers have suggested that individuals face problems related to adapting and coping in the face of a parental death, while others have found that the opposite occurs (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Given the limited previous research and its inconsistent findings, the current study added additional information and data to the psychological knowledge base regarding the long-term experience of bereaved youth who lost one or both parents. I hypothesized that this study would demonstrate that developing individuals grieve in a manner that is unique from persons at other stages in life, adding to the understanding of how adolescents deal with prior parental loss when they leave home to attend college and what parental loss means to them. In short, I aimed to discover and explain what happens to these individuals as they mature and face new psychosocial functioning challenges.

This research outcomes supported the psychological practice by providing data that informs the development of a new approach to understanding the traditional undergraduate college student's grief experience. Overall, this study was conducted to invoke positive social change by raising public awareness regarding the commonness and impact of recurring reactions to grief and progression during the early years of college. This study may plant the seed of awareness by providing psychologists with the insight required to help college institutions build bereavement services and educate communities in an innovative manner. With this expanded knowledge and community awareness, the psychologist will then be in a better position to help traditional undergraduate students who have experienced parental loss avoid major disruptions to their development.

## Summary

Past research establishes that a parental loss during childhood or adolescence has a profound effect on the psychosocial developmental trends of the stage that the individual is currently passing through, as well as affecting them later into adulthood (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). A parental loss seems to influence whether or not an individual is likely to manifest psychological disturbance, whether they are vulnerable to delinquency later in life, and the potential manifestation of grief while moving through various developmental milestones (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Attachment theory posits that parental nurturing plays an essential role in establishing psychosocial well-being in the developing individual. How this theory relates to grief, in terms of parental loss, and an individual's maturation process has only recently begun to receive scholarly attention. The regrief phenomenon suggests that, as youths develop, they will revisit grief at particular stages (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Grief processes due to a parental loss during any of the psychosocial stages described by Erikson (1993/1950) may affect psychosocial functioning as an individual matures.

Scholars have also suggested that young individuals who lose a parent struggle with adapting and coping as they mature (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001). In other words, parental loss may be superimposed upon each stage of development during a person's lifespan (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Grief processes due to parental loss may lay the groundwork for the manner in which this death influences psychosocial trends in

developing individuals. If a youth experiences intermittent grief from this loss, then psychosocial development may be disrupted. This study sought to determine whether or not there exists an association between grief processes due to the loss of a parent during adolescence and psychosocial functioning as a college-aged individual (18–22).

Chapter 2 is a review of the existing literature and explains how this research suggests an association between psychosocial trends and grief processes due to parental loss during the development process. The chapter begins with a description of the regrief phenomenon theory, which provides the theoretical framework for this study (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Chapter 2 also is a discussion of literature that challenges the outcomes of certain research in these areas. The chapter concludes with an overview of the implications of past research for the current study.

Chapter 3 is a description of the methodology used to investigate this study's research question. This chapter is about the use of the small samples T test as a valid means to analyze the possibility of a relationship between grief processes due to parental loss and psychosocial trends. The chapter additionally is a description of the sample population, procedures, ethical considerations, measures, and analysis of the data.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this literature review, I established that there was a need for continued research regarding the developmental trends in the change process that a traditional college aged student (18 to 22 years of age) grieving over the loss of a parent undergoes over time as they mature. Previous researchers have failed to examine what occurs during the period of time between the loss of the parent and adulthood (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Data have often been gathered years after the parent's death (Lampton & Cremeans, 2002; Mitchell, et al., 2006; Nguyen & Scott, 2013), which has led to a paucity of research of whether or not the grief processes changed as the individual matured (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Moreover, most extant studies have been cross-sectional in design (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). Cross sectional design research is only on one time frame (immediately following the parental loss). Researchers omit long periods of time or investigate only one time frame fail to address grief processes that change over time. Therefore, more studies from the longitudinal perspective are needed (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Other researchers have begun to explore whether losing a parent during youth is interrelated with domains of development; the findings have been contradictory. Some researchers have suggested that youth have difficulty adapting and coping in the face of a parental death (Oltjenbruns, 2001), while other researchers have found the opposite (Balk, 2011). Given that the parent-child relationship is a major contextual influence on development (NAGC, 2013); Oltjenbruns, 2001), the loss of a parent during one's childhood may impact an individual's personality, as well as their emotional and social

skills (NAGC, 2013; Oltjenbruns, 2001). However, the factors that determine whether these consequences have an enduring negative impact on an individual or can be overcome by said individual have yet to be investigated (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Lampton & Creamons, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2006; Nguyen & Scott, 2013).

The theoretical framework that I used to guide this study was Kevin Ann Oltjenbruns' (2001) childhood grief theory, which is based on organismic developmental theories that regard development as a series of distinct stages. At each stage people cope with different kinds of problems and develop different kinds of abilities. Each stage builds on the previous one and prepares the way for the next. One of the main tenets of this theory is that people who suffer a loss at one stage of development may express certain reactions to the loss that are conducive to the developmental stage that they are experiencing. Oltjenbruns (2001) posited that those individuals might express recurring grief reactions to the loss at the next stage of development—a situation which she termed the *regrief phenomenon*. This type of grief that resurfaces episodically may be interrelated with the new developmental problems and different kind of abilities the individual who experienced a parental loss is developing at the next stage of development.

I conducted a search of the literature to locate peer-reviewed journal articles through Walden University databases including PubMed/Medline, PsycINFO, and Academic Search Premier, the NAGC and practicing grief psychologist websites. The terms I used while conducting the literature search included *childhood bereavement*,

*bereavement on developmental stages, death studies, traumatic resilience, risk variables and development, archival data, and mortality and complicated grief.* In addition, the academic books on related topics I reviewed were to locate relevant journal articles referenced by the author(s).

I wrote this chapter to provide a brief overview of developmental stage theory, followed by an examination of the evolution of Oltjenbruns' childhood grief theory as the theoretical foundation for this study. I also discussed research on the influence of the parent-youth relationship on child development. In addition, I explored the loss of a parent studies addressing both positive and negative outcomes. I found that the limitations of the extant studies are considered, including reasons why these research results have been controversial and have failed to provide empirical evidence to prove or disprove the recurrence of grief. This chapter concludes on the ways in which this study contributed to the current gaps in the literature, as well as the methodological tools utilized.

### **Developmental Stage Theories**

The foundation for Oltjenbruns' grief and regrief phenomena is based on developmental stage theories. These theories are based on the concept that human beings undergo processes of development (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Developmental psychologists look at ways individuals change from conception through the life span (Oltjenbruns, 2001). They study change and stability in the various domains of physical development, cognitive development, and psychosocial development of the self. Each affects the others. The five periods of development that are termed the prenatal period, infancy and

toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescence are social concepts that developmental psychologists use to develop theories on how individuals undergo these developmental processes (Balk, 2011; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). In each period, individuals have characteristic developmental needs and tasks (Balk, 2011; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Some theorists subscribe to an organismic model of development that includes the existence of stages of development. In the next section I will summarize the organismic theories of development by Sigmund Freud and Erik Erikson.

### **Freud's Development Theory**

Sigmund Freud was one of the first psychologists to connect development with children and adolescents (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Freud emphasized the significance of early life experience for child and adolescent development. His psychosexual development theory included the oral, anal, phallic, latency, and genital stages. He proposed that trauma experienced during any of these stages could potentially impede development, leaving a person abidingly at a juvenile level of development (Berk, 2008). Freud theorized that adults could spend an entire lifetime attempting to resolve unmet needs from childhood or adolescence (Berk, 2008). If a child's needs go unattended during a particular stage of development, that child's maturation may be stunted as he or she continually strives toward the fulfillment of such needs during each subsequent stage of development. This process determines the nature of the individual's eventual adult personality, a characteristic that is largely dependent upon the stage on which the individual fixates (Berk, 2008). Parents play a crucial role in whether or not an

arrest in development occurs during the first three stages of life (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Freud suggested that if children receive too little or too much fulfillment at any of these stages, they become at risk for fixation (Berk, 2008). During the oral stage, infants whose needs, such as feeding, are not met may grow into adults who bite their nails or may develop a personality that is overly critical in nature. A toddler whose needs are not met by strict toilet training may become fixated at the anal stage, leading to an adult who is compulsively clean, strictly tied to schedules and routines, or especially messy. During the phallic stage of development, boys usually develop sexual attraction to their mothers while girls become attracted to their fathers, leading to aggressive urges toward the parent of the same sex as the child. Children generally resolve these feelings by identifying with the same-sex parent and then continuing into the latency stage. During the latency stage, children become far more aware about both themselves and society. Sexual urges become repressed at this stage, only to return during the genital stage of development (Berk, 2008).

Furthermore, Freud proposed three parts of the psychic apparatus that develops early in a child's life and directly relates to personality; he referred to these three elements as the id, the ego, and the superego (Berk, 2008). Babies rely upon the id, the element of the self that seeks immediate satisfaction, as a means of fulfilling their basic needs for survival. As a child develops into a toddler, he or she develops an ego that represents reason and works with the id in order to see that basic needs and desires are fulfilled in a manner that is not detrimental to the person in the long term. The superego then develops around the age of 5 or 6, bringing the aspect of the conscience into an



individual's personality. It is at this point that the person's value system begins to develop. The ego mediates between the id, which wants immediate satisfaction, and the superego, which demands high expectations and standards. Babies and young children may be self-centered by only knowing right and wrong from what parents tell them. After reaching 5 or 6 years of age children begin to understand and add to the values that parents have instilled in them. Within this model of development, the first 5 or 6 years of a person's life almost entirely determines the eventual person that this individual will become.

There are some limitations to Freud's theory. First, central to Freud's biological conception of human development and behavior was the sex instinct (Leahy, 2004). In his time, sex was an issue. Victorians did not accept the animal part of their nature (Leahy, 2004). Victorian culture was against sexual pleasure, and Victorians were burdened by an oppressive sense of guilt (Leahy, 2004). As a result, Freud the clinician identified sex as the root of his patients' problems because at the time and place, his patients had a hard time accommodating sex alongside their economic and moral aspirations (Leahy, 2004).

### **Erikson's Seven Stages of Development**

Erik Erikson expanded upon Freud's developmental theories and argued that development is a lifelong process rather than almost entirely dependent upon elements of one's childhood. He explained psychosocial development by categorizing seven stages of maturation through which most individuals pass (Berk, 2008). In order for a healthy ego to develop, issues that emerge during each of the seven stages of development must be

balanced, finding a medium between positive traits and corresponding negative traits (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). For example, at approximately 3 to 6 years of age, most children contend with the importance of taking initiative and admitting liability rather than coming to experience guilt. From around the age of 6 and continuing through puberty, adolescents generally grapple with learning new skills rather than experiencing incompetence. From approximately puberty to young adulthood, a person gains a sense of self and may feel confusion with regard to the many roles that an individual may experience. During young adulthood, a person will often seek to become committed to others in order to avoid feelings of isolation. To successfully progress through each stage of development, the person accomplishes the requisite tasks by mastering coping skills connected to that specific task. For example, this stage lays the groundwork for coping with the challenges of adult life. They learn to organize their abilities, needs, interests, and desires so they can be expressed in the social context. Once these abilities are mastered the virtue of fidelity can be accomplished allowing for the person to move on to the next stage of figuring out intimacy versus isolation. Parents play a particularly significant role in this process, often guiding their children to develop these necessary coping skills and promoting positive development toward adulthood.

