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Adolescent Bereavement After Sudden Loss of a Close Friend

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Abstract

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MPhil, Walden University, 2021

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Despite the prevalence of sudden death in adolescence, there is a deficiency of resources and support for adolescents who have lost a close friend to premature death. These resources are vital, as the sudden and unexpected death of a close friend is often traumatizing and can contribute to a sense of instability in young people. Although a great deal of academic research has been conducted on sibling or parental grief during adolescence, there existed a need for further research on peer loss during adolescence. Therefore, the purpose of the study was to describe the essence and meaning of the lived experience of bereaved emerging adults who have undergone the sudden death of a close friend during adolescence, which was reflected in the primary phenomenological research question. The present study was grounded in post-traumatic growth (PTG) theory, which is a way of describing the positive personal growth that individuals may come to experience after living through a traumatic event. Interpretative phenomenological analysis was used as the methodological framework for this research, wherein eight participants engaged in semi-structured interviews. Data were analyzed through first open coding and then axial coding methods. The results indicated that adolescents experienced a host of negative effects after loss, often came to experience PTG outcomes, were rarely offered formal bereavement resources, found intangible supports to be valuable, and exhibited ambivalent attitudes and behaviors. Ultimately, by improving the scholarly understanding of this phenomenon, efforts to improve this demographic's long-term PTG outcomes can be reinforced, leading to positive social change by making a small contribution towards benefitting bereaved young people.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Introduction

An innate facet of adolescence is the significance of kindred friendships to the development of one's identity; consequently, the death of a close friend during adolescence ushers forth tremendous change in the young people left behind. These transmutations cut across emotional, psychological, and social spheres of bereaved adolescents' lives, often sprawling forward into adulthood. Sudden, accidental death plagues the adolescent demographic more than any other cause of mortality, making the necessity of investigating this topic all the more pressing. This study explored the lived experience of the sudden death of a close friend during adolescence as well as the subsequent bereavement period. Through qualitative analysis of the data, the research examines individual perceptions and meaning-making of loss, post-traumatic growth (PTG), and bereavement support resources. This chapter provides a brief background on the topic of adolescent bereavement followed by the problem statement, purpose of the study, and phenomenological research questions. Additionally, the chapter contains information on the theoretical and conceptual framework of the study, the nature of the study, key definitions, assumptions, scope, delimitations and limitations, as well as a discussion on the significance of this study.

Background

Adolescents undergoing the sudden loss of a close friend experience trauma, which can lead to a plethora of short and long-term outcomes. Though many of these outcomes may be negative, there is also the potential for meaning-making and growth.

This study focuses on emerging adults who have experienced bereavement due to the sudden loss of a close friend during adolescence. Despite the growing body of research on PTG as well as the firmly established academic and clinical knowledge-base on the topic of bereavement, there was an apparent dearth of literature that specifically tied the elements of PTG, adolescent grief, sudden loss, and close friendship together.

Throughout the process of conducting the literature review, four themes emerged: road fatalities and sudden losses, negative effects of grief, support resources and coping mechanisms, and PTG. Sudden death in adolescence is not uncommon. The majority of adolescent deaths in the United States occur through accidental causes (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Of these accidental deaths, motor vehicle accidents contribute to the greatest loss of adolescent life (Cunningham et al., 2018). Unfortunately, automobile accidents are ubiquitous worldwide; the adolescent demographic has a higher likelihood of involvement in such fatal collisions than other age ranges (Øvstedal et al., 2017). Empirical research has demonstrated that sudden, unexpected losses have many negative long-term consequences on friends of the deceased and, concerningly, this type of loss more often leads to prolonged grief symptoms than do expected losses (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Scott et al., 2020). Sudden traffic fatalities involving close friends have been shown to result in despair and, relatedly, to disorganized narrative accounts from recently bereaved adolescents; as per Papadatou et al. (2018), this study examined emerging adults who, after the passing of several years, had established the capability of creating coherent accounts of their bereavement experiences. Much research exists on the prevalence of sudden death, often

through road accidents, in this particular age demographic and the resultant grief

responses, much of which is explored in Chapter 2.

Another theme that emerged throughout the literature review process was the

negative effects of grief, particularly on young people. As was previously noted,

adolescents rely on close friendships in the development and modification of their

identities (Berk, 2018; Mead, 2020). As such, peer relationships are regularly perceived

by teenagers to be the most important and highly valued relationships in their lives (Berk,

2018). The loss of a close friend during adolescence has been linked with increased rates

of identity distress, depression, complicated grief, and prolonged grief (Captari et al.,

2021; Herberman Mash et al., 2013). Death of a sibling has received a great deal of focus

in scholarly research and has also been shown to be accompanied by a host of negative

effects (Herberman Mash et al., 2013; Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Liu et al., 2019). In

addition to the comorbid internal challenges of depression and complicated grief,

experiencing bereavement in adolescence also comes with negative social effects (Liu et

al., 2019).

Additionally, there is a substantial base of literature relating to support,

resources, and coping mechanisms. Some of this research focuses on individual coping

strategies (Döveling, 2017; Morris et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2019). Other studies

emphasize how external support, whether through social support or bereavement

resources, has been utilized to contribute to the management of adolescent grief (Howard

Sharp et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2020; McFerran et al., 2010; Ridley & Franche, 2020).

Much of this research is grounded in Garmezy's (1991) concept of resilience (Morris et

al., 2020; Sasser et al., 2019). The final emergent theme is how Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) PTG relates to grief and bereavement. Many studies link bereavement to long-term PTG outcomes (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Morris et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018). Some of this research reports on adolescents, though much of it looks at young adults or even adult experiences of PTG post-loss.

Despite the large expanse of literature covering topics such as adolescent bereavement, PTG, sudden loss, grief coping mechanisms, and bereavement support, a gap in the literature existed around this study's specific topic. As McIndoo (2014) noted, it is the surrounding literature that serves to illuminate a place where more research needs to be conducted. By coming to understand what has already been discovered about a given topic, researchers can come to implicitly recognize what is not yet known (McIndoo, 2014). The following chapter will expound upon what exists in the current body of knowledge related to the above topics. When exploring the literature, I discovered there to be few studies that examined adolescent bereavement related to the loss of a peer or a close friend. Additionally, though PTG had been studied in relation to grief, it had not been explored in the context of the sudden death of a close friend during adolescence. By examining the combined topics of adolescent bereavement, PTG, and the sudden death of a close friend, this study provides a unique contribution to the field. This research was designed to connect our understanding of these related topics and add meaningful knowledge for the use of bereaved adolescents and those who care for them.

Problem Statement

At present, there is a lack of resources and support for adolescents who are going through grief after the sudden loss of a peer. Many teenagers lose friends to a variety of fatal causes during adolescence; the primary cause of death for adolescents in the United States is unintentional injury, a category of fatalities that is largely composed of automobile accidents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). Sudden losses are often traumatizing and contribute to a sense of instability (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Mead, 2020). Though interventions and resources exist to support young people experiencing grief, they are largely uncommon, uncoordinated, and available primarily to bereaved siblings (Howard Sharpe et al., 2018; Ridley & Franche, 2020). Though much research has been conducted on adolescent grief as it relates to loss of a parent or sibling, there was a need for further research on adolescent bereavement following peer loss, particularly if the loss was sudden and of a close friend (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Birenbaum, 2000; Papadatou et al., 2018).

In addition to the hardships that accompany grief, many severe losses contribute to select positive long-term outcomes. PTG has been extensively researched since the conception of the theory by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996). For instance, research by Armstrong and Shakespeare-Finch (2011) demonstrated that there is a positive relationship between severity of a loss and potential for PTG, while Morris et al. (2020) examined the relationship between coping mechanisms and PTG outcomes. Other scholars have recently begun to examine potential PTG effects in a grieving adolescent population; the presence of PTG outcomes in grieving adolescents has been demonstrated

by many of these researchers, and often occurs as a later stage in the bereavement process (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Meyerson et al., 2011). However, there remained a need to understand the experience of PTG within adolescents who had lost a close friend due to sudden death.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to describe the essence and meaning of the lived experience of bereaved emerging adults in the United States who underwent the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence. Bereavement surrounding sudden peer loss will generally be described as emerging adults (aged 18-25) who experienced the sudden (not due to terminal or prolonged illness) death of a close peer while aged 13-18.

Research Questions

Phenomenological Research Question

What is the essence of the lived bereavement experience of emerging adults in the United States who have experienced the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence?

Sub-Questions

- How can we understand the perceptions of these emerging adults and their experience of loss?

- What is the experience of PTG in this population?

- Can we characterize bereavement resources and support as meaningful?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework for the Study

Theoretical Foundation

This study is theoretically grounded in PTG theory, developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), which elucidates the ways in which individuals who have lived through trauma can later experience positive growth as a result of the aforementioned trauma. Though by no means claiming that all traumatic events lead to any (or exclusively) positive long-term outcomes, Tedeschi and Calhoun found, through the results of numerous studies that examined individuals who had experienced traumatic events, that many people eventually come to experience growth as they move through the aftermath of a traumatic experience. To complement their theory, Tedeschi and Calhoun developed an inventory that aimed to measure the positive long-term impacts of undergoing trauma. Additional information on the origins of PTG theory and Tedeschi and Calhoun's initial research is included in Chapter 2.

Using PTG theory as the backbone of my dissertation's theoretical foundation has academic precedence. Since the advent and popularization of this theory, much research on bereavement and grief has explored PTG as an element, variable, or theoretical foundation. For instance, Captari et al. (2021) discussed PTG in relation to attachment processes post-loss, while Howard Sharp et al. (2018) explored how social support can influence PTG outcomes in bereaved siblings. Others, such as Morris et al. (2020), examined the relationship between coping mechanisms and potential PTG effects. Similarly, Stein et al. (2018) considered how continuing bonds with the deceased may relate to long-term PTG outcomes. Overall, PTG is a unifying thematic element in much

contemporary research surrounding grief and bereavement, which lends credence through precedence for my use of the theory herein.

Additionally, this theory was chosen due to its relation to my study approach. As I interviewed emerging adults several years after the loss of a close friend in adolescence, any long-term outcomes and effects have had time to make themselves known, both to the participants themselves and to myself as the researcher. My primary research question asked after the essence of the lived bereavement experience of emerging adults in the United States who have experienced the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence. Because part of the bereavement experience includes longer term impacts, PTG theory aligns, as it has assisted in examining these outcomes. One of my research sub-questions asked, what is the experience of PTG in this population? This directly relates to PTG as a theory and further supports the use of Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) work as a theoretical foundation for this research.

Conceptual Foundation

In addition to a theoretical foundation, there is also a conceptual foundation that helps to ground this study. Though often conflated, theoretical and conceptual frameworks perform distinct, yet complimentary, roles within a research endeavor. The conceptual lens for this research used ideas and concepts surrounding both resiliency and positive psychology as they relate to adolescent bereavement processes. The use of research on resilience has been focused on its relation to adolescents and its mitigating effects on trauma (Garmezy, 1991). Early exploration of resilience in an adolescent population was conducted by Garmezy (1991) and is discussed in greater length in

Chapter 2. This conceptual lens has proven especially relevant when examining the first and second research sub-questions: How can we understand the perceptions of these emerging adults and their experience of loss as well as what is the experience of PTG in this population? Connections between resiliency, perceptions of loss, and PTG are explored, both in Chapter 2 and within the study itself.