Erikson's theory has held up better than Freud's, with the strengths being its emphasis on social and cultural influences and on development beyond adolescence (Balk, 2011; Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). His theory has been used to examine how coping skills are necessary to master developmental tasks in order for people to move forward in their development. In addition, his theories that

involve self-esteem (virtue of purpose) are global and tend to reflect adult approval (Balk, 2011; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Overall, Erikson provided the foundations that individuals are going through constant change in their psychosocial development. Therefore, an individual may express symptoms at one stage of development and entirely different symptoms at another stage (Levine & Sallee, 1992).

However, there are some limitations to Erikson's theory. The theory may be in need of modification to overcome gender bias favoring men (Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016). The identity formation during adolescence and intimacy during young adulthood recognize masculine values of autonomy and individualism over relational values favored by women. Another issue is sexual orientation across the life span as in the adolescents and young adult stages of identity formation and intimacy. The theory does not offer stages of development for homosexual individuals. The theory does not cover their struggle with support systems, with friends and family that often is unable to recognize and accept homosexual orientation. Next, socioeconomic issues that have impact on violence and death of adolescent youth are not accounted for in the theory (Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Last, different parenting styles of cultures are not expressed in the theory (Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Some mothers tend to be punitive or overprotective, whereas others are warm and accepting. Therefore, the result of these limitations may be dependent on the social acceptance of where the person develops.

Regardless of the limitations of Erikson's theory there are emerging trends his developmental perspective. Erikson's ideas of overcoming conflicts in the stages of

development in order to develop strengths has shifted orientation to wellness. For example, Wagner (1996) presented optimal development as a developmental perspective that emphasizes health and wellness over pathology. He noted that what constitutes optimal development varies to some degree contextually in terms of culture and so forth (Wagner, 1996). Another proposal for optimal development is to have a person-environment fit model of development that can be used to understand how optimal development occur. According to this model, a person moves forward toward optimal development when there is a good fit for his or her needs and the social environment (Chu & Powers, 1995). This synchrony plays a key role in promoting important competencies in children and adolescents, such as, attachment, autonomy, and social competency.

### **The Five Periods of Change**

There are five periods of developmental change during childhood, constituting the prenatal, infancy and toddlerhood, early childhood, middle childhood, and adolescent periods (Balk, 2011; Berk, 2008; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). The age during which an individual may progress through each stage of development widely varies, as each person matures at a different pace. Most developmental psychologists agree, however, that certain basic needs must be met, and specific tasks mastered during each stage in order for normal development to occur (Berk, 2008). For example, during the stage of infancy, children should form attachments to their parents or caregivers, while relying on them to fulfill basic needs. During early childhood, children become more social, forming relationships with other children, but still require parental guidance.

During middle childhood, behavior control shifts from parent to child, while peer groups become increasingly important. With adolescence comes the development of a child's identity—personal, sexual, and occupational—while the child prepares for eventual separation from the home environment. Hall characterized adolescence as a time that is full of conflict instigated by the rapid physical, psychosocial social, and cognitive changes that occur during puberty (Berk, 2008). While contemporary psychologists no longer presuppose puberty as a time of great internal turmoil, this stage is still understood as a period during which teens are at a higher risk for problems that adversely affect development. Due to the significant changes that occur during this period, including rapid brain development and hormonal and physical maturation, puberty remains a time during which persons have the potential to face greater challenges (Berk, 2008). Teens may become entangled in such obstacles as teen pregnancy, substance abuse, depression, and the trigger of psychological distancing from the parent, which directly impede their abilities to develop in a normal manner. Youth who lose a parent have all this change and stability occurring with the added grief (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

### **Grief and the Stages of Development**

As of the time I wrote this study, no grief theories had been developed that were specific to developing youth who lose a parent (Balk, 2011; Leming & Dickinson, 2016; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Oltjenbruns' (2001) work has attempted to provide a theoretical basis for grief and youth. She applies developmental stage theory concepts discussed above to childhood grief, such as, the concept that childhood is a distinct stage of life, and that individuals undergo constant change in their physical, cognitive, and psychosocial

abilities from infancy through their early college years (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Qualitative change in these abilities is marked by materialization of new phenomena that cannot be predicted easily, such as a change in children's perception from simply knowing that a person is not visible or physically present to actually understanding that a person has died (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Despite these progressive developmental changes, most individuals demonstrate an underlying constancy of personality and behavior. However, various influences, including parental loss, have the potential to modify these traits (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

Change associated with development occurs simultaneously for youth in interrelated domains, including physical development, cognitive development, and psychosocial development (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Physical development encompasses growth of the body and brain, the development of sensory capacities and motor skills, and one's physical health. Cognitive development encompasses evolution in one's mental abilities, such as learning, memory, language skills, thinking, moral reasoning, and creativity (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Finally, psychosocial development includes evolution in an individual's personality and emotional and social relationships. Development thus entails a cohesive progression across all three domains, which are interrelated and often influence one another. For example, during puberty, dramatic physical and hormonal changes could affect individuals' psychosocial development, including their sense of self. Bereaved youth face a unique set of difficulties, as they are undergoing this complex developmental process at the same time that they are grieving the loss of a parent (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

### **Defining the Nature of Grief and Development**

The period of childhood is one of these socially constructed stages (Berk, 2008). The concepts of adolescence and puberty are relatively recent, dating back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Until the 19<sup>th</sup> century, children were simply considered small adults, and they worked and fought in wars just as adults did. Children had no special privileges or protection under the law. Several events occurred that contributed to a shift in perspective regarding children that distinguished them from adults (Berk, 2008). First, Charles Darwin published *Biographical Sketch of an Infant* and Wilhelm Preyer published *The Mind of a Child* books in the late 1800s which helped to inspire the child-guidance clinics that provided counseling to children which emerged in the early 1900s. Second, in 1917, John B. Watson conducted his famous “Little Albert” experiments, which showed that children could be conditioned to cry at the sight of a furry object. Third, during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, G. Stanley Hall studied the physical and mental capabilities of children at Clark University. Here he founded the child movement studies. These studies led to the publications of his books on adolescence titled, *Adolescence its psychology and relation to physiology, anthropology, sociology, sex, crime, religion and education* (volumes 1 & 2). The researcher of these books applied the results of the child movement studies and concepts of evolution to the process of aging. He found that children’s mental capabilities were characteristically different after they started showing signs of puberty (Hall, 1904). However, their mental capabilities weren’t characteristically the same as adults either (Hall, 1904). Therefore, Hall was one of the first to recognize that puberty did not

necessarily mean that a person was an adult (Berk, 2008). The teenage years came to be viewed as a period of development.

However, Hall's research and book was not based on science (Berk, 2008). An American psychologist, James Mark Baldwin, helped to organize developmental psychology as a science, and established journals and university psychology departments (Berk, 2008). American philosopher John Dewey (1859–1952) viewed developmental psychology as a tool for studying and fostering socially desirable behaviors of children in their social setting (Santrock, 2008). Arnold Gesell (1929) studied stages of motor development, provided research-based information about developments during the maturational process that normally occur at various stages (Dalton, 2005). The Oakland (Adolescent) Growth Study (1930) provided more scientific information on the adolescent stage (Elder, 1998). With the work of Gesell and the classic theories of Sigmund Freud, the later works of Erik Erikson (introduced earlier), and Oakland studies (1930) developmental science became interdisciplinary, and adolescence was established as a period of development.

Recent research that has been conducted by researchers have found that adolescents do not immediately become masters of their personal, sexual, and occupational needs and they deal with conflicting needs and emotions upon leaving their parents' households (Balk, 2011). Individuals who attend college often find the transition from home to college to be the most formative stage in their development (Balk, 2011). Broad psychological changes have been documented as occurring among college students between the freshman and senior years of college (Balk, 2011). This notable



transformation is understandable given that students encounter new ideas and beliefs and unprecedented freedom and opportunities that were generally unavailable to them previously. Because college students sometimes struggle with becoming independent adults, interaction with other college students in academic and extracurricular environments helps individuals to further distance themselves psychologically from their parents, while maintaining a relationship with them (Balk, 2011; Berk, 2008).

A college student that has lost a parent, sometimes experiences more conflict due to their developmental trend of making commitment to others or feeling isolation may bring back feelings of grief as the previously bereaved student may feel guilt and loss as the inability to bring back a close relationship with the parent is realized (Janowick et al., 1995). As a result, these individuals may experience not only the grief, but also feelings of isolation, due to the fact that they are usually expected to have resolved the parental loss. They may not interact with peers on the college campus due to the fact that other college students may not have experienced this type of loss, and the individual may not feel they would understand what they are going through (Balk, 2011).

### **Freud on Mourning (Grief) and Melancholia (Depression)**

Freud (1917) studied adult women who were experiencing sorrow and was one of the first psychologists to consider the difference between what is termed today as grief (mourning) and depression (melancholia). Freud defined mourning as an internalization of a grief reaction to the loss of a person or object that takes place in the unconscious, while melancholia was defined as the same loss resulting in a severe grief reaction that interfered with psychological and physical function of the individual and may eventually

come to require treatment (Freud, 1917). He defined mourning as a normal reaction to a loss that, with time, would correct itself and thus did not require treatment. According to Freud (1917), such interference with the process of mourning could even be harmful. Melancholia and mourning had the same indicators of depression, withdrawal, loss of a desire to care, and lethargy (Freud, 1917). However, the definition of melancholia included indications of an exterior force interfering with the ego (later termed the superego), which were not aspects of a normal mourning process. These indications of melancholia included a tendency to feel bad about oneself to the extent of degrading and feeling a need to punish oneself (Freud, 1917). In the case of melancholia, the loss of the love object results in a degree of unconscious self-hatred.

In contrast, while still undergoing a painful and sometimes lengthy grief process, the person who is mourning will depend upon the ego to eventually find a realistic way to gratify the id that is acceptable to the superego; this process of satisfying all three aspects of the self is achieved through distancing the individual from memories and expectations of the loved one or object (Freud, 1917). Yet, when a person experiences melancholia, the ego becomes completely overwhelmed. When the ego becomes overwhelmed, the id and the superego are not monitored. This may induce the thoughts from the super ego of why this would happen to them or indulgence of the id of not wanting to do any regular activities but instead have instant relief from the grief, such as, sleep or being sad. This inundation may result from ambivalence that existed within the relationship between the individual and the lost person/object prior to the loss itself (Freud, 1917). Additionally, people who are melancholic may not understand the nature of the experience with which

they are struggling or may otherwise be incapable of distancing themselves from the person or object that has been lost. The unconscious, in a sense, may be overpowering the ego, such that persons struggling with melancholia may be unsure of the cause of their sorrow. A person in mourning, however, deals with such a loss in a conscious manner.

Freud (1917) only briefly mentioned the manner in which a developing individual experiences loss. He defined identification as a preliminary stage during which an individual begins investing emotional energy in a specific person or object. The initial identification process occurs during the oral stage of development, between the child and his or her parents. The infant unconsciously identifies the parents as part of him- or herself and begins replicating their behaviors. A parental loss at this stage can result in narcissistic identification, a process by which one blames oneself for a death or otherwise feels guilty about the loss; such an experience can lead to melancholia later in life. Freud (1917) considered the oral stage of development as a crucial time during which a child begins identifying with his or her parents. Thus, parental loss during this stage of development can interfere with the formulation of the eventual adult whom the child becomes.

### **Developments Since Freud**

Contemporary scholars find that, if the relationship with their parents is ambivalent to begin with, then when an unconscious trigger leads a person to detach from his or her parents in order to form a distinct identity while still maintaining a relationship with these parents, the likelihood of depression eventually developing increases (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Balk, 1998; Draper & Hancock, 2011). This possibility is

particularly prevalent among individuals who, soon after leaving home to attend college, lose a parent, further distancing them from the parent both psychologically and physically (Mathews & Servaty-Seib, 2007).

Additionally, psychosocial scholars since Freud have generally argued against the perspective that persons who experience loss ought to distance themselves from the object or person who is lost by moving on or letting go. They instead offer the argument that each individual should cope with loss in a manner that is highly personalized; there is no best way, these scholars argue, for coping with such a loss (Janowiak et al., 1995). In particular, developing youths who have lost parents may most fruitfully address their loss by maintaining an attachment with the absent parent by talking about, looking at pictures, and keeping journals of the parent who has passed away, during their daily lives (Biank & Werner-Lin, 2011; Janowiak et al., 1995).

Oltjenbruns (2001) in particular deals with the nature of loss by drawing upon Freud's basis of developing and mourning and Erikson's expansion of these ideas. For example, children approximately 3 to 6 years of age who experience parental loss may experience immediate reactions of guilt, often blaming themselves for the parent's death. Children from approximately age 6 to puberty may understand such death from an external perspective, perceiving death as a harsh reality for which they are not personally to blame. Children from puberty through young adulthood may experience death anxiety after losing a loved one as a result of grappling with the meanings of life and death. College students who experience such losses may instead struggle with the lack of this

significant relationship as they begin engaging with and developing new relationships in their lives (Balk, 2011; Leming & Dickinson, 2016).

### **Psychosocial Trends for Helping the Bereaved**

John Bowlby expanded upon Freud's concepts of mourning and melancholia with his introduction of attachment theory. According to Bowlby, effectively working through grief requires a reorganization of the manner in which the lost object or individual influences one's concept of selfhood, often through the breaking of psychological bonds (Silverman, 1987). However, adjusting the manner in which one imagines the lost person or object and coming to terms with such a loss is a gradual process (Silverman, 1987). Bowlby's peers have drawn differing conclusions with regard to techniques for coping with or moving beyond bereavement. Some researchers have contended that a person experiencing loss must disengage from the grief in order to heal, while others have argued that grief is an adaptive process (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001; Silverman, 1987). Essentially, the ongoing nature of this debate denotes the fact that questions regarding the nature of grief as necessary or counterproductive and whether or not such grief should be considered an adaptive process remain unanswered. Oltjenbruns' (2001) work is of particular relevance to the present study given its focus on the experience of loss in youth.

### **Oltjenbruns' Concept of Regrief**

Oltjenbruns (2001) combined the aforementioned developmental theories and the nature of the adult grief process in formulating this theory of regrief. Her concept theorizes that a person who suffers loss may express certain reactions that are conducive

to the changes they are experiencing in terms of physical, cognitive, and psychosocial growth at a particular stage in the development process. However, the same individual may express recurring grief reactions to the same loss at his or her next stage of development. This grief that resurfaces episodically may be correlated with the changes individuals are experiencing, leading to Oltjenbruns (2001) concept of the regrief phenomenon. Oltjenbruns (2001) defined the regrief phenomenon as grief that recurs in the context of maturational and developmental processes. The regrief phenomenon explains the manner in which developing individuals manage the onset and the impact of grief in relation to age-appropriate abilities.

For example, grief reactions to the loss of a parent may not manifest immediately (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Sometimes, grief reactions occur 2 or more years following a parent's death. A young child who experiences parental death will likely miss his or her parent but may cope by erroneously believing that the lost parent will one day return (Oltjenbruns, 2001). As he or she matures into an adolescent, however, the individual will start to grapple with the meaning of life and death, recognizing that the lost parent cannot return. The prior death of a parent may make it more difficult for such individuals to understand their unique identities and their places in the world than their non-bereaved counterparts who may not have yet considered the nature of death (Lemings & Dickinson, 2016). As the same person transitions to the college-going age experience, he or she may speculate about relationships, particularly musing on the relationship that he or she might have had with the lost parent. Essentially, parental loss may be

superimposed upon each stage of development during a person's lifespan (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

### **Previous Childhood Bereavement Studies**

The little research available provided by researchers in regard to children's immediate and long-term responses to grief derives mainly from the United Kingdom (UK) and studies conducted by Oltjenbruns (2001) in the United States. These researchers' studies have found that children and adolescents may revisit grief at different times throughout their lifespan, experiences which such adolescents may perceive as abnormal (Dowdney, 2000; NAGC, 2013). Some of these researchers' studies examine the literature and programs that have been set in place to help youth directly following the death of a parent (Lampten & Cremeans, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2006; Nguyen & Scott, 2013). The premises for many of these studies considered long-term outcomes for individuals who lost a parent (Lampten & Cremeans, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2006; Nguyen & Scott, 2013).

For example, one researcher examined the literature related to communication skills in order to see if such children became depressed (Mitchell et al., 2006). This study was an archive study that reviewed past data and then summarized the results of such studies on psychosocial outcomes of childhood parental loss. The focus was on the communication skills. This author of the article stressed the importance of understanding the bereaved child's social skills during this time of loss. These children experienced anxiety, depression, fears, angry outbursts, and regression in developmental milestones (Mitchell et al., 2006). The results of the author's study indicated that most children

under seven do not see death as inevitable and those who that do tend view death as something is reversible (Mitchell et al., 2006). This author of the study signifies that children who experience the loss of a parent may display the psychosocial communication issue when they are able to process the death. Therefore, there is a need for more research on the subject.

Other researchers examined data collected from the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development in order to locate reoccurring themes of self-efficacy and depression among individuals who experienced such losses (Nguyen & Scott, 2013). Twenty-five children and their surviving parents filled out a self-concept form. They indicated that self-identity played a role of whether or not depression surfaced later in life (Nguyen & Scott, 2013). Their study did not include how returning grief could have factored into whether or not the participant's self-concept was high.

Scholars Draper and Hancock (2011) conducted archival research of a 1958 study that considered children development in order to determine whether or not youths were vulnerable to delinquency after the death of a parent. In this study, school-aged children, clinical participants, college students, and adults were interviewed 3 to 20 years after the loss of a parent (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Balk et al., 1998; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Ellis, et al, 2013; Janowiak et al., 1995; Silverman, 1987). The authors went back into secondary data of children under 16 years of age and found that the individuals were vulnerable to delinquency. The significant findings for future research included that the delinquency for the individuals showed up 5 years or more after death, if the child was between the age of 12 and 16 when the parental death occurred they scored higher for



delinquency behavior, and that family relationships, external support, and family transitions after the death need further explanation. The researchers of this study conducted their search on past research, and, therefore, did not include how returning grief could have played a role in the outcomes.

Additionally, most researchers used cross-sectional designs in regard to the effects of parental loss on youth have been cross-sectional in design (Oltjenbruns, 2001). These studies were about grief immediately following a parental death up to two years after the death. Specifically, the aim of the researchers was to acquire information over a limited time span that compared groups of bereaved individuals. This means that there would not be information as to the well-being of the participants once they entered the next stage of psychosocial development.

One of the researcher's study involved interviews with participants who were in a clinical bereavement center (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). Their study found that bereaved clinical participants who had lost parents up to 10 years prior, as compared to participants who were not a part of the bereavement program, demonstrated fewer negative effects as a result of loss (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). The recurrent themes found from their study were directly related to having clinical support. These participants had fewer negative effects from the death of a parent during childhood due to the clinical support. Their outcomes support the idea that not all outcomes of prior and current bereavement include negative results. However, all of the participants participated in a weekend therapy that may have influenced the positive results (Brewer & Sparks, 2011). This suggests that bereaved individuals may need outside family coping mechanisms. In addition, the

positive results were mostly the end results after years of coping with the tragedy. For example, one adult participant was happy with how his life eventually turned out and was doing well. However, during the interview process his story of starting college was one of binge drinking and failing. Other participants described how the “journey” from the time of parental loss was long and hard with results of being stronger as an adult. This points to the need for further research of variables of how a person goes through a transformation from struggling to the positive outcome of well-being.

In another study, researchers conducted interviews and compared academic achievement levels of school-aged, bereaved children (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004) conducted 72 interviews of children in school that experienced a parental death during childhood in order to evaluate long-term academic achievement as a result of the traumatic experience. The researchers of this study took into account external factors that included age, gender, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status that may contribute to the participant’s experience. Their findings suggested that some variables that contributed to the underachievement were that children that were bereaved during childhood (especially before the age of 5 and at 12 years of age), girls that lost mothers; boy who lost fathers, and whether or not the surviving parent held a job after the loss, regardless of reason for the parent’s death. Their combined findings support that bereavement could be a negative factor in later development. Other findings of their study suggested that bereavement may be prolonged and intermittent. However, how grief played a role in the results was not explored. The authors suggest further research on individual’s interpersonal relationships after the death of a parent. Researchers interviewed bereaved youth in grades 2 to 6,

specifically considering the degree to which self-concept played a role as to the manner in which participants were affected by parental loss during the Nguyen and Scott (2013) study discussed above.

Despite these select studies, there remains a relative paucity of information on acute grief as experienced by children due to the fact that bereaved youth are rarely asked to provide input about their grief experiences (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Most of the extant research relies instead on the parents or caregivers as informants with regard to their children's grief, or simply involves meta-analyses or literature reviews examining relevant past studies (Draper & Hancock, 2011; Hung & Rabin, 2009; Kaplow, Saunders, Angold, & Costello, 2010). When researchers have directly interviewed youths, an extended period of time has generally passed since the parental death. This may be due to the fact that it is far more difficult to get IRB approval for studies involving children, particularly those who are at risk.