Additionally, positive psychology concepts are integrated into the conceptual framework. In particular, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi's (2000) seminal research and writings have been incorporated, which are further discussed in Chapter 2. Their research explored an alternative approach to mental health; rather than focusing on pathological facets of psychology, they turned their attention towards positive experiences, traits, and institutions that contribute to wellbeing and happiness (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). The third research sub-question links to this concept, as it explored if and how we can characterize bereavement resources and support as meaningful. Several questions within the interview protocol aimed to explore possible connections between bereavement, resiliency, and positive psychology (see Appendix). Though explicitly biased data analysis was distinctly avoided, these conceptual lenses have been reflected upon during the analysis phase of the research by way of their relation to the research questions. Ultimately, PTG, resiliency, and positive psychology each served as pieces of the theoretical and conceptual framework of this research, as they have each be linked to the way in which adolescents may potentially take their experiences of bereavement over sudden peer death and come to know subsequent healing and growth.

Nature of the Study

To address the research questions in this qualitative study, the specific research design followed a phenomenological approach (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to examine the meaning making processes of individuals who have undergone this particular life experience, the research design was structured around interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a framework that focuses on individuals' sense-making of and meaning attribution to a particular experience (Smith et al., 2009). Each of the three roots of IPA: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography, contributed to the design of this study; the import of these three foundational approaches will be discussed at further length in the methodology section, located in Chapter 3 (Smith et al., 2009). In phenomenological research, individuals' experience of a singular defining event, or phenomenon, is examined. For this study, the phenomenon in question was the death of a close friend during adolescence, as explored through the eyes of emerging adults.

In terms of methodological choices, IPA is a design that, in this context, necessitated semi-structured interviews with emerging adults who experienced bereavement over the loss of a close friend during adolescence (Smith et al., 2009). Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. Data were analyzed first through open coding of the interview transcriptions, and subsequently, through axial coding to identify the unifying themes. This phenomenological approach was used to add to the scientific community's understanding of the essence of the experience of adolescent bereavement after sudden peer loss.

Definitions

Accidental death: A term referring to deaths that occur without intention (excludes homicide and suicide), which are often sudden and violent (Vigilant & Williamson, 2003). In addition to being unintentional, accidental deaths are unforeseen (Vigilant & Williamson, 2003). Accidental death is the leading cause of adolescent death in the United States, the majority of which are caused by automobile accidents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Cunningham et al., 2018).

Emerging adult: A term used to describe a specific age category of young people, often considered to be 18-25, but sometimes extending through 29 (Fincham & Lucier-Greer, 2018; Mead, 2020). Conceptualized by Jeffrey Arnett as a response to the widening gap between the average length of time between the end of adolescence and marriage in the United States, emerging adulthood refers to a time in one's life after adolescence but before one takes on many of the demands of Erikson's "young adulthood," such as marriage or parenthood (Fincham & Lucier-Greer, 2018; Mead, 2020).

Post-traumatic growth: A term referring to positive long-term outcomes of a traumatic experience, coined by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996).

Sudden loss: A term related to grief associated with a sudden death; sudden deaths are sometimes, but not always, violent (Scott et al., 2020). Sudden loss has been shown to have more severe negative health and wellbeing outcomes than non-sudden forms of loss (Scott et al., 2020).

Assumptions

In order to complete this research, I assumed that adolescents who underwent the sudden loss of a close friend would experience strong emotions regarding the event as well as a subsequent period of bereavement, both of which would yield one or more types of long-term impact. Without this underlying assumption, the topic of the study would be made irrelevant. I also assumed that several years post-loss, individual participants would remember and honestly relay details of their bereavement experience; trust in the honesty of participants is central to an interview-based qualitative research effort. Additionally, I assumed that the selected participants were reasonably representative of the population of emerging adults who had suffered the loss of a close friend during adolescence, as generalizability within this niche population was vital to the applicability and utility of this study. Finally, I made the ontological assumption that each participant's experience may have been perceived uniquely by the individual, as reality and the perception of it was largely subjective (Summer, 2003). This assumption was necessary to follow through with a qualitative phenomenological study, because without it, understanding the lived experience of the individual would be unnecessary.

Scope and Delimitations

For the purpose of this research endeavor, it was necessary to define the boundaries of the topic under study as well as to omit related aspects, concepts, and theories. The topic of adolescent bereavement is broader than that which is examined here. Within this research, adolescent bereavement was only to be explored as it related to grieving the loss of a close friend. Related topics of study could have ventured into

adolescent grief over the loss of a sibling, parent, other mentor figure (familial or otherwise), or acquaintance. Additionally, the study of bereavement during adolescence could explore loss that occurs over time, such as death from terminal illness. This study excluded those who suffered a loss due to a long-term condition and exclusively examined loss that happened suddenly, such as those related to accidental death. Additionally, violent and/or intentional death, such as homicide, have been omitted herein; the purpose of this study was not to explore how teenagers cope with violent killings. Loss through different means has been shown to create different emotional reactions and long-term outcomes; it was only my intention to delve into the topic of bereavement due to sudden loss (Camacho et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2020).

For this research, the population was chosen as emerging adults who, as adolescents, experienced the sudden loss of a close friend. The age demographic of emerging adults was chosen for several reasons. Conducting research on or with children bears with it a host of ethical quandaries and procedural limitations. By consulting the experiences of adults just beyond adolescence, many of these challenges and considerations evaporate, making the research process itself less cumbersome and delicate. Additionally, using the emerging adult population allowed time to have passed between the death of the participants' friends during their teenage years and data collection, which allowed them to answer questions related to long-term outcomes.

This study employed the theoretical framework of PTG theory as well as the conceptual lenses of resilience and positive psychology. Several other prominent theories related to grief were excluded from this study. Perhaps most infamous of bereavement

theories is Kübler-Ross' Five Stages of Grief Model (Kübler-Ross, 1969). Though this model ends in a stage of "acceptance," which aligns in some ways with PTG theory, the model has not be used as a lens through which to view the qualitative data obtained for my study (Kübler-Ross, 1969). This by no means precluded the possibility that the data may mirror this renowned theory's model of grief, but I chose to largely ignore the model so as not to bias my expectation of each participant's experience of bereavement. A plethora of other empirically-based theories of trauma and grief exist, but this study only explicitly drew from theories of PTG, resilience, and positive psychology.

By limiting the scope of one's study, the participant population, and the associated theories, researchers therefore limit the transferability of their results. However, without these delimitations, applicability would be difficult to ascertain. By restricting these aspects of the research, I am acknowledging that the results should be largely transferable beyond the participants themselves to the population they represent.

Limitations

As with many forms of research, this study must bear the weight of several limitations. By the nature of qualitative research, my study relied on recruiting a small number (eight) of participants that met the specific inclusion criteria. It proved difficult to recruit enough participants, both because of the particular inclusion requirements and given the sensitive nature of the research topic. I made use of a multitude of recruitment strategies in order to secure a sufficient number of participants, which are discussed at length in Chapter 3. Another limitation relates to transferability. Due to the innate precision of phenomenological study, the results of this research are narrowly

generalizable. However, through thick description of the data, the results are transferable to others within the population of study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Dependability is another measure of qualitative research trustworthiness, one which has been translated from the quantitative concept of reliability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reliability cannot be obtained in a numerical manner in qualitative research; therefore, steps were taken to produce dependable research with results that are consistent with the collected data. In this study, dependability has been ensured through the use of peer examination, reflexivity through the use of a research journal, and the inclusion of a thorough audit trail. These as well as other issues of trustworthiness are discussed at length in Chapter 3.

The limitations associated with personal, professional, and academic bias must also be considered. As someone with personal experience with the subject matter, it was essential to refrain from allowing my own experience of the phenomenon to cloud the analysis of data I collected. Professional bias and relational disparities were circumvented by clearly avoiding the inclusion of participants with whom I shared a work environment. Power dynamics associated with the interviewer-interviewee relationship will be explored in further depth in Chapter 3. Finally, academic bias presented itself by way of preconceptions of data results associated with my knowledge of the supporting literature. As I had deeply explored the current body of academic knowledge on adolescent bereavement, sudden death, and PTG, it was necessary that I carefully side-step the pitfall of academic bias. When applicable, this knowledge was used to bolster my theoretical and conceptual foundations for the research, yet I tread lightly to avoid overlaying these expectations on the hard data. There exist strategies for reflexivity, such as bracketing

and reflective journaling, that I employed throughout the research process, which reduced

the potential for bias (Ortlipp, 2008; Sorsa et al., 2015). Maintaining awareness of the

potential limitations of this research served to help me recognize and, when applicable,

successfully overcome these barriers.

Significance

Looking through the lens of PTG theory, as conceptualized by Tedeschi and

Calhoun (1996), this study could be leveraged to help young people undergoing grief due

to sudden peer loss by improving the collective understanding of how to provide

beneficial support resources in the form of books, school curriculum, training modules

for therapists/schools, intervention programs, and/or information for friends and family

members of bereaved adolescents to help them better understand what support behaviors

may be constructive or detrimental to the grieving process. As "accidental injuries," and

motor vehicle accidents in particular, are the leading cause of death of adolescents in the

United States, there are many sudden deaths within this demographic; therefore, a

multitude of young people are confronted with this form of unexpected loss, which is

accompanied by a plethora of consequent changes in one's life (Centers for Disease

Control and Prevention, 2021; Herberman Mash et al., 2013; Mead, 2020; Papadatou et

al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018). During adolescence, identity is largely tied to one's peers,

making this an especially difficult developmental time to experience the sudden death of

a close friend (Berk, 2018). Increasing the scholarly understanding of the essence of this

phenomenon helps to provide information that can therefore aid in the efforts to bolster

this demographic's long-term PTG outcomes; ultimately, this study takes a small, yet

hopeful step towards positive social change through its beneficial impact on individual bereaved young people.

Summary

This study aimed to use an interpretative phenomenological lens to examine the lived experience of emerging adults who, as adolescents, underwent the sudden loss of a close friend. Within this introductory chapter, one can find a brief summary of related research, the problem statement, the underlying purpose of the study, and the research questions, as well as the theoretical and conceptual foundations upon which the research stands. Further, the chapter included a discussion on the nature of the study, key definitions, assumptions that were made, the scope and delimitations of the research, notable limitations of this particular study, and the significance of conducting this research. Future chapters of the dissertation will delve into the body of literature surrounding the topic of study and the methodological intricacies of the conducted research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this study is to describe the essence of the lived experience of bereaved emerging adults in the United States who have suffered the loss of a close peer during adolescence, as well as to describe their meaning-making of their bereavement experience. Presently, there is an inadequate presence of resources and support for adolescents who are undergoing bereavement due to the loss of a close friend. The current state of the literature shows that research in this arena is largely focused on parental or sibling bereavement and bereavement due to terminal illness, rather than sudden losses or the death of a close friend during adolescence (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Birenbaum, 2000; Collins-Colosi, 2017; Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Keenan, 2014; Morris et al., 2020; Ridley & Franche, 2020; Seguin et al., 1995). What research does exist that explores the sudden death of close friends during adolescence has often been tied to other sources of trauma, such as mass homicide or simultaneous injury to the bereaved (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Papadatou et al., 2018). In order to better understand the academic body of knowledge on and adjacent to adolescent bereavement, a thorough literature review was conducted.

Throughout this chapter, the literature search strategy will be explained, followed by a detailed examination of the theoretical and conceptual frameworks (both of which are also discussed at length in the prior chapter). These shorter sections will be followed by an exploration of the current body of knowledge surrounding the four themes that emerged from this review of the literature. The first of the four themes encompasses

sudden death, particularly but not exclusively in the form of road fatalities. Next, this literature review will delve into the second emergent theme, negative effects of loss, which will be succeeded by the third theme of bereavement support, resources, and coping strategies. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the fourth theme, PTG, as it relates to bereavement processes, particularly in adolescence and young adulthood.

Literature Search Strategy

For this literature review, a search strategy was employed with the purpose of creating a semi-exhaustive exploration of the academic research on relevant grief-related topics. This review is considered semi-exhaustive rather than exhaustive to acknowledge the impossibility of achieving complete comprehension of all literature tangentially related to the subject of this dissertation. Though great efforts were made to collect the most relevant and suitable academic publications on related subjects, I recognize the proliferation and ever-expanding nature of the field. For this search, the main database that was utilized was the Walden University Library. Specifically, the Thoreau feature was applied for broad cross-database searches. This search method yielded the majority of the articles included in this literature review. Narrower databases, such as APA PsycArticles, were also searched. Some preliminary searches were also conducted using Google Scholar as accessed through the Google search engine in tandem with my Walden university credentials. One specific academic journal that was also comprehensively searched was OMEGA—Journal of Death & Dying.

A plethora of key search terms were used in numerous combinations. For example, the terms *adolescent bereavement/grief, teen bereavement/grief, young adult*

bereavement/grief, and *emerging adult bereavement/grief* were often used. Other search terms included *posttraumatic growth, sudden death, sudden loss, motor vehicle collisions, road fatalities, coping, coping mechanisms, support resources, consequences, long-term outcomes,* and *outcomes*, among other similar terms. As I searched for these terms, other analogous key words and phrases were revealed, which allowed me to use iterative searching to improve the scope of my results. When searching for these key terms, other limiting features of the database were used, such as the option to narrow the results down to peer-reviewed journal articles and specify the year of publication. Some searches were made without these delimitations, however most of the searches did limit the source type and publication date (often to the past 4 or 5 years) in order to locate the most relevant and timely articles. This literature review does include a number of supporting articles from outside of the 5-year timeframe; they were included intentionally, as grief is an immutably universal experience that seems to exist largely outside of the constraints of time and place. In other words, the loss of a young life is the loss of the young life whether it occurred in the year 2020 or the year 1990. For this reason, select articles were included to strengthen this understanding that bereavement processes have remained largely unchanged throughout, at least, the recent past.

The process of conducting a literature review is not, however, as simple as locating as many pertinent articles through a search database as possible. Rather, it is an iterative process that relies on the aforementioned articles to act as guideposts pointing towards other germane, and often seminal, research. Within many articles, I searched for similar research being referenced, especially if the research was discussed in multiple

newer publications. This technique also allowed me to better see which researchers were conducting the most research within the field as well as which theories/work were considered reputable and methodologically sound. Throughout the process of searching through the current academic body of knowledge, the sheer quantity of research that has been conducted on both bereavement and PTG was revealed. Though this continual search has yielded a great deal of research on adolescent bereavement, it has also reaffirmed that the particular subject matter of my dissertation does, in fact, constitute a gap in the literature which I can endeavor to fill.

Theoretical Foundation

This research effort is supported by Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) PTG theory and inventory. PTG forms the theoretical foundation on which this study was constructed; the use of PTG theory is supported by academic precedent, which will be presently explored. In the mid-1990s, Tedeschi and Calhoun recognized that numerous studies had shown the negative consequences of experiencing traumatic events, but that there was also a burgeoning conception that trauma may also provide certain long-term benefits or opportunities for growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). As they explored the literature available at the time, they recognized three conceptual threads running throughout recent studies on trauma: changes in perception of the self, changes in interpersonal relationships, and changes in life philosophies (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996).

With the intent to create an inventory that could measure these perceived positive changes post-trauma, Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) conducted a three-study series. The first study aimed to develop the inventory items and establish scale reliability while the

second supported the inventory's concurrent and discriminant validity and the third

focused on measuring construct validity (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Through this work,

the researchers identified five domains of PTG, which included relating to others, new

possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life (Tedeschi &

Calhoun, 1996). Additionally, they found that women are more likely to report PTG

related benefits than men and that perceptions of growth are most closely related to the

big-five personality traits of optimism and extraversion (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). At

the conclusion of this research effort, Tedeschi and Calhoun had developed their

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory (PTGI), which consisted of 21 items that could be

measured by a six-point Likert scale. This inventory is still used today in its original form

to, as initially intended, measure individuals' perceptions of growth after various

traumatic life experiences. Overall, PTG theory posits that individuals often perceive

growth and/or benefits that are rooted in their experiences of trauma; while the theory by

no means assumes that all individuals will experience PTG or that people experience only

positive outcomes as a result of their trauma, it does assume that humans have the ability

to take profoundly traumatizing experiences and perceive some good to have been born

of them.

This theory has been applied numerous times in a wide variety of manners to

academic research. Within the last 25 years, many researchers have recognized the value

of the theory and have utilized both the theory and the inventory to explore trauma from

myriad angles. Specifically in relation to bereavement, academicians have used PTG as

either an element, variable, or theoretical foundation for their research. Many studies,

such as those conducted by Captari et al. (2021), Howard Sharpe et al. (2018), Morris et al. (2020), and Stein et al. (2018), examine how certain factors can sway an individual's PTG outcomes; in the case of Howard Sharpe et al., this factor was social support as they measured its influence on PTG outcomes in bereaved siblings. Captari et al. examined attachment processes in relation to PTG, while similarly, Morris et al. explored the relationship between various coping mechanisms and the presence of PTG effects. PTG is, if not strictly ubiquitous, then abundantly present within grief-related research. In addition to acting as this study's theoretical framework, PTG is also one of the emergent themes that will be discussed within the ensuing literature review.

When considering the potential theories that could buttress this study, PTG was decided upon for several reasons. As previously shown, PTG has tremendous academic precedent which meant the existence of a profusion of peer-reviewed articles that could form the basis of my literature review. These prior research efforts could, and did, also help to guide my methodological choices. Additionally, my particular research interest lies in the positive long-term outcomes that may be experienced by bereaved adolescents after the loss of a close friend; PTG aligned with this desire to understand the coping mechanisms, personal tendencies, and external support that led to increased positive outcomes. Using this lens, I could better understand these factors that play into personal meaning-making in order to better assist young people who have experienced this precise traumatic phenomenon. Ultimately, PTG theory most closely aligned with prior research as well as my own research interests and will therefore be used as the theoretical foundation for this study.

After having chosen PTG to form the theoretical foundation, it was vital to ensure that other aspects of the study were appropriately aligned. One methodological decision that supports the use of PTG is the decision to interview participants several years post-loss. Having experienced the death of a close friend years prior to their study participation, participants have presumably had time for possible growth and reflection, allowing long-term outcomes to percolate and manifest themselves. Additionally, the present study includes a research sub-question that is directly linked to PTG theory. The question asks: What is the experience of PTG in this population? Not only is the theory underlying the study as a whole, but the concept surfaces in a direct manner through this research question. Though this study does not inherently challenge PTG, it does leave room for participants' personal experiences to contradict or build upon its central tenets. Ultimately, PTG theory closely aligns with my research purpose and questions, was largely influential in the methodological decision making of this study and informs a noteworthy amount of the current literature surrounding bereavement, making it an ideal choice to use for this study's theoretical foundation.

Conceptual Framework

In addition to the theoretical foundation, this study also employs a conceptual framework. As previously discussed, the conceptual framework functions in a different way than the theoretical foundation, though they are often mistaken for one and the same. In this study, two concepts will be utilized and explored as part of the conceptual framework. The first is research on resiliency in children and the second is positive

psychology. These ideas will be incorporated as a conceptual lens through which to view adolescent bereavement processes.

The concept of resilience was first introduced in relation to the mitigation of childhood trauma by Garmezy (1991). In his seminal research, he explored adolescent resiliency as a protective factor for the negative effects of trauma (Garmezy, 1991). Garmezy explored the concept of functional adequacy despite experiences of stress and what markers demonstrate resilient behavior in children and adolescents under psychological stress. According to Garmezy, "the term resilience by definition means the tendency to 'rebound or recoil,' 'to spring back,' the power of recovery,'" (p. 459). This concept will be returned to throughout the present study, as this research is inherently entangled with the idea of trauma recovery. Within his work, Garmezy discussed the vulnerability of children and the risk factors that impact long-term negative outcomes as well as factors connected to resilience; some of these resiliency factors are individual while others are familial or support related.

There are instances where bereavement has been explored in tandem with resiliency. These past studies provide a model as well as precedent for the current inclusion of resiliency within the conceptual framework of this study. For instance, Pangborn (2019) examined the potential connections between narrative family storytelling, resilience, and grief during adolescence. In other instances, resiliency has been explored as a personality trait that impacts chosen coping strategies and PTG outcomes (McClatchey, 2020). As in the aforementioned study, resiliency and PTG are often related, which provides further confirmation that this is an appropriate concept to

include within the present study's framework. Additionally, resiliency in children is aligned with two of this study's research sub-questions: a) how can we understand the perceptions of these emerging adults and their experience of loss and b) what is the experience of PTG in this population? The ways in which perceptions of loss and PTG are experienced will be viewed through the conceptual lens of resiliency, which will benefit the study by positioning the work within the broader research tradition.

In addition to resiliency, the concept of positive psychology will be included within this study's conceptual framework. Positive psychology was conceptualized and brought to the public attention by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000); rather than focusing on pathology in mental health, these researchers explored positive facets of psychology, such as constructive experiences, strength-related traits, and institutions that contribute to the wellbeing and happiness of individuals. Their work turns away from pathology and toward the factors that encourage individuals to flourish, with a particular emphasis on moving behavioral sciences away from a purely deficit model of mental health (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Seligman, 2012). Similarly to Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi do not posit that negative experiences, pathology, or trauma do not exist, but rather that it is important to understand how to lead rich and fulfilling lives despite and beyond one's challenges. In his book published a decade later, Seligman (2012) described how simply removing something typically perceived as negative (such as anxiety or depression) does not make someone happy, it only makes them empty or devoid of the problem. Individuals ought then to utilize

subjectivity of experience, their personal strengths, and positive institutions to move beyond emptiness and into a state of wellbeing (Seligman, 2012).

Prior research and trauma interventions have implemented the concept of positive psychology into studies and practice. Some interventions utilize a dual-continua model of trauma-informed education, a model that seeks to include both the deficit perspective and the strengths perspective, where psychological resources are called upon in recovery from trauma (Brunzell et al., 2016). Others create their own conceptual branches out of the original notion, such as Leung's (2019) Tragic Optimism, a view based on positive psychology that emphasizes meaning-making. Despite its dominant use in trauma care outside of the realm of bereavement support, positive psychology takes a strengths-based approach that aligns with the current study. One of the research sub-questions asks if and how we can characterize bereavement resources and support as meaningful, which can connect to interventions and support resources that utilize positive psychology as well as to personal traits that may encourage positive coping techniques. Within the interview protocol (see Appendix), multiple questions seek to explore connections between positive psychology, bereavement, and PTG.