However, in a few significant longitudinal studies, researchers have examined psychological mental disorders that developed within an adolescent following the death of a parent (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Balk et al., 1998; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). One study in particular analyzed the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) to determine whether or not stress was a factor in determining if children were still experiencing the grief process (Kaplow et al., 2010). Kaplow, Saunders, and Arnold (2010) focused on psychiatric symptoms after the loss of someone close to them. There were 172 children ages 11 to 21 years old who lost a parent in one group. Two comparison groups were used: 815 children who lost a relative other than their parent,

and 235 children who did not lose someone close to them. All participants and their parents were administered the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment, a structured diagnostic interview for DSM IV disorders, and a sociodemographic scale that quantifies family composition, family function and life stress (Kaplow et al., 2010). Youth's and parent's reports of psychiatric symptoms were compared among the three groups by using the scales derived from the diagnostic interview. There were two significant findings. In each case, participants that lost a parent were associated with poverty, substance abuse problems, and greater functional impairment (Kaplow et al., 2010). In addition, bereaved children were more likely than nonbereaved to exhibit signs of conduct disorder, substance abuse, and to show functional impairment (Kaplow et al., 2010). This study advocated for a focus on individuals who lose a parent due to the increased risk for disruptions of psychosocial functions.

In the Mitchell et al. study, researchers conducted a group comparison in order to consider the difference in psychopathologic development between bereaved children and depressed children, utilizing a behavior checklist that drew upon parent and teacher input (Mitchell et al., 2006).

### **Studies on Bereaved College Students**

Even fewer researchers have considered the manner in which a parental loss occurring 2 to 5 years earlier affects college age students' psychosocial functioning abilities (Balk, 2011). Developmental trends related to college students making commitments to others or experiencing isolation may evoke feelings of grief; previous loss of a parent students may feel guilt and loss as they realize that they are incapable of

improving the relationship they once had with the lost parent (Janowick et al., 1995). As a result, these individuals may experience an increased degree of isolation. Additionally, these individuals may feel uncomfortable talking to others as a result of fear that those who experienced the same loss may have moved past the grief process or may become saddened by such discussions (Janowick et al., 1995). Furthermore, these persons' peers may not have experienced such a degree of loss, thus rendering them incapable of understanding the grief that the bereaved is experiencing (Balk, 2011).

While there was some research conducted on college students and adults who have lost a parent during childhood, the intention of the researchers of such studies was to determine long-term outcomes. For example, adult retrospective studies and archival researchers have shown that one in five children who experience the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological disturbance, resulting in such individuals becoming more vulnerable to delinquency later in life (Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Ellis, Dowrick, and Lloyd-Williams (2013), focused on quality of life in adults after the losing a parent during childhood. Adult participants were administered retrospective interviews about their current life. The researchers major finding was that social dynamic played a role in the extent of how the death affected them throughout their lives and adulthood. Psychological distress was less if the participant had followed protocol procedures for the individual age at the time of the death of a parent. The researchers of this study stressed the need for helping parents to follow an outline for helping their children with grief. This study was retrospective and did not include how grief was played a role as the adults

developed. Perceived vulnerability to loss during childhood was, furthermore, implicated in the development of adult psychopathology (Mireault & Bond, 1992).

All of the researchers of these studies indicated that there is a gap in the research when it comes to how 1 in 5 children who experience the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological disturbance, that they were vulnerable to delinquency later in life, individuals experience grief while moving through developmental milestones, and that these results have not been interpreted as to why this occurs (Brewer & Sparks, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006).; Dowdney et al., 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis, Dowrick & Lloyd-Williams, 2013).

Cerel et al., (2006), ocused on stress and psychiatric problems in children/adolescents after the loss of a parent. Some participants, ages 6 to 17 years of age, were in a group that lost a parent. Bereaved children were identified through published obituaries. Two age-matched comparison groups were used: a community group with no history of psychiatric problems and a depressed group. All children/adolescents were administered the Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents, a structured interview for depression for children and adolescents, and the Children's Depression Rating Scale to assess the severity of current depressive symptoms. Parents of bereaved and depressed children were administered the parent form for the Diagnostic Interview for Children and Adolescents. All parents completed the parent form for the Children's Depression Rating Scale. Children/adolescents' and parents' reports were compared among the three groups. They found 2 significant results. Following a parental death, an increase in psychiatric problems did occur in the first two

years following the death compared to non-bereaved children and depressed children (Cerel et al., 2006). In addition, children in the bereaved group were more likely to show symptoms of separation anxiety, depression, conduct disorder compared to the other two groups (Cerel et al., 2006).

Dowdney (2000), focused on past claims from an archival 1978 study that found psychological issues were discovered in bereaved children. They conducted an archival data study to find evidence of this claim in recent studies. The major theme they found was that it supported the 1978 study where researchers found that one out of five children who experienced the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological issues.

Therefore, individuals may not be receiving or have available resources if and when their grief returns. Hence, the research that I conducted helped to fill this gap in understanding of developmental trends of the process underlying change to an individual's grief over the loss of a parent as they mature over time and reevaluated the death with a new perspective.

### **Limitations of the Literature**

As a whole, the results of the aforementioned studies have been largely contradictory in nature. While some researchers have suggested that problems emerge when adapting to and coping with parental death, others have found that problems do not emerge (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Some researchers findinfs supported the ideas that bereavement may become a negative factor in later development, that bereavement may be prolonged and intermittent, that delinquency may occur 5 years or more after a loss of a parent, that grief hinders developmental tasks, and that the impact of the death is

profound and long term (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Janowiak et al., 1995; Kaplow et al., 2010; Mathews & Servaty-Seib, 2007; Silverman, 1987).

Janowiak (1995) similarly found that integrating the impact of the parental death into their own identity as emerging adults was a continuous process for the parentally bereaved. Her article stated that research should investigate outcomes within specific developmental levels. In addition, she found that, if a parent or another family caregiver dies just as a young person is distancing him or herself to establish a more autonomous identity, the bereaved student may subsequently experience strong feelings of guilt, as well as a deep sense of loss about being unable to reestablish a close relationship with their parent during their adult years.

Kaplow, Saunders, and Arnold (2010) focused on psychiatric symptoms in children/adolescents after the loss of a parent. There were 172 children/adolescents ages 11 to 21 years in a group that lost a parent. Two age matched comparison groups were used: 815 youth that experienced the death of another relative, and 235 children/adolescents who did not lose a parent. All children/adolescents were interviewed with the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment. Parents of children who lost a parent or another relative were administered the parent interview for the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Assessment. Children/adolescents' and parents' reports on potential differences in psychiatric symptoms were compared among the three groups. Researchers found that losing a parent at a young age was associated with poverty, previous substance abuse problems, and greater functional impairment before the loss (Kaplow et al., 2010). In addition, bereaved children were more likely than nonbereaved



children to exhibit symptoms of conduct disorder and substance abuse, and to show functional impairment (Kaplow et al., 2010). The prior death of a parent increased risk for psychological and behavioral problems shows a need for a greater awareness for the parental bereaved.

Other scholars have concluded that not all outcomes regarding prior bereavement support negative results, especially when the individual has had social, family or clinical support (Biank & Werner, 2011; Brewer & Sparks, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013; Hung & Rabin, 2009). Hung and Rabin (2009) focused on factors that may affect a child's reaction to a parental death. They searched archival data in order to find common themes. They found two significant themes surfaced. Family dynamics before the loss of a parent, and the surviving parent were significant in how the child responded to the parental loss. Another result was there was a lack of following individuals as they progress through life after the loss of a parent. Thus, longitudinal studies that researchers research bereavement that resurfaces episodically are needed to determine specifically how the parent's role affects the response to a loss of a parent.

Few researchers thus far, however, have considered whether or not persons who have been previously bereaved experience grief again when they enter into the next stage of development (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Given this, most researchers are in agreement regarding the need for further research related to grief in youth (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2006; Silverman, 1987). Specifically, these researchers concur that additional investigation is needed into whether grief plays a significant role in terms of development—particularly

when a person undergoes a transformation from struggling with parental loss to well-being, as well as whether or not bereavement resurfaces episodically (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2006; Silverman, 1987). As such, the long-term psychosocial developmental trends of individuals after the traumatic event of losing a parent more than 2 years prior is an important area for future research in the field of psychology, particularly as the recurring impact of loss on these individuals requires additional understanding (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001). By arriving at a deeper understanding of the long-term nature of loss, experts may come to better to help people dealing with the nature of recurring bereavement as related to parental loss.

### **Research Methods**

The majority of the studies of this literature review regarding youth and bereavement did not propose specific guidelines for conducting research on bereaved youth. For example, because many of the researchers' research designs were retrospective in nature and dependent completely upon participants' memories, the information provided may have been skewed as a result of age and time passing (Lampten & Cremeans, 2002; Mitchell et al., 2006; Nguyen & Scott, 2013; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Additionally, nearly all of the researchers were in agreement that more longitudinal research was required due to the fact that most previous studies (whether longitudinal or cross-sectional) have failed to account for the manner in which grief shifts over time (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Balk et al., 1998; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Hung & Rabin, 2009; Kaplow et al., 2010). Furthermore, much of the data in previous studies

was based on the opinions of parents with regard to children's experiences. A parent or teacher, however, may not be fully aware of a youth's internal experiences (Kaplow et al., 2010; Mitchell et al., 2006).

Many of the studies that led to researchers' findings of individuals who lost a parent develop into well-adjusted adults were based upon small and clinical sample sizes that cannot be generalized to other populations (Biank & Werner, 2011; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Furthermore, a great number of these studies' participants included persons grieving various types of death with varied time frames since the death itself (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Mitchell et al., 2006; Silverman, 1987). These differences were rarely included in the scholars' analyses or interpretations. Even when such variables were identified, grief was not analyzed in relation to the outcome (Kaplow et al., 2010). Instead, many of these researchers utilized measurements focused on bereavement rather than the effects of grief or, otherwise, did not look at grief specifically. For example, Abdelnoor and Hollins (2004) utilized behavioral checklists and academic achievement tests, while Draper and Hancock (2011) considered delinquency outcomes. Other measures included in past research entail interviews that were did not follow guidelines of other studies (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013; Silverman, 1987).

As a result of these deficiencies, I mindfully designed the current study as a process in which data was collected in a shorter time frame of 2 to 5 years (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Furthermore, while most past researchers focused on grief experienced during the same time periods (Oltjenbruns, 2001), I focused on grief and the manner in which it may

shift over time. Because many of the long-term studies included a gap between time of death and adulthood, there may have been many other variables clouding their results, such as other life changes, remembering accuracy of event, and details of the grief reactions could have been forgotten (Oltjenbruns, 2001). Therefore, I included in this current study only participants who were currently attending college. In other words, all of the participants for my study were currently experiencing the same psychosocial functioning challenges and had experienced a prior loss of a parent at approximately the same time. I further improved the sample of my study by using a nonbereaved control group, involving participants who have experienced the same type of loss (parental loss), and taking into account age and socioeconomic status through the employment of a family history questionnaire to match the participants into groups accordingly based on their responses.

To investigate this topic, a quantitative approach with an exploratory descriptive design was employed since there is no way to control whether or not a participant has lost a parent. This design is appropriate when variables cannot be manipulated or controlled and when participants are not randomly assigned to groups. Because the independent variable (IV), the previous loss of a parent, is a preexisting condition, participants cannot be randomized into groups. Additionally, this design is the right choice for this study because there is minimal research covering an extended period of time after the previous loss of a parent, and the research that is available is limited by methodological shortcomings (Oltjenbruns, 2001).

## Summary

Overall, I conducted an extensive literature review that showed that the relationship between how bereavement is experienced differently depending upon the stage of development the individual is in immediately after the parental loss occurs has been researched. Some research has been done about acute grief that may manifest soon after a parental loss. For example, Cerel et al., (2006) found that following the death of a parent, an increase in psychiatric problems did occur during the first two years following a parental death.

In addition, there is some research on college students and adults who have lost a parent during childhood. The intent of the researchers of these studies was to determine long term outcomes. For example, researchers who conducted adult retrospective studies and archival research found themes of 1 in 5 children who experienced the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological disturbance and that these individuals were vulnerable to delinquency later in life (Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis, Dowrick, & Lloyd-Williams, 2013). Perceived vulnerability to loss was implicated in the development of adult psychopathology linked with the early loss of the parent for college students (Mireault & Bond, 1992).

Overall, this literature review had a wide breadth of research on bereaved youth that the researchers found that such past research was scant and limited by methodological shortcomings. These inadequacies consisted of failures in research design, sample, measurement tools, analysis, reporting, and interpretation; furthermore, many of the studies researchers have found contradictory results. However, all the

researchers indicated that there is a significant gap in the research regarding the manner in which children experience the death of a parent over time. In particular, they found that extant research fails to consider the manner in which 1 in 5 children who experience the death of a parent are likely to manifest psychological disturbance, the fact that such individuals are vulnerable to delinquency later in life, the manner in which such individuals experience grief while moving through developmental milestones, or the reasons for these difficulties, and that these results have not been interpreted as to determine why this occurs (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cerel et al., 2006; Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). As a result, individuals may not receive or have access to available resources if their grief returns. Hence, this research helped to fill this gap regarding the developmental trends related to an individual's grief over the loss of a parent as he or she matures over time and reevaluates the death with a new perspective. Specifically, in the college student population. The next chapter is about the methodology, setting, sample, instrumentation, and analysis used during the current study.

## Chapter 3: Research Method

### **Introduction**

Like adults, youth feel grief at the loss of a loved one, including pain, sorrow, and anxiety (Berk, 2008; Oltjenbruns, 2001). However, young individuals may interpret the death differently depending on their age and capability (Berk, 2008; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Psychological research has indicated that a child's comprehension of and adaptation to death develops along with their physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development, which is constantly maturing (Berk, 2008; Oltjenbruns, 2001). This, in turn, may affect their well-being (Lampton & Cremens, 2002; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Psychosocially, an individual who has experienced adolescent grief may mature differently in terms of the processes of identity achievement, intimacy growth, commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, and interpersonal commitments than an individual who was not previously bereaved (Mitchell et al., 2006; Nyguyen & Scott, 2013). Moreover, recurring grief reactions may surface when a previously bereaved individual separates from his or her parent upon leaving for college (Lampton & Cremens, 2002; Oltjenbruns, 2001).

The purpose of this study was to determine whether or not the psychosocial functioning of an individual who has lost a parent 2 to 5 years prior is affected by recurring grief reactions over time. Specifically, this study explored whether or not recurring grief reactions affect the psychological growth of a person when they go to college and must deal with additional separation from their parents. This chapter is about the design, sampling procedure, measurements, data analysis, and ethical considerations

for the present study. The rationale I used behind the specific research design selected is also discussed. Finally, I presented sample characteristics and sizes along with a description of the instrumentation that I used.

### **Research Design**

I explored the developmental trends underlying the changes in an adolescent individual's grief over the loss of a parent as he or she matures into a college age student. Previous data have shown that developing youths who experience the loss of a parent must develop abilities to adapt and cope in the face of adversity (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Balk et al., 1998; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Ellis, et al., 2013; Janowiak et al., 1995; Silverman, 1987). However, researchers have not yet studied the specific developmental trends underlying changes in an adolescent's grief over the loss of a parent (Balk, 2011; Oltjenbruns, 2001). Researching the responses of long-term bereaved adolescents is thus essential to characterize the full impact of a death on an adolescent over time, as well as to explore the natural course of bereavement at different developmental stages.

In a comparative group study of children who had recently lost a parent with children in the same community who had not experienced such a loss, Cerel, et al., (2006) found that there was an increase in psychiatric problems during the first 2 years following a parental death. Adult retrospective studies and archival research have also shown that one in five children who experienced the death of a parent were likely to manifest psychological disturbance and were vulnerable to delinquency later in life (Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis, et al., 2013) Perceived vulnerability to a loss has also



been implicated in the development of adult psychopathology linked with the early loss of a parent in college students (Mireault & Bond, 1992). Oltjenbruns (2001) found that children and adolescents revisited grief at different times throughout their lives, but that they did not feel like returning to their grief was normal (Dowdney, 2000; NAGC, 2015). The now adolescents and young adults felt that the grief from the loss that they had experienced should have been resolved (Dowdney; NAGC, 2015). They felt the return grief was not normal because many years had passed, and others had moved on from the loss and they should have too.

In light of these findings, Oltjenbruns (2001) called for more studies that not only consider how developing individuals cope with a loss using specific tools from their current development stage, but that also take into account the fact that the grief process may start over again later. As a person matures and passes developmental milestones, the loss may take on new meaning years later. Few researchers have investigated if an individual who loses a parent goes through the grief process again when their psychosocial abilities change as a result of maturing into the next stage of development (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Even fewer researchers have examined how recent parental loss impacted the psychosocial functioning of college students (Balk, 2011). This is important because at this specific developmental stage, making commitments to others or feeling isolated may bring back feelings of grief. This could lead the previously bereaved student to feel guilt and loss as they realize their inability to bring back a close relationship with their parent (Janowiak et al., 1995).

In this study I built on the results of Oltjenbruns' theory by investigating a single stage of development, encompassing the traditional undergraduate college experience (of students ages 18 to 22), to see if individuals who have lost a parent during adolescence experience a return of their grief. This return in grief may be related to the ego developmental milestone of intimacy versus isolation, as Erikson (1950) has described. In this milestone, individuals must develop coping skills to achieve intimacy before they can proceed effectively to the next developmental trend. Those who have lost a parent only 2 to 5 years prior may grieve again during this period of psychosocial growth of maturing into a young adulthood of college age from adolescence. I aimed to add to and improve upon the limited data and methodological shortcomings of past research on the development of bereaved individuals by narrowing the focus to a single developmental stage and psychosocial functioning. Past studies had many different aged participants who were experiencing different developmental trends. Therefore, they could not be compared as to specifically what developmental dysfunction they were experiencing. These results will lay the foundation for research into how the phenomenon of intermittent grief affects psychosocial functioning.

I used a quantitative analysis using the Intimacy Isolation Scale of the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory (MEPSI) and built on a robust body of knowledge concerning a young college student's psychosocial functioning experiences years after a parental death. I used scales from the MEPSI to score the progress the participant has had resolving each stage of Erikson's developmental theory ending with the Intimacy Isolation Scale that scored the participant's developmental trends of identity

achievement, commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, interpersonal commitments, and intimacy. The scores of the MEPSI were the dependent variable (DV). However, another variable of recurring grief could affect the DV scores. Scores of the MEPSI from the group of participants who have lost a parent were statistically compared to the scores of the MEPSI from the group of non-bereaved participants using a small samples *t* test in order to determine if there is a significant difference between the two groups. Then a small samples independent *t* test was run on the scores of the TRIG to see if there was a significant difference between the two groups on grieving.

### **Setting and Sample Participants**

The participants in the bereaved group were individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 ( $n = 15$ ) who had experienced the loss of a parent during their adolescence (ages 12 to 15). The participants in the non-bereaved group were individuals between the ages of 18 to 22 ( $n = 15$ ) who had not experienced the loss of a parent. The participants were recruited through posters placed at public places that college students may frequent like social media, and media outlets, such as participants.com. The participants were selected if they met the following requirements: they belonged to an accessible population, they were old enough to agree to informed consent, they had experienced a parental loss in the specified time period, and they were grieving parental loss. I used an age and socioeconomic status ascertained with a family history questionnaire were also taken into account before the participants were matched to their group. In this way, other variables that could affect the DV scores were controlled.

Although approximately 15,250,000 children have lost a parent in the United States (Bluethmann, 2013), there is no way to determine the specific number of youths who lost a parent between 2018 and 2023. Thus, it is impossible to specify the probability of each sampling unit's inclusion from a single draw from the population, making this a nonprobability sample. Therefore, I used a quota sampling method. The quota sampling method was an appropriate method as it is used for a selection of populations that is similar to the population of adolescents that lost a parent and are now young adults going off to college.

The sampling frame of the study was a population similar to adolescents who lost a parent as it was the number of youths residing in a single-parent, U.S. household as of 2018. The number of adolescents who lived in a single-parent home (26.8 million) was used to estimate the proportion of participants that should be represented in the study (U.S. Census Bureau, 2016). Based on these statistics, the sample needed to include 72.9% White, 15.1% Black, 1.6% American Indian and Alaska Native, 4.9% Asian, 0.3% Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander, and 4.9% of individuals of two or more races. Therefore, I used a stratified sampling of the population that was taken from the quota sample.

### **Procedures**

I used an R code to calculate the power of the sample size. Each sample size was  $n=15$  the power was 0.184.. The informed consent form included background information about the study, the procedures for participation, a discussion of confidentiality, the voluntary nature of the study, and ethical concerns.

Individuals who agreed to participate in the study clicked on the link to survey monkey website for the study. The participants did not have to enter their name or identifying information when they filled out the surveys. The surveys also included a copy of the TRIG and the MEPSI, along with instructions for both.

## **Instrumentation**

### ***Demographics***

I used a socioeconomic demographic questionnaire was used to gather basic information on the participant's age and socioeconomic status in order to place participants in matched pairs in the 2 groups. This is how I controlled these outside variables that may affect the MEPSI scores.

### ***Revised Texas Inventory of Grief***

The covariant variable of grief was measured using the second scale of the TRIG to assess the level of the participant's present grief level. This scale has been used previously to assess grief associated with the death of a loved one (Faschingbauer et al., 1987) and consists of 21 items to determine the extent of the grief an individual is facing. A detailed description of the instrument is as follows.

The measure has two scales that have questions that are arranged similar to a 5-point Likert-type survey. Items are summed to produce a total score. The second 13 item scale measures present feelings of continuous emotional distress, lack of acceptance, painful memories, and rumination.

The directions for the second scale say to read each statement carefully and answer the questions about your feelings about your parent's death. Check the answer

that best applies to you after your loved one died), *Completely True, Mostly True, Both True, and False, Mostly False or Completely False* (Faschingbauer et al., 1987). The participant answered questions by selecting a response alternative from the designated scale. I examined the TRIG's psychometric properties across diverse age groups using samples consisting of older adults, adolescents and children (Faschingbauer et al., 1987).