As resiliency and positive psychology are part of the conceptual framework rather than the theoretical foundation, they will be called upon as a conceptual lens throughout data analysis. Furthermore, these concepts have helped to inform the research questions, which are an integral piece of this research effort. Ultimately, PTG, resiliency, and positive psychology will serve to support this research by creating a union between it and the broader research tradition as well as by aiding in the interpretation and understanding

of how young people take traumatic experiences of loss and come to perceive long-term benefits and growth.

Emergent Themes

When reviewing the literature, four themes emerged from the current body of knowledge on adolescent death and bereavement. The first theme surrounds the subject of sudden death and road fatalities. This theme will be discussed first as it will help to lay the foundation for the themes to follow. Next will come a discussion on the negative effects of loss on adolescents or on those who have lost adolescents, which have been amply documented. Moving into a more applicable field of knowledge, the literature review will examine the current body of work on bereavement support, resources, and coping strategies. Finally, the literature review will conclude with an exploration of PTG in bereaved individuals.

Sudden Death & Road Fatalities

Though much bereavement research focuses on terminal illnesses and/or natural causes of death, there is also a growing body of knowledge on sudden death and its impact on the bereaved. As this current study excludes homicide and suicide as causes of death, only several of the articles herein will touch on these topics. Predominately, this literature review homes in on sudden, accidental death, many of which occur through road accidents. This section explores multiple facets of sudden death, including cause of death, relationship to the deceased, and negative impacts, as well as other life changes connected to the death of a loved one.

Sudden, Violent, Traumatic, and Unanticipated Death

While enduring the death of a loved one is widely considered to be an experience of sorrow that words cannot touch no matter the circumstance, it is meaningful to explore how sudden death in particular affects those left behind, especially if the deceased or the bereaved are in childhood or adolescence. It is essential to separate research on bereavement connected to sudden deaths from that associated with expected deaths, as circumstance of death is known to largely influence the ensuing bereavement experience (Breen & O'Connor, 2010; Camacho et al., 2018; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; LaFreniere & Cain, 2015a; Scott et al., 2020). Suddenness of loss can contribute to an array of negative outcomes and is widely accepted to be more traumatizing than anticipated losses (Camacho et al., 2018; Lohan et al., 2002; Scott et al., 2020; Stewart, 1999). For instance, complicated grief is shown to be exacerbated by suddenness of death, especially if accompanied by untimeliness, such as the loss of a child or adolescent, preventability, as would occur after an accident such as a motor vehicle crash, and violence and/or mutilating injuries (Breen & O'Connor, 2010; Camacho et al., 2018; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Stewart, 1999).

Conflicting reports exist on whether post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is increased by sudden loss verses expected loss, though there appear to be fewer studies linking PTSD to sudden death than those that link complicated grief to the unanticipated loss of a loved one. While some research shows that sudden death may increase the severity of PTSD symptoms, other research has demonstrated no significant difference in PTSD scores between children who have lost parents suddenly versus those who

experienced the expected death of a parent (McClatchy et al. 2009; Stewart, 1999).

Recent research seems to focus more on the factors that contribute to the decrease in

PTSD symptoms post-loss, which will be discussed at length in later sections of this

chapter (Papadatou et al., 2018; Scott et al., 2020). Additional negative effects of sudden

loss will also be further explored, such as those relating to depression, peer support,

family functioning, academic adjustment, and mental distress (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015a;

Lohan & Murphy, 2005; Oosterhoff et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2018).

The rationale behind choosing to explore sudden loss versus anticipated loss is the

prevalence of accidental deaths in the adolescent population. Accidental deaths are

innately sudden. According to Vigilant & Williamson (2003), accidental deaths are not

only unintentional, but "are usually unforeseen, violent, and unexpected," (p. 2). Many

accidental deaths are further shadowed by the belief in their preventability (Breen &

O'Connor, 2010; Cunningham et al., 2018; Vigilant & Williamson, 2003; Stewart, 1999).

Accidental deaths, otherwise known as death by unintentional injury, are both most

common during adolescence and the most frequent cause of death in adolescence

(Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Cunningham et al., 2018; Hardt et al.,

2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2018; Papadatou et al., 2018). In 2016, more than 60% of deaths

for children and adolescents were due to injury-related accidents (Cunningham et al.,

2018). This is not a recent development, as Stewart (1999) also noted the leading cause of

death for those aged 0-24 to be car accidents, which are currently the largest sub-category

of death by accidental injury (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021;

Cunningham et al., 2018). As the research clearly demonstrates there to be differences

between anticipated losses and sudden losses as well as the prevalence of sudden loss during adolescence, it is meaningful to explore the current body of knowledge on adolescent grief after experiencing the sudden death of a loved one.

Motor Vehicle Crashes

While the current study did not focus solely on motor vehicle crashes, it was presumed that there were likely to be study participants who had experienced the death of a close friend due to road traffic accidents. Motor vehicle crashes (also known as road traffic accidents, car crashes, automobile accidents, etc.) are currently and have consistently been the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in the United States in recent years (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021; Cunningham et al., 2018). Similarly, in the young/emerging adult age range of 15-24, motor vehicle crashes are also one of the leading causes of death (Williams et al., 2018). According to recent statistics, motor vehicle accidents represent 20% of the deaths of children aged 1-19 within the United States (Cunningham et al., 2018). This is by no means an American phenomenon, as research in other countries across the globe also demonstrates the prevalence of traffic accidents leading to the loss of young life (Djelantik et al., 2021; Øvstedal et al., 2017).

While there is existing literature examining fatal road traffic accidents in the adolescent and/or young adult population, there is arguably much room for further exploration. Several modern social scientists maintain that there has not been enough research dedicated to the young adult population in regard to motor vehicle crashes, especially related to the traumatic death of a peer, despite the high prevalence of fatal

road traffic accidents within this age demographic (Hardt et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018). In fact, a great deal of the current body of knowledge on bereavement after losing an adolescent to a motor vehicle crash, including both recent research and earlier studies, focuses on parental grief (Djelantik et al., 2021; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Séguin et al., 1995; Spooren et al., 2001). There are clear gaps in the literature relating to the experience of the deceased adolescents' contemporaries, whether peer or friend.

A recurring theme in the literature is a pervasive sense of preventability. Grief reactions are shown to increase when a bereaved individual perceives the death to have been preventable, which is another reason why circumstance of death impacts grief experiences (Breen & O'Connor, 2010). Additionally, the risk of developing various mental health conditions such as major depressive disorder, PTSD, and complicated grief are also increased when the death is perceived to have been preventable (Breen & O'Connor, 2010). Preventability in the literature is a difficult term, as it sometimes is operationalized as alcohol or drug use as a contributing factor to the motor vehicle crash and other times is referenced more generally as a death that was neither inevitable nor even likely (Breen & O'Connor, 2010; Cunningham et al., 2018; Stewart, 1999).

Motor vehicle crashes as a cause of death have specifically been linked to co-occurring mental health problems, such as PTSD, depression, and complicated grief/prolonged grief disorder (Breen & O'Connor, 2010; Djelantik et al., 2021; Hardt et al., 2020; Séguin et al., 1995; Spooren et al., 2001; Stewart, 1999; Williams et al., 2018). PTSD has recently been demonstrated to be most frequent mental health concern following the death of a loved one in a traffic accident (Hardt et al., 2020). Motor vehicle

crashes have long been documented to increase general psychiatric distress in parents of deceased children when compared to other causes of death (Spooren et al., 2001). Loss from this cause of death is particularly traumatizing; early research showed that there was no group difference between suicide-bereaved individuals and road accident-bereaved individuals in terms of depression nine months post-loss, which demonstrates the severity of sudden loss due to automobile accidents (Seguin et al., 1995). Mental health conditions notwithstanding, negative emotional grief responses are often present, and "extend beyond an expected grief response," particularly if the deceased is a young person (Breen & O'Connor, 2010, p. 30; Øvstedal et al., 2017).

However, certain cultural practices may influence the effects of motor vehicle crashes on surviving loved ones (Djelantik et al., 2021). As Djelantik et al. (2021) showcased in their recent study of Balinese bereaved family members after automobile accidents, 0% of their sample exhibited prolonged grief disorder, while only 1% showed symptoms of PTSD, and 2% experienced depression 16 months post-loss; they posited that it is the Balinese cultural rituals that contributed to the resilience and low rates of post-loss morbidity (Djelantik et al., 2021).

It is not only in Bali that humans tend to envelop death in a shroud of ritual. In response to fatal automobile accidents, the bereaved often desire to create a physical memorial of their loved ones (Clark & Franzmann, 2006). This physical marker at the place of death extends beyond the traditional burial marker, a commonality in the United States and many other countries no matter the circumstance of death. As Clark and Franzmann (2006) stated, roadside memorials speak to "the power of place," in giving

the bereaved a sense of authority and empowerment, as well as recognizing the strength

of their grief and the presence of their deceased loved one (p. 579). Additional discussion

on mourning rituals and behaviors that increase a bereaved individual's connection to a

child or adolescent who has died are included in a later section.

Relationship to the Deceased

Another essential distinction to make is the relationship that a bereaved individual

had to the deceased. While this is not intended to convey a hierarchical scale of grief or

pain where one person's grief is measured against another's, the literature does show

certain distinct characteristics of grief associated with various relationships to the loved

one who has died. The first relationship examined herein is the loss of a parent by an

adolescent/young person, which will be followed by a discussion on the loss of a sibling.

Research exploring the death of a close friend will be explored next. Finally, this section

on relationship to the deceased will be concluded with an examination of adult loss of a

child.

Loss of a Parent. Parental loss during childhood or adolescence is a sorrow that

many young people face. This experience poses a host of potentially developmentally and

psychologically disruptive challenges, as a foundational part of a child's world is lost

when a parent dies (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015a; McClatchy et al., 2009; Revet et al.,

2021; Sandler et al., 2016; Simsek Arslan et al., 2020; Weber et al., 2021). The idea of

irreversibility is often not fully conceptualized in young people, which can contribute to

distress upon encountering the death of a loved one (Simsek Arslan et al., 2020). Many

children and adolescents who have experienced the loss of a parent subsequently face

psychological challenges in the form of moderate to severe childhood traumatic grief (CTG), PTSD, prolonged grief disorder (PGD), and depression, among other psychological and developmental disturbances (McClatchy et al., 2009; Revet et al., 2021). Severity of CTG and PTSD symptoms in parentally bereaved children have been demonstrated to be unrelated to type of parental loss (sudden/violent vs expected), while other emotional and mental health factors have been shown to impact the long-term mental wellbeing outcomes of parentally bereaved children (McClatchy et al., 2009; LaFreniere & Cain, 2015; Revet et al., 2021; Weber et al., 2021). Peritraumatic distress at time of death is demonstrated to be a significant predictor of PGD severity in children/adolescents who have lost a parent, making it a key response to watch for when identifying children most in need of bereavement services (Revet et al., 2021).