Some psychometric properties that have been reported on the TRIG are internal consistency, factor analysis, and convergent validity. Internal consistency reports indicate ranges from .77 to .87 for the current grief scale and .86 to .89 for the past disruption scale (Shoulte et al., 2012). The factor analysis was greater than .40 (Shoulte et al., 2012). The convergent validity was reported at .87 (Shoulte et al., 2012). High internal validity and convergent validity indicates that the TRIG is a good measure of current grief and past grief.

Some evidence of construct validity of the instrument has been supported by the fact that the strength of the responses varies over time (Kirschling, et al., 1999). Factor analysis showed that this scale could have practical advantages and potentially influence the way in which clinicians assess grief and evaluate bereavement interventions (Futterman, et al., 2010). Several populations that have been tested with the Texas Inventory of Grief include elderly, adolescents, children, and adults (Futterman et al., 2010; Michon, et al., 2003). Convergent validity has been reported greater than .5 (Martínez & Eiroá-Orosa, 2010).

Overall, the TRIG's content validity and concurrent validity adequately measures grief and compares to scores of other measures of grief. The split-half reliability score of

.81 is acceptable because of the test's brevity (Faschingbauer et al., 1987). Some limitations of the tests include its subjectiveness of judging the scales and the administration of scoring to the test's last question. The interpretation of the scores is up to the researcher. A variety of errors could occur when judging the scales that include constant errors, the halo effect, contrast errors, and proximity errors. In addition, such factors as fatigue, boredom, emotional, physical state, and experience can influence interobserver reliability and participants answering questions. The participant can get through the test in a reasonable amount of time without losing focus due to the low number of questions on the test.

The reliability of the test is affected by the first scale of the test that is retrospective in nature. The answers rely on the memory of the participant which could be influenced by the present state of the participant. Despite these limitations to the TRIG test, it is proven to be theoretically grounded and an empirically sound instrument that accurately measures the level of grief for multiple populations.

### ***Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory***

I used the MEPSI to determine which stage of psychosocial development the participant is in and if past stages were completed before or after the parental loss. This inventory was developed to see if the first six stages of Erikson's theory had been successfully resolved (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988). These six scales measured the extent of the unresolved or resolved psychosocial health of the participants. Each scale is comprised of 12 statements, ordered as a 5-point, Likert-type questionnaire, and represents one stage of development as Erikson (1950) has described. Items were

summed to produce a total score. Each scale has six items that measure the extent to which the issue at each stage was resolved, and six items that measure whether the issue at that stage remains unresolved (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988).

I examined the psychometric properties of the MEPSI across diverse age groups using samples of both older adults and adolescents (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988). Some psychometric properties that have been reported on the MEPSI include internal consistency and construct validity. Researchers reported internal consistency, or how closely each item is linked with another, as a correlation coefficient for the two subscales, with a level of 0.97 for the total scale, and a range of 0.75 (intimacy) to 0.86 (identity) for the subscales (Leidy & Fisher, 1995). Researchers reported the construct validity of the MEPSI compared to other samples was supported (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988), indicating that the test items actually represented a true measure of the developmental stages as Erikson (1950) has described. Evidence of construct validity of the MEPSI has also been reported using criterion group analysis, and further supported by the fact that the strength of the responses varies over time (Leidy & Darling-Fisher, 1995). The empirical validity was demonstrated in a scales factor analysis which showed that the MEPSI could have practical advantages and potentially influence the way in which clinicians assess grief and evaluate bereavement interventions (Leidy & Darling-Fisher, 1995).

Several populations have been tested with the MEPSI, including the elderly (Hearn, 1993; Morrissey, 2004), adolescents (Morrissey, 2004), children (Morrissey, 2004), and adults (Barnfather & Ronis, 2000; Morrissey, 2004). In these studies,



Researchers reported convergent validity to be greater than 0.5 (Morrissey, 2004). However, the scoring of this test is subjective in nature because a participant's answers rely on their interpretations of the questions. A variety of errors can occur when judging the scales, including constant errors, the halo effect, contrast errors, and proximity errors. In addition, factors such as fatigue, boredom, emotional and physical state, and experience can all influence the test taker's answers. The brevity of the test is designed to help to overcome problems such as boredom and rushed answers. Overall, the MEPSI is a theoretically grounded and empirically sound instrument that has the potential to assess the psychosocial developmental stages of multiple populations.

### ***Analysis***

I employed an exploratory descriptive, ex post facto design. I used the measurements, the TRIG and the MEPSI, that allowed for a quantitative comparative analysis between the two study groups. I demonstrated the appropriateness for the research question and the hypothesis that demonstrate analysis.

### **Research Question 1**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population psychosocial development and grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ: Are there differences in psychosocial functioning as measured by the MEPSI between college students (18-22 years of age) who experienced a prior loss of a parent during the stage of adolescence (2-5 years before going to college) and

college students (18-22 years of age) that did not experience the prior death of a parent if grief returns.

### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the variance of all the scales of the MEPSI between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:  $H = \eta = \eta$ .

*H<sub>01</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the identity achievement subscale.

*H<sub>02</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the intimacy subscale.

*H<sub>03</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the total scale score of the MEPSI.

### **Research Question 2**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population and their returning grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ2: If a parental loss occurs during adolescence, will grief return to disrupt psychosocial development when the individual separates from home and goes to college?

### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the variance of the scales of the TRIG between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:  
 $H = \sigma_1^2 = \sigma_2^2$ .

Since I had one IV of loss of a parent during adolescence, with two different groups (one group of individuals who lost a parent during adolescence and one group of individuals that did not lose a parent during adolescence) the scores on the MEPSI are the DV. I investigated the individual measurement results further for trends between the groups. I examined the results from the TRIG to determine how the participants' current grief compares with their past grief. I examined the MEPSI results to determine if the psychosocial stages of development were occurring naturally before the parental loss and if they were disrupted during adolescence.

### **Ethical Considerations**

I considered the nature of this study and its possible consequences for the well-being of the participants. There were no physical risks or benefits associated with this study; however, there was potential for emotional upset by bringing up difficult or traumatic memories. Participants were notified that there is no obligation to complete any part of the study with which they feel uncomfortable. Participants completed online

measures. Therefore, there was no physical threat to the participants. Therefore, no liability plan was offered to the participants. Participants viewed the consent form before filling out the measures.

This chapter was about, the fact that I used a quantitative approach with an exploratory descriptive design to explore whether or not recurring grief reactions affect the psychological growth of a person when he or she goes to college and must deal with additional separation from his or her parents. The sample consisted of two groups of individuals between the ages of 18–22, including a bereaved group of participants ( $n = 15$ ) who have experienced the loss of a parent during their adolescence (ages 12–15), and a nonbereaved group of participants ( $n = 15$ ) who have not experienced the loss of a parent. I collected data via three instruments: (a) a demographic questionnaire, (b) the TRIG to measure the outcome variable of bereavement, and (c) the MEPSI to determine the participant's stage of psychosocial development. Data analysis was conducted via hand scoring and SPSS, including small samples independent  $t$ -tests.

## Chapter 4: Results

### Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine whether college students (18 to 22 years of age) who lost a parent 2 to 5 years before going to college during the stage of adolescence have lower psychosocial functioning than college students of the same age who have not lost a parent. I collected data through the survey site [surveymonkey.com](https://www.surveymonkey.com). All participants filled out the MEPSI, a self-report scale that quantifies the progress of individuals as they proceed through the developmental stages described by Erikson (1993/1950), and the TRIG. I did not make any modifications to the MEPSI. I modified the TRIG for the group of participants who had not lost a parent, where questions were slightly modified to remove mention of the loss of a parent. I scored both inventories as a total scale score, and then by subsections, as applicable, to the parental loss group.

Past studies about prior parental loss during the psychosocial developmental stages were scant and limited. These studies were about connections between one's psychosocial functioning during their adult life for those who have experienced prior parental loss. There were no studies on the possible effects that returning grief processes years after a death may have on individuals' psychosocial functioning throughout the developmental process, specifically when individuals attend college at 18 to 22 years of age. The literature review was about information about why youths who experience the loss of a parent may have compromised psychosocial functioning during the developmental process based on revisiting grief at separate times throughout their lifespans. Loss of the relationship with the deceased is an integral part of the adaptation

of the maturing psychosocial functions as addressed in the regrief theory. The following sections are about the research questions and hypotheses and present the data analysis.

### **Research Questions**

Psychosocial functioning quantitative studies have been conducted in populations of adults who experienced the prior death of a parent while developing, as well as within a year's time of the death of a parent. No researchers that have used quantitative studies have focused on college students who experienced the prior death of a parent during adolescence. Further, no grief theory specifically has addressed youths who lose one or both parents. Therefore, I sought to answer the following research questions:

#### **Research Question 1**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population psychosocial development and grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ: Are there differences in psychosocial functioning as measured by the MEPSI between college students (18-22 years of age) who experienced a prior loss of a parent during the stage of adolescence (2-5 years before going to college) and college students (18-22 years of age) that did not experience the prior death of a parent if grief returns.

#### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the variance of all the scales of the MEPSI between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a

parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:  $H_0: \eta_1 = \eta_2$ .

*H<sub>o1</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the identity achievement subscale.

*H<sub>o2</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the intimacy subscale.

*H<sub>o3</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the total scale score of the MEPSI.

### **Research Question 2**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population and their returning grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ2: If a parental loss occurs during adolescence, will grief return to disrupt psychosocial development when the individual separates from home and goes to college?

### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>o</sub>*:: There is no significant difference in the variance of the scales of the TRIG between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent

and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:

$H = \eta = \eta$ .

### Data Collection

A total of 30 participants completed the inventory. The bereaved group included individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 ( $n = 15$ ) who experienced the loss of a parent during their adolescence (ages 12 to 15). The nonbereaved group included individuals between the ages of 18 and 22 ( $n = 15$ ) who had not experienced the loss of a parent. The recruited participants found the inventory in three ways: social media, participants.com, and surveymonkey.com, and they did not receive compensation for participating. The participants received invitations to the study with the approved consent form through emails sent via participants.com with a direct link to surveymonkey.com, which housed the inventory. A business Facebook page also posted the consent form for interested participants with a link that took them to the inventory on surveymonkey.com. The inventory was completely anonymous.

### Results

#### Frequencies and Percentages

Half of the participants fell under the category of No for No loss of a parent ( $n = 15$ , 50%). Frequencies and percentages for nominal variables are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1**

*Frequencies and Percentages for Nominal Variables*

Variable	$n$	%
Parental loss		



No	15	50
Yes	15	50
Total	30	100

### Independent Sample *t* Test for Total Score

I used an independent sample *t* test to assess whether there were differences in the total scale score of the MEPSI by parental loss during the stage of adolescence (13–17 years of age; No parental loss v. Parental loss). Prior to analysis, the assumption of normality was assessed using a Shapiro–Wilk test. The result of the test was significant,  $p = .021$ , invalidating the assumption of normality. Therefore, I used a Mann-Whitney *U* test.