Bereavement interventions may be effective at mitigating negative outcomes in some cases. For instance, suicidal ideation, the likelihood of which is increased after the death of a parent, has been shown to be diminished by certain bereavement interventions, such as the Family Bereavement Program (Sandler et al., 2016). Though many parentally bereaved children and adolescents receive support from peers following the death of their parent, LaFreniere & Cain's (2015a) research demonstrates that 71.4% of this demographic prefer not to have their peers engage in bereavement-related interaction. In addition to this dynamic with peers, communication with other family members after the death of a parent is also strained (Weber et al., 2021). The disconnect between parentally bereaved children/adolescents and their parent-proxy adult family members is exemplified by the finding that the adults' average rating of communication with the

bereaved youth is moderate in quality while the youths' average rating is low in quality; additionally, the adult family members tended to rate the youths' mental health as good while the children and adolescents themselves perceived their psychological health to be poor (Weber et al., 2021). Perception differences notwithstanding, family communication is still a protective factor against negative grief outcomes (Weber et al., 2021). Additionally, a recent systematic review of PTG in parentally bereaved youth found that, though there were certainly factors that impacted these outcomes, most of these young people did come to experience PTG (Simsek Arslan et al., 2020). Overall, despite the many negative psychological impacts associated with parentally bereaved youth, longer term outcomes are often positive.

Loss of a Sibling. Loss of a sibling has also been explored in the literature. In general, the death of a sibling has been shown to be traumatic and the catalyst for negative life changes (Khang et al., 2020; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Lohan & Murphy, 2006). Many of these challenges are exacerbated when the death is sudden and/or traumatic (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Lohan & Murphy, 2006). Some negative outcomes are psychological, such as the development of complicated grief or mental distress, while others are behavioral (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Khang et al., 2020; Lohan & Murphy, 2006). Relationships with parents and other family members are often strained and overall family functioning is negatively impacted (Khang et al., 2020; Lohan & Murphy, 2006). Social changes have also been noted, as bereaved adolescents often want to be treated 'normally' (Khang et al., 2020; LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b). Even several years after the traumatic death of a sibling, surviving siblings were still perceived

by their parents to continue to exhibit grief reactions that had not lessened with time (Lohan and Murphy, 2002). However, similarly to findings on parentally bereaved children, Johnsen and Afgun (2021) found that many bereaved siblings, especially females, did come to experience PTG responses.

Loss of a Close Friend. The death of a close friend during adolescence has not been the primary focus of teenage bereavement research. Multiple researchers concur that despite the importance of friendships in the lives of young people, very little research attention has focused on the loss of a close friend, violent or otherwise (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Papadatou et al., 2018). What few recent research efforts have been made have largely surrounded the 2011 killings at Utøya, in Norway (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021). Johnsen & Dyregrov (2016) examined the bereavement process of adolescents after losing their close friends in that sudden and violent massacre. The results of their qualitative study identified multiple themes including the effect of circumstance of death on bereavement, daily experiences of loss, and the importance of recognizing this group of bereaved individuals (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016). They purport that "the loss of a close friend has had a profound effect on the young people, and the loss of a friend is also a distinct loss," (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016, p. 16).

A few years later, Johnsen worked with Afgun to examine both the negative and positive long-term outcomes of sudden loss of a close friend (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021). Their findings included the notable outcome that siblings and close friends did not differ in their PTG scores, indicating that in some ways, there is similarity in the adolescent

bereavement processes of losing a sibling and losing a close friend (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021). Similarly, Papadatou et al. (2018) found that the bereavement process of peer loss moved from a state of living in despair, to collecting one's pieces, and finally to remembering and moving on; symptoms of post-traumatic stress decreased in severity over time while positive effects increased after several years. The limited research available indicates both the severity of the death of a close friend as well as the potential for PTG (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Papadatou et al., 2018).

Loss of a Child. While not an experience of adolescent bereavement, literature on the sudden loss of an adolescent child also has a place in this review. The grief of a parent over their dead child, especially when the death is sudden, is overwhelming for years afterwards (Øvstedal et al., 2017). Furthermore, psychological distress after loss of a child is common, particularly if the loss was sudden/traumatic (Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Seguin et al., 1995; Spooren et al., 2001). Depression occurs in many parents of suddenly deceased children, regardless of whether the death was accidental or intentional, though suicide bereaved parents often experience a greater degree of guilt over the loss (Camacho et al., 2018; Seguin et al., 1995). Loss of a child from suicide has a negative impact on emotion regulation and many of these negative effects of losing one's child lessen with time but do not disappear entirely (Camacho et al., 2018; Øvstedal et al., 2017). Families often experience increased malfunction and the alterations of event meanings after the sudden loss of a child (Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Øvstedal et al., 2017). Certain coping measures such as everlasting love, pleasant remembrances, and social engagement, among others, have been seen to be beneficial,

while other coping strategies like avoidance and rumination are maladaptive (Parker & Dunn, 2011). Though social support has been shown as a mitigating factor in psychological distress, care and support resources for bereaved parents have been deemed by many to be insufficient (Parker & Dunn, 2011; Spooren et al., 2001).

Negative Changes, Mental Health, and Unhelpful Coping Behaviors

A large portion of the adolescent bereavement literature focuses on the negative changes of grief. These changes include mental health challenges, as well as the unhelpful coping behaviors that many people develop in the face of loss, especially when the loss is sudden. This section will briefly explore these negative changes in relation to sudden loss, as a much larger portion of this review covers negative effects of grief as an emergent theme within the broader bereavement literature.

Mental Health & Negative Coping. As previously noted, bereavement due to sudden death leads to more severe mental health outcomes than are present with expected losses (Breen & O'Connor, 2010; Camacho et al., 2018; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Scott et al., 2020). A myriad of classifications of psychiatric distress and mental health disorders arise for the survivors of a sudden death; these forms of mental distress can include diagnosable conditions such as PTSD, complicated grief/prolonged grief disorder, depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation, as well as general emotional malaise, trouble with emotion regulation, guilt, anger, and withdrawal (Camacho et al., 2018; Djelantik et al., 2021; Hardt et al., 2020; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Khang et al., 2020; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; McClatchy et al., 2009; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2020; Sequin et al., 1995; Spooren et al., 2001; Stewart, 1999; Williams et al., 2018). Additionally, many

bereaved by sudden death adopt unhelpful/negative coping behaviors (Khang et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Parker & Dunn, 2011). The most common negative coping behaviors in an adolescent population are anger issues, cessation of speech, anxiety symptoms, social withdrawal, and recklessness (Khang et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018). Additional negative behaviors following sudden loss are avoidance, rumination, addiction, hoarding, and inertness (Khang et al., 2020; Parker & Dunn, 2011). Ultimately, sudden loss carries with it a heavy weight of mental health and behavioral burden that often extends beyond that of expected losses.

School Adjustment. Teenagers who are grieving also face a host of school adjustment issues (Khang et al., 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2018). Some of these school adjustment problems are social in nature, where students struggle to relate to and communicate with their peers after their loss (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b; Oosterhoff et al., 2018). Other adjustment problems are more academic in nature, such as lower academic achievement, decreased focus, and less school-related enjoyment (Khang et al., 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2018). Further exploration on the topic of effective strategies for reducing bereavement-related school adjustment issues may prove useful at increasing both the use and efficacy of mental health care for bereaved individuals within schools (Khang et al., 2020; Oosterhoff et al., 2018).

Expressions of Grief/Daily Experiences

As has been shown, grief is pervasive, entering unwelcomed into many areas of one's life. Rather than something solely expressed during large events, such as funerals, memorial services, and death anniversaries, sorrow is both experienced and expressed

daily. Bereaved adolescents identify the period after their loss as a time when they lived in despair, agony, and fear (Papadatou et al., 2018). This often is associated with maladaptive daily behaviors that range from recklessness to incapability (Papadatou et al., 2018). Withdrawal, anxiety, and rage are frequent daily reactions to grief (Khang et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018). Some youth spend much of their time in remembrance of the deceased and daily experiences of loneliness and emptiness are common (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Khang et al., 2020). Regularly, bereaved adolescents encounter small everyday situations/settings that used to include their deceased friend; these situations, such as a certain class they had together or certain activities they both used to participate in, bring the sorrow to the forefront of these youths' daily lives, reminding them of the future together that has been lost (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016). When considering the grief experiences of bereaved adolescents, it is vital to not only examine the seemingly more impactful large events and memorials, but also the daily encounters with the emptiness of an unoccupied chair at the lunch table or a solitary bike ride home.

Changes in Relationships and Social Support

A marked external change in the life of a suddenly bereaved person is the alteration in their other relationships (Khang et al., 2020; LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b; Lohan & Murphy, 2006). For adolescents, this change often comes in the form of tension within their family and shifting familial roles, as well as negative interactions with their peers (Khang et al., 2020; LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b; Lohan & Murphy, 2006). Many bereaved young people find their peer relationships to be strained and want their peers to veritably ignore their loss (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b). A common reaction to this

uneasiness around and mistrust of peers is social withdrawal (Papadatou et al., 2018). On

the other side of the proverbial coin, social support can play a key role in the mitigation

of negative bereavement outcomes for young people (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015a;

LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b; Scott et al., 2020). Navigating a balance between this desire

to be 'normal' and the desire for social support can be demanding.

Reinvention/Identity/New Life Order/Beliefs

The sudden loss of a loved one often calls the bereaved to re-order their life as

well as reinvent themselves, their identities, and their beliefs (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016;

Øvstedal et al., 2017; Rodger et al., 2007). This topic is especially pertinent in the

discussion of teenagers, as young people in this stage of life already base a great deal of

their identity creation and exploration on their friends (Berk, 2018; Johnsen & Dyregrov,

2016). Sudden, unanticipated deaths upend one's sense of self in such a way that a person

must resituate themselves in the world around them, examining their new place among

family, friends, and acquaintances as well as their foundational beliefs about the world

(Captari et al., 2020; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Papadatou et al., 2018; Rodger et al., 2007).

The world suddenly seems less kind, less trustworthy, less safe (Captari et al., 2020;

Papadatou et al., 2018). Faith is oft abandoned, misplaced somewhere alongside one's

trust in the world (Khang et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018). Events take on new

meaning, and bereaved individuals must incorporate this experience of eternal

missingness into their conceptualization of self (Øvstedal et al., 2017; Rodger et al.,

2007). This upset in life can have a particular effect on adolescents, whose identities lie

so closely linked with those of their friends (Berk, 2018; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016).

Coping After Sudden Loss/Memorials

There remains a tendency for individuals who have experienced sudden loss to cope through the use of continuing bonds with the deceased as well as the creation of physical memorials (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Djelantik et al., 2021; Papadatou et al., 2018; Parker & Dunn, 2011; Stein et al., 2018). In recent years, much of this has been achieved by bereaved teenagers through the use of online social media posts (Döveling, 2017; Williams & Merten, 2009). Continuing bonds are an important component in emotional healing; many adolescents use social media posts to speak directly to their deceased friend, which allows them to psychologically maintain their friendship bond after death (Döveling, 2017; Stein et al., 2018) As discussed in the prior section on motor vehicle crashes, creating a physical memorial as a place of remembrance for one's deceased loved one often enables bereaved individuals to experience a sense of empowerment as well as increases the presence (or at least the perception of presence) of one's lost loved one (Clark & Franzmann, 2006). Both material memorials and less physical manners of memorialization can be ritualistic in nature, allowing the bereaved to express their love and care for those they have lost; both can prove to be helpful and positive coping mechanisms for grief (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Djelantik et al., 2021; Parker & Dunn, 2011).

Interventions and Resources

Certain interventions and resources have been developed to help young people cope with sudden loss (Oosterhoff et al., 2018; Sandler et al., 2016; Spooren et al., 2001; Williams et al., 2018). Some interventions involve the bereaved adolescent's family

members, others are modular in approach (Sandler et al., 2016; Williams et al., 2018).

Though some resources exist, there remains a need for increased bereavement informed

mental health care, support, and resources in high schools (Khang et al., 2020; Oosterhoff

et al., 2018). Group-based intervention as a method has been cited as the most

empirically backed for traumatic grief treatment, yet it may behoove those considering

intervention options to consider that many bereaved adolescents do not want

bereavement-related peer interaction (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b; Mead, 2020; Williams

et al., 2018).

Long-Term Grief & Changes

Finally, within this theme of sudden death, is a brief exploration of the long-term

impact of unanticipated loss. Though much research indicates that long-term outcomes of

grief often tend toward growth (as will be explored in the section on PTG in bereavement

literature), studies still demonstrate the long-lasting effects of sudden bereavement

(Øvstedal et al., 2017; Papadatou et al., 2018). The sudden loss of a young life impacts

many; for family members, this grief has been shown to never fully dissipate (Lohan &

Murphy, 2002; Øvstedal et al., 2017). Negative symptoms tend to decrease with time just

as indicators of growth often increase years after the death of a loved one, but the sorrow

for those who have been lost remains, irrevocably shaping the lives of those left behind

(Lohan & Murphy, 2002; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Papadatou et al., 2018; Rodger et al.,

2007).

Negative Effects of Loss

The experience of losing someone close during an individual's formative years carries with it a host of negative effects. While some adverse effects may be more recognizably ubiquitous for general grief, others tend to be distinctive to the adolescent bereavement experience. Though covered in more depth previously, particularly in reference to sudden deaths, it is vital to note that traumatic losses increase the severity of many of these negative effects in the adolescent population (Hardt et al., 2020; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Perschy, 2004; Revet et al., 2021). Provided within this section of the literature review is an overview of the current body of knowledge related to negative effects of adolescent bereavement as well as the loss of a young life.

Mental and Cognitive Distress

Bereavement is often predominately characterized by various forms of mental distress. This distress is known by many names, with a great deal of operationalized overlap. Psychiatric distress is a term that is regularly utilized, as is cognitive distress. For the purposes of this review, these terms will be used interchangeably unless otherwise noted. As will be covered in the following sections, bereavement during adolescence increases the risk of developing a number of specific psychological disorders (Birenbaum, 1999; Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Hardt et al., 2020; Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnsen & Afgun, 2020; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Keenan, 2014; Liu et al., 2019; McClatchy et al., 2009; Revet et al., 2021; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). More generally, grief at this age negatively impacts one's

psychological wellbeing in a pervasive and intrusive manner (Liu et al., 2019; Thurman et al., 2017). While many of these reactions may not be categorized as symptom clusters for disorders in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual-V (DSM-V), they are connected to adverse psychological outcomes. For instance, focus is largely compromised in many grieving adolescents as is ease of quieting one's mind for sleep (Johnson et al., 2017; Oosterhoff et al., 2018). Beyond considering specific and diagnosable disorders, it is vital to consider the overall mental distress that is caused by this experience of early loss (Birenbaum, 1999; Johnson et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Oosterhoff et al., 2017; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). The review will now provide the reader with a detailed examination of specific disorders that commonly arise during the experience of adolescent bereavement.

Prolonged Grief Disorder/Complicated Grief

Prolonged grief disorder (PGD), also known as complicated grief, has been widely studied within the field of bereavement research. As per Jordan and Litz (2014), PGD is characterized by the growth or continuation of grief symptoms beyond a normative or expected amount of time; typically, grief diminishes over time rather than remaining stable/increasing in severity. Prominent symptoms associated with PGD include yearning, confusion about role, difficulty accepting, avoidance, difficulty trusting others, angriness/bitterness, difficulty moving on, numbness, feelings of meaninglessness/emptiness, and shock (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020). Despite large amounts of research that point towards the existence of PGD and its separateness from other mood disorders, the DSM has not yet included it as a diagnosable mental health

disorder (Jordan & Litz, 2014). Certain recent research has postulated that PGD may, in fact, be a reward system disorder, as it has been associated with behavioral activation system sensitivity (Williams et al., 2019). Now that great swaths of research have been conducted on the topic, its presence will hopefully be canonized and regularly considered when working with bereaved individuals.

Various factors have been shown to be related to the development of PGD. Research has demonstrated that PGD is a particularly common outcome of loss during adolescence (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Keenan, 2014; Revet et al., 2021; Thurman et al., 2017). It is also notably connected to bereavement following sudden deaths (Djelantik et al., 2021; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Stewart et al., 1999). In addition to unnatural/sudden losses and the young age of the bereaved, there other factors that are associated with the development of PGD, including being female, losing a partner or child, maladaptive cognition, and the exhibition of avoidance behaviors (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020). Again, circumstances surrounding the death will impact, and have the possibility of complicating, one's grief experience (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016). Research that focuses on the death of a sibling or close friend consistently returns high rates of youth who develop PGD (Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016). Ultimately, the population of this study lies at an intersection of many of the factors that have been shown to increase one's chance of developing PGD, making it a vital consideration within the present research study.

Depression

Another documented reaction to adolescent bereavement is depression (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2017; Thurman et al., 2017). Depression, largely characterized by anhedonia as well as feelings of purposelessness and slowness, can include a panoply of more specific symptoms (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020). Anhedonia pervades multiple areas of life, making many of life's small joys feel inconsequential and pointless; examples include not enjoying one's favorite books, tv, food, or funny movies (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020). The rates of depression in youth who have lost either a sibling or close friend are high, with the severity increasing as the degree of emotional closeness rises (Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2017). This maladaptive grief is often specifically linked to adolescent girls, who are frequently placed in high symptom classes (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Thurman et al., 2017). However, there is a possibility that culturally appropriate interventions may reduce a bereaved person's depression score (Djelantik et al., 2021; Thurman, 2017).

PTSD

Perhaps the most widely recognized of mental health conditions related to trauma is PTSD. Within the bereavement literature, PTSD is commonly referenced as a response to loss in a sudden or traumatic way (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Djelantik et al., 2021; Hardt et al., 2020; McClatchy et al., 2009; Stewart, 1999; Williams et al., 2019). While not all loss is traumatic, sudden loss has been shown (see above section on sudden death) to increase the severity of negative bereavement effects. Motor vehicle crashes in

particular increase the likelihood of developing PTSD in both young people and adults; this finding has been consistent for several decades (Hardt et al., 2020; Stewart, 1999). As was the case with PGD, PTSD is more common in recently bereaved young women than in other demographic groupings (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020). According to research by Williams et al. (2019), PTSD is also associated with individuals who have behavioral inhibition sensitivity, which indicates that they are more attuned to positive and negative punishment. This finding could assist mental health and educational professionals in developing tools for identifying PTSD risk factors in recently bereaved adolescents (Williams et al., 2019). As will be presently touched upon, considering trauma as a distinct effect of an unanticipated death may be a useful way to conceptualize sudden adolescent loss.

Childhood Traumatic Grief

An additional negative effect that is particular to young people who have lost loved ones in a traumatic manner is childhood traumatic grief (CTG); CTG is sometimes present in teenagers bereaved due to MVC (McClatchy et al., 2009; Stevens & Michael, 2014). Losing someone in a traumatic way not only creates a grief response, but also a separate experience of personal trauma (McClatchy et al., 2009; Perschy, 2004; Stevens & Michael, 2014). This recognition of trauma as, at least along some dimensions, distinct from other aspects of grief has implications for interventions. According to Perschy (2004) in her classic workbook for teen grief, in situations where the teenager was traumatically bereaved, "the initial focus needs to be on the trauma," (p. 12). CTG is arguably similar to complicated grief in a number of ways, yet it remains necessary to

remember that the age of the bereaved individual creates unique grief experiences. Though CTG is not necessarily be a focus of the present study, the differences between adult bereavement and adolescent bereavement are explored herein.

Suicide/Self Harm

While this research is largely skirting the vast literature on suicide-related deaths, two recent studies are especially pertinent to the present research endeavor. Sandler et al. (2016) examined whether parental death is a significant risk factor for suicide rates in their bereaved children. Their results showcased that not only was the death of a parent during childhood a significant risk factor for suicidal ideation, but also for suicide attempts (Sandler et al., 2016). This research was longitudinal, spanning 15 years post-loss, and ascertained that at both the 6-year mark and the 15-year mark, offspring of a deceased parent (who had died while their child was not yet an adult) were more likely to think about and/or attempt to end their own lives (Sandler et al., 2016). Similar longitudinal research by del Carpio et al. (2021) demonstrated that maladaptive coping strategies in grieving adolescents could be used to predict self-harm group membership. Interestingly, these researchers also found that whether the deceased loved one had themselves committed suicide or had died in an alternative way did not predict membership in the self-harm group (del Carpio et al., 2021). Findings such as these point towards the necessity of adolescent bereavement interventions in order to better determine which grieving teens may be in more urgent need of support (del Carpio et al., 2021; Sandler et al., 2016).

Behavioral Changes

In addition to, though not necessarily disconnected from, negative psychological outcomes, many bereaved adolescents also experience a host of negative behavioral alterations post-loss (Birenbaum, 1999; Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Oosterhoff et al., 2018; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). These changes are often petulant and antisocial in nature; behavioral problems such as argumentation, stubbornness, irritability, disobedience, and impulsivity are common in grieving teenagers, as are social withdrawal and avoidance (Birenbaum, 1999; Papadatou et al., 2018; Williams et al., 2019). The Child Behavior Checklist is an inventory that is often utilized and widely accepted as a valid and reliable measure of children's behavior (Thurman et al., 2017). Using this checklist, behavioral problems of bereaved adolescent girls have been seen to be mitigated through the intervention of a grief support group (Thurman et al., 2017). Behavioral disruptions can impact one's social life, as was seen in the prior discussion on peer support, as well as on one's academic functioning (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015a; Liu et al., 2019; Papadatou et al., 2018; Oosterhoff et al, 2018).

Adaptive Challenges/Maladaptive Coping

Adolescent bereavement can create a host of adaptive challenges that may be met by maladaptive coping techniques. Maladaptive grief is common in grieving young people as they grasp for ways to cope with an unexplainable and tremendous sorrow (Mead, 2020; Thurman et al., 2017). Maladaptive coping strategies range widely from reckless risk-taking to withdrawal and even self-harm behaviors (del Carpio et al., 2021;

Papadatou et al., 2018). During emerging adulthood, volatile behavior and substance abuse are common forms of unhealthy coping (Mead, 2020). Excessive alcohol use as well as use of other substances is regularly utilized to cope with grief, which is also tied to emotional instability and outbursts (Mead, 2020). In terms of self-harm behaviors, these can be either a form of maladaptive coping, or could be indicative of other types of unhealthy coping patterns (del Carpio et al., 2021). When considering ways in which adolescents may begin to behave during a period of bereavement, it is vital to remember that many unhealthy or maladaptive behavioral habits were originally formed as a way to protect oneself from pain and to cope with an adaptive challenge. With this at the forefront, grief interventions can help young people learn healthy ways of coping with loss.

Physiological Responses

An oft-repeated colloquialism is that psychology informs physiology and vice versa. It follows that an emotional trauma such as losing a loved one would also manifest itself in an individual's body. Physiological somatization responses to adolescent bereavement are wide-ranging in scope, stretching from the development of enuresis to abnormal eating patterns to poor sleep habits to dizziness and nausea (Birenbaum et al., 1999; Johnson et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Williams et al., 2019). Gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and stomach pains have also been shown to be associated with grief (Johnson et al., 2017). This range of physical effects appears to affect female adolescents more seriously than their male counterparts (Liu et al., 2019).