The results of the independent sample Mann Whitney *U* test were not significant,  $p = .187$ , suggesting that there was not a difference in total scale score by parental loss. Results of the independent *t* test are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2**

*Independent Sample *t* Test for Total Scale Score by Parental Loss*

Variable	<i>p</i>	Decision
Interpersonal commitment	.187	Retain the null Hypothesis

### Independent Sample *t* Test for Intimacy by Parental Loss

An independent sample *t* test was conducted to assess if there were differences in intimacy by parental loss during the stage of adolescence (13–17 years of age; No

parental loss v. Parental loss). Prior to analysis, the assumption of normality was assessed using a Shapiro–Wilk test. The result of the test was not significant,  $p = .825.$ , validating the assumption of normality. The assumption of equality variance was assessed using the Levene’s test. The result of the test was not significant,  $p = .391.$ , validating the assumption of variance.

The results of the independent sample  $t$  test were not significant,  $t(000) = -1.525$ ,  $p = .138$  suggesting that there was not a difference in intimacy by parental loss. Results of the independent  $t$  test are presented in Table 5.

**Table 3**

*Independent Sample  $t$  Test for Intimacy by Parental Loss*

Variable	$t(000)$	$p$	Parental loss		No parental loss	
			$M$	$SD$	$M$	$SD$
Intimacy	-1.525	.138	3.57	0.648	3.	0.56

**Independent Sample  $t$  Test for Identity Achievement by Parental Loss**

I used an independent sample  $t$  test to assess whether there were differences in identity achievement by parental loss during the stage of adolescence (13–17 years of age; No parental loss vs. Parental loss). I assessed the assumption of normality by using a Shapiro–Wilk test prior to analysis. The result of the test was significant,  $p = .041$ , invalidating the assumption of normality. Therefore, I ran an independent sample Mann-Whitney test.

The results of the independent sample  $u$  test were not significant,  $p = .744$ , suggesting that there was not a difference in identity achievement by parental loss. Results of the independent  $t$  test are presented in Table 6.

**Table 4***Independent Sample t Test for Identity Achievement by Parental Loss*

Variable	<i>p</i>	Decision
Identity achievement	.744	Retain the null Hypothesis

**Independent Sample *t* Test for TRIG by Parental Loss**

I used an independent sample *t* test to assess if there were differences in grief by parental loss during the stage of adolescence (13–17 years of age; No parental loss v. Parental loss). Prior to analysis, the assumption of normality was assessed using a Shapiro–Wilk test. The result of the test was not significant,  $p = .521$ ., validating the assumption of normality. I assessed the assumption of equality variance using the Levene’s test. The result of the test was not significant,  $p = .530$  validating the assumption of variance.

The results of the independent sample *t* test were not significant,  $t(000) = -1.747$ ,  $p = .092$  suggesting that there was not a difference in current grief by parental loss. Results of the independent *t* test are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5***Independent Sample t Test for Intimacy by Parental Loss*

Variable	<i>t</i> (000)	<i>p</i>	Parental loss		No parental loss	
			<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Grief	-1.747	.092	3.4107	0.69353	3.81	0.55034

### Summary

I compared responses to the MEPSI inventory by two participant groups. One group had 15 college students ages 18 to 22 years who experienced a prior loss of a parent 2 to 5 years earlier. The other group was composed of 15 college students 18 to 22 years who did not lose a parent. I assessed the hypothesis for total MEPSI young adult scale score per group, as well as scores for the instrument's three subscales. The results did not support the rejection of the null hypothesis.

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the variance of all the scales of the MEPSI between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:  $H = \eta^2 = \eta^2$ .

Table 2 shows the Levene's test ( $p \geq .05$ ); there was no significant difference found between the two groups' total scale scores. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

*H<sub>01</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the identity achievement subscale.

Table 4 shows the identity achievement scale scores of the MEPSI for the two groups. There was no significant difference between the two groups regarding identity achievement. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

*H<sub>02</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the intimacy subscale.

Table 3 shows the intimacy scores of the MEPSI for the two groups. There was no significant difference between the two groups regarding interpersonal intimacy. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

*H<sub>o3</sub>*: College students (18–22 years of age) who have lost a parent will score lower than college students (18–22 years of age) who have not previously lost a parent on the total scale score of the MEPSI.

Table 2 shows the total scale scores of the MEPSI for the two groups. There was no significant difference between the two groups regarding total scale scores. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

### **Research Question 2**

There is no previously published research exploring previous parental loss in the as it relates to young college age population and their returning grief. The intention is to answer the following research question:

RQ2: If a parental loss occurs during adolescence, will grief return to disrupt psychosocial development when the individual separates from home and goes to college?

### **Null and Alternative Hypothesis**

*H<sub>o</sub>*: There is no significant difference in the variance of the scales of the TRIG between college students (18–22 years of age) who have experienced the loss of a parent and college students (18–22 years of age) who have not experienced the loss of a parent:

$H_0 = \eta^2 = \eta^2$ .

Table 5 shows the Levene's test ( $p \geq .05$ ); there was no significant difference found between the two groups' total scale scores. The null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

Chapter 5 is a summary of this research that has a summary of an interpretation of the results, limitations, future recommendations, and suggestions for positive social change.

## Chapter 5: Discussions, Findings, and Recommendations

### Introduction

I explored the hypothesis that adolescents who lose a parent between the ages of 12 to 17 may experience psychosocial development issues during the next stage of development of young adulthood, when they leave for college and separate from the surviving parent (18 to 22 years of age). The purpose of this study was to discover whether psychosocial functioning in individuals who have lost a parent 2 to 5 years previously is affected over time as hypothesized in Oltjenbruns's (2001) regrief phenomenon. In Chapter 2, the review of the literature is a summary of a grief theory specifically addressing youths who lose one or both parents. Many studies have been conducted to determine the long-term outcomes for a person who loses a parent during youth related to vulnerability to psychosocial disturbance, delinquency, and depression (Dowdney, 2000; Draper & Hancock, 2011). Most of the parental loss research has focused on the acute grief response or long-term outcomes without giving equal attention to developmental trends. According to Leming and Dickinson (2016), few have studied the relationship between growth through the stages depicted in Erik Erikson's (1993) psychosocial development theory and the perception of death described in the regrief theory. There is a lack of understanding of how children and youth experience parental loss both in the moment and over time. While no researcher has developed a grief theory specifically addressing youths who lose one or both parents or has conducted research exploring how parental loss affects psychosocial development and grief patterns in

maturing individuals, there is a compelling reason to do so given that approximately 4% of U.S. children lose at least one parent by the age of 15 (Dowdney, 2000; NAGC, 2013).

### **Interpretation of the Results**

The purpose of this study was to identify a clear connection between young college students (18 to 22 years of age) who lost a parent during the adolescent stage (12 to 17 years of age) and their psychosocial development using the MEPSI inventory using the survey site surveymonkey.com. I attempted to determine whether college students who lost a parent had issues of psychosocial development during young adulthood more frequently than college students who did not lose a parent during adolescence. The method to gather data for this study was an inventory posted on an Internet survey site. I had two research questions and three hypotheses. I then compared the two groups' MEPSI scores. One of the scales (social identity) and its subscales were compared to determine whether participants who lost a parent scored lower on commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, interpersonal commitment, and intimacy. I also compared the two group TRIG scores. I collected via an anonymous online inventory, in which no demographic information was collected. I did not monitor who took the survey because of anonymity, but all participants filled out a consent form that outlined inclusion criteria before being directed to the inventory link.

Young college students' (18 to 22 years of age) reports of social identity, which consists of commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, interpersonal commitment, and intimacy, were compared using scales derived from the MEPSI. In each



case, college students who lost a parent during adolescence did not differ from college students who did not lose a parent, and so the null hypotheses were not rejected.

I compared the subscales for social identity skills between groups to see whether participants who lost a parent during adolescence scored lower than participants who did not lose a parent. The findings of this hypothesis indicated there was not a significant difference in the scores of the two groups. The basis for this hypothesis stems from Erik Erikson's definition of the search for identity, as confidence in one's inner continuity amid change comes into focus during the teenage years. Adolescents' cognitive development enables them to construct a theory of self (Berk, 2008). This stage lays the groundwork for coping with the challenges of adult life. For example, adolescents can organize their abilities, needs, interests, and desires so they can be expressed in the social context. Identity forms as young people resolve three key issues: the choice of occupation, the adoption of values to live by, and the development of satisfying sexual identity (Berk, 2008). Oltjenbruns's (2001) grief theory postulates that during adolescence, children acquire skills needed for success in their culture. If an adolescent loses a parent, they need to find ways to use these skills. They may have trouble mastering these skills due to returning grief from the loss of a parent. Therefore, they are at risk for maladaptive behavior when they leave for college as a young adult.

Some clinical implications of identity formation include fidelity and trust and role confusion. The period of adolescence allows young people to search for commitments to which they can be faithful (Berk, 2008). By remaining faithful to their commitments, young people are more likely to resolve the identity crisis with fidelity. Fidelity is defined

as the identification with a set of values and ideology, a religion, a political movement, a creative pursuit, or an ethnic group (Berk, 2008). At this stage, it becomes important for the individual to be trustworthy in oneself. In sharing thoughts and feelings, the adolescent clarifies a tentative identity by seeing it reflected in the eyes of the beloved. These identity issues must be solved in adolescence for young adults to form an identity of commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, interpersonal commitment, and intimacy. Oltjenbruns's (2001) grief theory postulates that if an adolescent loses a parent during adolescence, these identity issues may be delayed. This was the basis for the hypothesis comparing the subscales between the two groups on the MEPSI and on the TRIG.

Erikson observed that some degree of identity confusion is normal, accounting for the chaotic nature of much adolescent behavior and for teenagers' painful self-consciousness (Berk, 2008). Defenses against identity confusion include cliquishness and intolerance of differences. Young adults also may show confusion through regressing into adolescence to avoid resolving conflicts or by committing themselves to poorly thought-out courses of action (Berk, 2008). Oltjenbruns's (2001) theory suggests that identity confusion may be difficult. There was one finding in this study on these subscales of the MEPSI. The college students who lost a parent during adolescence had a harder time with interpersonal commitment and intimacy (mean score = 3.22,  $SD = .556$ ) versus (mean score = 3.57,  $SD = .556$ ) in the control group. However, the scores of the college students who had lost a parent remained within the normal limits and were therefore not statistically significant.

Regardless of this result, the subscale for the MEPSI inventory showed no difference in psychosocial functions between the group of participants who had lost a parent and the group of participants who had not. I used demographics to control variables such as age, education level, and socioeconomic status by matching the participants between groups for these variables. For example, a participant who had lost a parent was placed in that group and a participant who had not was placed in the second group, with the same age, education level, and socioeconomic status. Psychosocial functioning was not significantly affected by these demographics.