Familial Functioning and Adolescent Development

Another distinctly social change is the capacity of grief to shift family dynamics. Alteration to family functioning has been demonstrated as a negative effect of bereavement when a child/sibling dies, either suddenly or from a terminal condition (Birenbaum, 1999; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Mead, 2020; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Weber et al., 2021). Strain to communication as well as relational and role alterations have been noted throughout the years (Birenbaum, 1999; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Øvstedal et al., 2017). Death of a close friend can also impact social functioning, therefore impacting family dynamics, yet the death of an immediate family member innately disrupts the family constellation, thereby rendering each family member's previous role no longer stable (Liu et al., 2019; Øvstedal et al., 2017). A parent must adapt to their new role as a mother or father of fewer children (if any at all) and siblings must face their new identity as someone with fewer or no siblings (Khang et al., 2020; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Øvstedal et al., 2017). Parents may have perceptions of their surviving children's grief while bereaved adolescents may experience changes in their relationships with their parents (Khang et al., 2020).

These changes could be communication or identity-based, as a foundational task of adolescence is the shifting away from dependence on parents and a reaching toward independence; bereaved teenagers may find themselves needing adult guidance more, which can create identity-based tension (Khang et al., 2020; Mead, 2020; Perschy, 2004; Weber et al., 2021). According to Mead (2020), this creates a "developmental conundrum" for adolescents and emerging adults, wherein they must overcome certain

grief tasks while their developmental stage promotes behavior in opposition to the completion of such tasks (p. 161; Perschy, 2004). Both identity development and psychological development are detrimentally impacted by experiencing the loss of a loved one during adolescence or emerging adulthood, an effect of such profundity that it often creates negative ripple effects into one's adulthood (Keenan, 2014; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Mead, 2020; Perschy, 2004).

Recurring Research Elements

Emotional Closeness. There are a number of factors that recur throughout the field of adolescent bereavement, one of which is the degree of emotional closeness between the bereaved and the deceased. Research has repeatedly demonstrated that the higher the degree of emotional closeness, the more intense the grief response is likely to be (Herberman-Mash, 21013; Johnson et al., 2017; Servaty-Seib & Pistole, 2007). While relationship category (e.g.: sibling, grandparent, close friend, parent, etc.) can play a role, the degree of emotional closeness is more closely linked to the grief severity (Servaty-Seib & Pistole, 2007). Research by Herberman-Mash et al. (2013) looked at the difference between loss of a sibling and of a close friend and found that though there was a difference between effects of sibling loss and close friend loss, it was the greater depth of the sibling relationships (in many cases) that was tied to a more severe bereavement outcome. This emotional closeness is subjective and is judged based upon the perceived closeness between the two individuals (Johnson et al., 2017). As the perceived closeness and significance of the relationship to the bereaved increases, so too does the reported impact of the loss (Johnson et al., 2017). Research to date shows it to be arguable that

when an adolescent loses a close friend, the grief can be just as severe as if they had lost a

sibling, depending upon the degree of emotional closeness.

Death of a Friend. Though explored in more depth in the preceding section on

sudden death of a close friend, the unique elements associated with losing a friend during

adolescence will be briefly touched upon herein. It is well-documented that there is

insufficient research on the loss of a close friend (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Liu et al.,

2019; Papadatou et al., 2018; Servaty-Seib & Pistole, 2007). However, what research

does exist points toward this type of loss as a severe trauma in the life of a young person

(Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2017; Liu et al., 2019; Mead, 2020;

Servaty-Seib & Pistole, 2007). As previously discussed, death of a close friend during

adolescence can result in complicated grief, depression, poorer mental health, poorer

social functioning, developmental difficulties, identity crises, anxiety, and somatization,

as well as a host of other physiological, psychological, and behavioral maladies

(Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Johnson et al., 2017; Liu et

al., 2019; Papadatou et al., 2018). Johnsen and Dyregrov (2016) name this form of grief

as distinct and profound, due to the significance of friendship during the adolescent

period. As loss of a friend is typically given less attention than loss of a family member,

the negative effects not only stem from the death itself, but its nature as a

"disenfranchised grief," (Liu et al., 2019, p. 12). This lack of grief acknowledgement can

therefore make it more difficult for adolescents to overcome their grief tasks and move

forward in healthy ways, the acknowledgement of which illuminates the import of

research that sheds light on this form of loss (Liu et al., 2019).

Parental Death. Layered atop the aforementioned negative effects associated with adolescent bereavement, loss of a parent has been shown to be severely psychologically damaging to young people (Johnson et al., 2017; Keenan, 2014; McClatchy et al., 2009; Revet et al., 2021; Sandler et al., 2016). Revet et al. (2021) posit that this loss is, in fact, "the most traumatic event that a child can experience in their lifetime," (p. 1). Parental death has even been shown to be a significant risk factor for offspring suicide (Sandler et al., 2016). Other common occurrences associated with parentally bereaved young people are unresolved mourning, particularly when a legacy of loss is involved, significant life changes, compromised psychological development, somatization as well as many mental health conditions such as PGD, PTSD, CTG, depression, and anxiety (Johnson et al., 2017; Keenan, 2014; McClatchy et al., 2009; Revet et al., 2021; Sandler et al., 2016). While loss of a parent is not the specific phenomenon covered in the present study, understanding the primary similarities and differences that have been observed between types of loss based on relationship to the deceased was useful in the development of the interview protocol.

Peritraumatic Distress. In particular relation to traumatic deaths, research has shown that peritraumatic distress, that is, the emotional and psychological distress experienced at the time of the trauma, is associated with increased severity of post-loss bereavement outcomes (Hardt et al., 2020; Revet et al., 2021). This means that when a young person loses someone they care for to a sudden death, their long-term outcomes, especially rates of PTSD, are considerably worsened if the individual was present at the accident or privy to the mutilating injuries of their loved one (Hardt et al., 2020; Stewart,

1999). Peritraumatic distress can be utilized as an early identifier of teenagers who may need more intensive bereavement intervention (Revet et al., 2021).

Support, Resources, & Coping Strategies

Throughout the literature review process, a third theme emerged: support, resources, and adaptive coping strategies. There is a great deal of overlap between interpersonal support, institutional support, and personal coping techniques. However, separating them allowed for an investigation into the current research on each subtopic. As a great deal of specificity on each subtopic would require dissertations or meta-analyses of their own, this review will go into moderate detail while retaining the overall wide-angle view on the adolescent bereavement experience.

Interpersonal Support and Connection

Interpersonal connection and support have, time and again, been shown to be important components of healthy teen grieving (Kennedy et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019; McFerran et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2016; Pangborn, 2019; Richardson et al., 2017; Thai & Moore, 2018). This support and connection can come from many directions, such as peers, parents, and other compassionate adults. The vital nature of "presence" for bereaved adolescents is not to be overstated. Support and guidance not only decrease distress responses in grieving teens, but also help to nurture youths' psychosocial strengths (Palmer et al., 2016; Richardson et al., 2017). The level of one's social connectedness can largely predict their long-term bereavement outcomes (Liu et al., 2019). In fact, the less socially active a bereaved adolescent is, the more prolonged the

negative effects of their grief tend to be active (Liu et al., 2019). External support and connection are clear protective factors for adolescent grief responses.

There are many strategies that adults and peers alike can employ that benefit the grieving adolescents in their lives; showing up with a willingness to listen and just being there are perhaps most meaningful (Perschy, 2004; Thai & Moore, 2018). Communication is an integral facet of connection, and while we have previously examined how communication can be broken down in the face of grief, we can note that it also has the capacity to fortify bereaved adolescents (Pangborn, 2019; Thai & Moore, 2018). Another beneficial strategy is normalizing the feelings of bereaved youth (Palmer et al., 2016; Perschy, 2004). While many people, especially those who have never previously experienced the death of a loved one, may associate grief with a few key emotions or reactions, grief encompasses a vast array of internal feelings and responses (Palmer et al., 2016; Perschy, 2004). When examining the adolescent bereavement experience, researchers would do well to consider that social environments, including smaller communities as well as societal/cultural norms, play large roles in the grieving process (Djelantik et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2017). As Sasser et al. (2019) note, "contextual factors may attenuate or exacerbate [bereaved] youths' risk for internalizing and externalizing psychopathology," (p. 1). Each person within these communities maintains the opportunity to participate in interpersonal connection, which will ultimately support a grieving young person. By doing so, one cultivates supportive relationships that can foster healing and a sense of belonging in bereaved youth.

Peer Support. Research on peer support returns mixed findings. Friends and peers have been demonstrated to play pivotal roles as sources of positive social support for bereaved adolescents (Collins-Colosi, 2017; Howard Sharp et al., 2018). In fact, Howard Sharp et al. (2018) found peer support to be negatively correlated with grief over time, illustrating the productive power of supportive friendships and peer relationships. Yet, research by LaFreniere & Cain (2015a) resulted in the conclusion that the majority of bereaved adolescents prefer no peer bereavement support. It seems that teenagers often want to appear "normal" to their peers, despite their deep sorrow and upended lives (LaFreniere & Cain, 2015b; Perschy, 2004). While friends and peers can present grieving youth with opportunities for interpersonal connection, research appears to indicate that if the support is bereavement-centered, it may be undesirable.

Parental Support. As previously discussed, relationships with parents tend to be strained after the death of a teenager's loved one. This is also a developmental time in a young person's life where it is natural for them to pull away from their adult caregivers (Mead, 2020; Perschy, 2004). However, this does not negate the necessity of parental support during an adolescent's period of grief. Parental support, like peer support, is negatively correlated with grief and encourages post-loss growth in young people (Howard Sharp et al., 2018). There are several specific parent behaviors that have been linked to positive long-term outcomes for grieving teens, including family future orientation, parental monitoring, and effective family communication (Sasser et al., 2019; Thai & Moore, 2018). Moreover, as shown above, purely being present for a bereaved

adolescent is a supportive factor and is essential, even if a parent is experiencing their own grief (Perschy, 2004).

Adult Support. There is also a place for other adults in the lives of bereaved youth. Within the medical profession, there is room for nurses and helping professionals to provide support and guidance to grieving teenagers (Palmer et al., 2016; Ridley & Frache, 2020). Pediatric nurses can employ intervention and support strategies that decrease the distress faced by grieving youth, which can have positive effects on both the youth and their families (Palmer et al., 2016; Ridley & Frache, 2020). In addition to professionals, whether in schools, therapeutic centers, hospitals or other institutional centers, other adults within a youth's community can also support them throughout their grieving process (Collins-Colosi, 2017; Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Palmer et al., 2016; Sasser et al., 2019). As will be examined in more specificity in the following sections, each of these adults can encourage and assist a grieving youth by providing guidance, resources, presence, and employing a host of support and intervention strategies (Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Palmer et al., 2016; Sasser et al., 2019). According to Sasser et al. (2019), adults within a youth's social environment can support bereaved youth, especially maltreated bereaved youth, to create a high degree of neighborhood collective efficacy that can act as a mitigating and protective factor for trauma.