I used the MEPSI to determine which stage of psychosocial development the participant was in and whether past stages were completed before or after the parental loss. This inventory was developed to determine if the first six stages of Erikson's theory had been successfully resolved (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988). The six scales measured the extent of the unresolved or resolved psychosocial health of the participants. Each scale comprised 12 statements, ordered as a 5-point Likert-type questionnaire, and represented one stage of development, as Erikson (1950) described. I summed the items to produce a total score. Each scale had six items that measured the extent to which the issue at each stage was resolved, and six items that measured whether the issue at that stage remained unresolved (Darling-Fisher & Leidy, 1988). I compared the scores of the subscales and the mean scores of the two groups and did not find a significant difference between the scores.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study had several limitations. The anonymity and use of an online inventory to collect data may have reduced the accuracy of responses due to lack of liability. For example, the responses could not be validated for truthfulness. In addition, the criteria used for recruiting participants was narrow and specific. This study included only those who had separated from their parents and gone off to college. This may have served as a protective factor in that the families from which they had come may have been stable. The inclusion criteria did not include those who stayed home for college or went to college online from home. The literature review indicated that adults who lost a parent during childhood or adolescence are likely to manifest psychological disturbance and are vulnerable to delinquency later in life (Draper & Hancock, 2011; Ellis et al., 2013). Therefore, there may have been some college students who did not respond due to stress or who did not remain in college. It is possible that those who lost a parent during adolescence may not have attended college at all.

Other study weaknesses include exceedingly small numbers in the groups due to strict inclusion criteria and the period of the study. The generalizability of this study may be limited to similar populations of young adults (college-aged individuals, ages 18 to 22). Therefore, this study did not meet the G-power originally intended and instead had a R power of .184. I started this study at the start of COVID-19, it was especially difficult recruiting participants due to the closure of brick-and-mortar schools. Additionally, there are potential limitations to studies such as this one that depend on the memory of participants. For this and other reasons, recalling the relationship between adolescents

and their parents may have been difficult for some of the participants. These difficulties may have resulted in inaccurate or biased answers. This includes the fact that in Western culture, people are usually expected to have resolved the parental loss and thus often feel uncomfortable sharing such experiences of mourning.

### **Recommendations for Future Studies**

Due to the lack of scholarship on this subject, there is immense value in completing research that sheds light on parental loss in the developing individual and the effects that such a loss has at each stage of Erikson's (1993/1950) model, as the present research accomplished. A parental loss that occurs while an individual is maturing may be integral to future grief trends or may influence psychosocial trends that occur with each stage of development. The loss of a parent may shape a person's life for years or an entire lifetime. I did not identify differences between the group of participants who had lost a parent and the group of participants who had not, and that may be because the population included in this study did not reflect an overall picture of adults between the ages of 18 and 22. Therefore, recruiting from a broader population pool of all adults ages 18 to 22 could expand the findings. Future research could also examine distinct stages of development in relation to the next stage of development. For example, if an individual loses a parent during the age of young childhood, does it affect their development in the stage of middle childhood?

Even fewer researchers have studied how a parental loss that occurs 2 to 5 years prior to entering college affects the way these students develop psychosocial functioning and coping strategies (Balk, 2011). As such youths mature and begin making

commitments to others or experience isolation, they may again experience feelings of grief. This grief occurs, in part, due to guilt and the bereaved person's inability to bring back a close relationship with a deceased parent (Janowiak et al.,1995). As a result, these individuals may experience not only grief, but also feelings of isolation, because in Western culture they are usually expected to have resolved the parental loss and thus often feel uncomfortable sharing their experiences of mourning. Furthermore, these individuals may not feel comfortable talking to others in their lives due to anxiety over the possibility that others who have experienced a similar loss may have moved on or, conversely, that mentioning such a loss may make another bereaved youth feel unhappy again. Additionally, peers in the bereaved youth's life may not have experienced such a loss, leading the individual to feel that others are simply incapable of understanding the nature of their grief (Balk, 2011). As a result, the long-term psychosocial developmental trends of individuals after the loss of a parent offers another significant area for future research in the field of psychology, as the recurring impact of the loss on these individuals, termed recurring grief by Oltjenbruns (2001), requires greater understanding (Balk, 2011). This includes using a mixed-method approach to explore the grief aspect qualitatively along with including inventories to generate quantitative data to help triangulate the qualitative findings. Such findings may further inform experts about the returning grief that some individuals who experience parental loss undergo.

### **Implications**

The results of this study did not generate an efficient understanding of all the implications of continued grief and psychosocial development of youths who had lost a

parent. There were no significant differences between the group of participants who had lost a parent and the group of participants who had not. This study is limited by the small number of participants. An investigation of distinct stages of development using the MEPSI quantitative survey combined with a qualitative aspect exploring individuals' lived experiences could provide a deeper understanding of the bereaved youth who have lost a parent, their experience of returning grief, and their psychosocial development.

Despite the large numbers of individuals who lose a parent, insufficient attention has been devoted to following them as they continue to mature (Balk, 2011). In fact, no grief theory has been developed to describe the experiences of developing youths specifically (Leming & Dickinson, 2016). Therefore, this research may inspire future studies to further explain parental loss and psychosocial development and continue to provide evidence of the regrief theory. Studies that provide answers to and awareness of what growing up with the loss of a parent is like can help encourage a shift away from the social stigma that discourages individuals from talking about the deceased parent in later years with friends or family. The social challenge thus lies in cultivating an environment that encourages interactions that are beneficial to maintaining health and well-being for such persons, including the participants of this study. The findings of this study indicated that, although the college students who had lost a parent did not differ from those who had not, the participation rate was low. Why the participation rate was low could provide future research studies with about college students who lost a parent of why they did not participate. For example: Were college students too sad to answer the recruitment posters? Did they actually separate from their parent and go to college, or did they

perhaps remain at home? This information can be useful to parents, individuals who have lost a parent, professionals who work with these populations, and college programs. A lack of significant findings can have implications for social change. These data can add to the information indicating that adolescents who lose a parent may not be attending college, but the ones who do may not differ from their peers.

The literature review is a compilation of information about Oltjenbruns's (2001) regrief theory and adult studies that identified psychosocial dysfunction for those who lost a parent as a child or adolescent. While the intention of the literature review was to associate these findings with those who lost a parent during adolescence and separated from their parents as young adults, then went to college, there may be other ties to regrief that were not explored in this research. Continued exploration of adolescents' experiences of parental loss and regrief could affect the future understanding of parental loss and psychosocial functioning specifically among this age group.

### **Conclusions**

The goal of my research was to examine the relationship of the regrief phenomenon regarding loss of a parent during adolescence and psychosocial development into the early college years (18–22 years of age) as measured by the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory. A sample of young college students who had lost a parent, ages 18–22 years of age, completed the Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory and were compared with a group of college students 18–22 years of age who did not lose a parent. Past researchers have indicated the possibility of a connection between parental loss experiences and manifesting psychological disturbance,



vulnerability to delinquency later in life, and experiencing grief while moving through developmental milestones. Regrief phenomenon theory, described by Oltjenbruns (2001), posits that a developing individual who experiences a loss may cope with the loss using tools from the developmental stage they are in when the loss occurs. Then, as the person matures, the loss may take on new meaning, due to advances in developmental milestones, years later.

I built on the scant existing research that found children/adolescents may revisit grief at separate times throughout the lifespan, and that these children/adolescents may not feel like returning grief is normal. I looked to answer the question: If a parental loss occurs during adolescence, will grief return to disrupt psychosocial development when the individual separates from home and goes to college? The strengths of this study included quantitative assessment of the college students' psychosocial development and a prospective design for further research to study regrief as an individual matures. Weaknesses included a small parental loss group with limited data, and potential difference in subjects who did not participate. Commitment to personally meaningful values and goals, interpersonal commitment, intimacy, and identity achievement did not differ between the two groups. These young adult psychosocial traits were not significantly affected in college students who had lost a parent in adolescence. Other researchers have suggested that problems related to parental death may occur at distinct stages of development or when children become adults. Thus, more longitudinal studies are warranted to determine whether these functions are affected over time. Overall, I intended to invoke positive social change by raising public awareness of the commonness

and impact of recurring reactions to grief and the progression of individuals who have experienced the prior loss of a parent during the early years of college.

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## Appendix A: Socioeconomic Form

SES questions:

1. What is the highest grade (or year) of college that you have completed? (Check one.)

College/Junior College: 1 2 3 4

2. What is your racial ethnicity?

 White/Hispanic Black American Indian Asian Two or more races None of the above

3. How many months/years have you been residing independently from your parents?

4. Which of these categories best describes your total combined family income for your household when you lived at home with your parents. This should include income (before taxes) from all sources, wages, rent from properties, social security, disability and/or veteran's benefits, unemployment benefits, workman's compensation, help from relatives (including child payments and alimony), and so on.

 <\$25,000 \$25,000-<\$50,000 \$50,000-<\$75,000 \$75,000-<\$100,000 \$100,000-<\$150,000 ≥\$150,000

## Appendix B: TRIG

## Texas Revised Inventory for Grief (TRIG)

## Developers

Thomas R. Faschingbauer, Richard A. DeVaul, and Sidney Zisook

Publisher: American Psychiatric Press

## Assessment for Participants

## Part 1: Past Behavior

Think back to the time that your loved one died and answer all of these questions about your feelings and actions at that time by indicating whether each item is Completely True, Mostly True, Both True and False, Mostly False, or Completely False as it be appropriate to you after your dad died. Check the best answer.

1. After my parent died I found it hard to get along with certain people.
2. I found it hard to play at school well after my parent died.
3. After my parent died I lost interest in my family friends, and outside activities.
4. I felt a need to do things that my parent had wanted to do.
5. I was unusually irritable after my parent died.
6. I couldn't keep up with my normal activities for the first 3 months after my parent died.
7. I was angry that my parent left me.
8. I found it hard to sleep after my parent died.

## Part 11: Present Emotional Feelings

Now answer all the following questions by checking how you now feel about your parent's death. Do not look back to Part 1.

1. I still cry when I think of my parent.
2. I still get upset when I think about my parent.
3. I cannot believe my parent has died.
4. Sometimes I very much miss my parent.
5. Even now it's painful to recall memories of my parent.
6. I often think about my parent.
7. I hide my tears when I think about my parent.
8. No one will ever take the place in my life of my parent.
9. I can't avoid thinking about my parent.
10. I feel it's unfair that my parent died.
11. Things and people around me still remind me of my parent.
12. I am not capable to accept the death of my parent.
13. At times I still feel the need to cry for my parent.

## Appendix D: MEPSI

### Appendix D

#### Sample of Modified Erikson Psychosocial Stage Inventory

#### Developers

Cindy Darling-Fischer, Ph.D., RN and Nancy Kline Leidy, Ph.D., RN

Publisher: University of Michigan, Deep Blue

Assessment for Participants

*<https://deepblue.lib.umich.edu/handle/2027.../111746>*