Institutional Support, Groups, and Counseling

Group-Based Interventions. While there are multiple options for institutional bereavement support, groups, and therapy, the form of institutional support that is most widely discussed in the literature is group-based interventions (Jensen de Lopez et al.,

2020; McFerran et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2020; Perschy, 2004; Ridley & Frache, 2020; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). The category group-based interventions encompasses a variety of therapeutic and non-therapeutic formats. Group sessions often include a combination of mediated discussion (often by a peer moderator), bereavement-centered activities, and relaxed activities (Perschy, 2004; Ridley & Frache, 2020). Group interventions can be tailored to traumatic loss, particularly if conducted as a modular treatment (Perschy, 2004; Williams et al., 2018). There is variety within the group format; for instance, group-based interventions can be structured around counseling, general social support/connection, adaptive coping mechanisms, or specific cultural mourning rituals (McFerran et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2020; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017). Throughout the literature, there is ample empirically based evidence to demonstrate the efficacy of group-based bereavement interventions (McFerran et al., 2010; Ridley & Frache, 2020; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018).

Healing/Bereavement Camps. A specific treatment modality for bereaved youth is participation in a healing or bereavement camp. Youth bereavement camps have been shown to encourage a plethora of positive effects including PTG, resilience, connection, effective communication, confidence, supportive relationships, belonging, and a sense of one's own psychosocial strengths (McClatchey, 2020; Pangborn, 2019; Richardson et al., 2017; Ridley & Frache, 2020). Camps can take place on weekends or extend for longer periods of time (Ridley & Frache, 2020). Therapeutic elements can be included, as can specific approaches, such as trauma-informed care, though not all bereavement camps are

reliant on therapeutic tools (McClatchey, 2020; Pangborn, 2019; Richardson et al., 2017; Ridley & Frache, 2020). While medical/counseling professionals can guide these camps, people in non-clinical community services can also host effective healing camps (Ridley & Frache, 2020). A cornerstone of bereavement camps is a focus on connection, where bereaved young people gather together to give and receive empathy and feel less alone in their sorrow (Pangborn, 2019; Richardson et al., 2017). Healthy coping tools and mechanisms can also be taught during these events (Richardson et al., 2017).

  Therapy. Institutional bereavement care can alternately come in the form of a variety of therapeutic techniques. Therapy, whether group-based or individual, can range in method. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is a commonly used modality for bereavement counseling (Palmer et al., 2016; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017). Another form of therapy that aligns with positive psychology and a dual-system model is integrative meaning therapy (Leung, 2019). Additionally, there are a host of creative therapies, which will be touched on at more length in later sections. Therapeutic intervention strategies and treatments have shown, across systematic reviews, to have promising results, decreasing the mental distress of bereaved young people, as well as decreasing maladaptive behavioral responses (Jensen de Lopez et al., 2020; Palmer et al., 2016; Thurman et al., 2017). However, it is also apparent that much research revolving around therapeutic intervention strategies for bereaved adolescents contains measurement discrepancies when compared; this makes it difficult to ascertain the relative efficacy of various treatment options (Jensen de Lopez et al., 2020). While therapy may not be a necessary tool for all grieving young people, it "is more of an urgent concern when grief

becomes complex," or when there is associated trauma, such as when a loss is

unanticipated (Palmer et al., 2016, p. 279; Perschy, 2004). While therapeutic support is

not the primary focus of the present study, awareness of the wide variety of mental health

treatment options remained useful.

      School-Based Support. Schools can have an impactful effect on the long-term

outcomes of bereaved young people, both at the high school and college levels.

Educational professionals, whether clinically trained or not, can provide support and

resources to grieving young people (Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2020;

Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017). According to Howard Sharp et al. (2018),

positive adjustment is encouraged when a bereaved young person is surrounded by

school-based support, including support from their teachers. In fact, teacher engagement

in supporting bereaved adolescents has been correlated with post-loss growth (Howard

Sharp et al., 2017). Recent research posits that in order to be empowered schools,

educational institutions should explicitly discuss the topic of death; this allows them to

successfully navigate an otherwise taboo subject, creating what Kennedy et al. (2020) call

a compassionate school community. Additionally, schools can be ideal locales for hosting

curriculum-based bereavement support group interventions (Thurman et al., 2017).

Moreover, providing psychoeducation on bereavement to faculty may increase the

positive impact of school-based support (Thai & Moore, 2018). When educational

professionals understand both the developmental phases of young people as well as

normal grief responses, they are better able to support their students as well as to identify

abnormal/deviant grief responses (Palmer et al., 2016; Perschy, 2004). Whether

therapeutic or not, support in schools can assist young people as they move through their bereavement.

      Legitimizing Loss. An important element of many forms of support and resources is the legitimization of a young person's loss (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019; Pangborn, 2019). Much of bereaved adolescents' pain is overlooked or delegitimized, especially when the loss is of a friend rather than a family member (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016). As part of the grieving process, it is fundamentally critical that the death of an adolescent friend is recognized as an experience of deep sorrow and a foundational upset to a youth's life (Liu et al., 2019). Many people/groups can provide this essential legitimization, including school communities, narrative therapists, people in the young person's life, and even the scientific community (Johnsen & Dyregrov, 2016; Kennedy et al., 2010; Liu et al., 2019; Pangborn, 2019).

Applied Positive Psychology & Resilience

      Positive Psychology and The Dual-Continua Model. Positive psychology can be applied at many stages of the bereavement process and in an array of ways. As defined by the founders, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), positive psychology encompasses positive subjective experiences, positive individual traits, and positive institutions and strays away from a model of deficit/pathology. This emphasis on strengths and psychological resources can be employed in numerous ways in bereavement support, resources, and interventions. For instance, positive psychology has been used in conjunction with the dual-continua model of deficits and strengths in

trauma-informed positive education for vulnerable students (Brunzell et al., 2016). Also known as the dual-system model, in which psychological resources, resilience, and positive psychology are considered alongside deficits/psychopathologies, it can be employed through integrative meaning therapy for trauma treatment, bereavement camps, and alternative grief therapies (Brunzell et al., 2016; Leung, 2019; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2017; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). A focus on a young person's psychosocial strengths helps to increase a sense of belonging and can be a positive coping method for many (Richardson et al., 2017). By fostering their inner resources and focusing on their individual strengths, adolescents can process their grief in a safe and empowered manner (Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). Using the dual-continua model has also been shown to repair regulatory abilities and disrupted attachments (Brunzell et al., 2016). While this approach *emphasizes* a bereaved youth's psychological/psychosocial resources, it simultaneously *builds* the aforementioned psychological resources (Brunzell et al al., 2016; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020; Richardson et al., 2017). As has been shown, utilizing a positive psychology-based approach in bereavement interventions has the possibility of increasing a host of beneficial long-term outcomes.

Resilience. Resilience research often coincides with bereavement literature. Resiliency is, once again, an ability to rebound from negative life events and involves individual, familial, and support factors (Garmezy, 1991). Garmezy (1991) famously explored the role of resilience in the adaptation of children after negative life events. About resiliency, he posited that it is the "commitment to struggle, to conquer the

obstacle, and to achieve one's goals despite the negative circumstances to which one has been exposed," (p. 466). Individual traits, such as a future orientation, optimism, and self-determination, can increase resilience (Sasser et al., 2019; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Additionally, resilience can be encouraged and grown through a multitude of interventions strategies, such as bereavement rituals, integrative meaning therapy, and songwriting or narrative therapies (Djelantik et al., 2021; Leung, 2019; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020; Pangborn, 2019). Cultivating resilience helps individuals in their journeys to adjust to adversity and process their grief (Djelantik et al., 2021; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). Research shows that narrative therapies, whether through family storytelling or songwriting, can have a demonstrably positive impact on grieving adolescents' resilience (Myers-Coffman et al., 2020; Pangborn, 2019). Ultimately, a primary grief task for bereaved adolescents is to acknowledge and accept the reality of the loss; acceptance of devastation is woven within the concept of Garmezy's so-called "commitment to struggle," making resilience an important facet of healing from loss (p. 466; Perschy, 2004; Wolfelt, 2001; Worden, 1996).

Personal Coping

Continuing Bonds. There is a vast variety of personal coping strategies, some of which appear to be more universal than others. The term coping refers to "cognitive and behavioral processes to manage internal or external demands that challenge one's personal resources," (Morris et al., 2020, p. 74). While coping can be either adaptive or maladaptive, adaptive coping increases the likelihood of PTG. One adaptive coping method that is recurrent in the bereavement literature is the concept of maintaining a

continuing bond with one's deceased loved one (Collins-Colosi, 2017; Djelantik et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2019; Thai & Moore, 2018; Williams & Merten, 2009). In Stein et al.'s (2018) research on continuing bonds in young adults after the loss of a close friend, the researchers found that continuing bonds include three activities: personal communication, personal change, and homage activities. There are many ways in which a meaningful connection can be continued, including social media posts, expressions of caring, and cultural rituals (Djelantik et al., 2021; Stein et al., 2018; Thai & Moore, 2018; Williams & Merten, 2009). Forms of remembrance can be either digital, as will be discussed shortly, or traditional; in either case, these methods of continuing bonds assist bereaved young people in "facilitat[ing] continued communication with the deceased" and "creat[ing] and sustain[ing] memories," (Stein et al., 2019; p. 257). It is the participation in these activities that help a grieving young person to maintain a connection and attachment to their lost loved one (Collins-Colosi, 2017; Williams & Merten, 2009).

Online Bereavement & Social Networking. In recent times, social media and online platforms have become locations for grieving young people to cope with their grief. Multiple benefits have been demonstrated to come of young people utilizing online spaces for what Döveling (2017) names digitally mediated bereavement (Palmer et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2019; Thai & Moore, 2018; Williams & Merten, 2009). However, with this comes the possibility of youth sharing too much private information in a public forum (Thai & Moore, 2018). Despite this, using digital tools allows people, particularly young people, to cope with their grief, regulate their emotions, and share interpersonal

empathy with others who are also grieving (Döveling, 2017). The reflection that accompanies writing remembrance posts on social media is a form of healthy coping that helps teenagers to face their grief, which is one of the primary grief tasks (Perschy, 2004; Stein et al., 2019; Williams & Merten, 2009; Wolfelt, 2001; Worden, 1996). It is notable that adolescents typically aim their posts and comments directly to their deceased loved one (Williams & Merten, 2009). This may be reflective of a desire for continuing bonds, which are said to be strengthened through the use of online posts (Thai & Moore, 2018). Additionally, emotion regulation is tied to digitally mediated bereavement and is shown to differ based on age (Döveling, 2017). Using these online social networking platforms as bereavement processing tools also serves to connect the grieving youth to their communities (Döveling, 2017; Palmer et al., 2016; Stein et al., 2019). As Palmer et al. (2016) note, these platforms "provide a communal space through which some youth find solace and companionship," (p. 278). Though not necessarily superior to more traditional forms of remembrance activities, these spaces can assist adolescents throughout the grieving process.

Creative Therapeutic Strategies. A variety of creative therapies and interventions are available for bereaved adolescents. Literature can be used in a myriad of ways, including to help grieving young people feel less alone in their emotions (Palmer et al., 2016). Beyond the recognition of oneself in fictional characters, books about grief can also teach young people about the grieving process, normalize their feelings, and offer up healthy coping techniques (Palmer et al., 2016). Music therapy has also been shown to be beneficial for this demographic (McFerran et al., 2010; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). In a

group format, music therapy programs can foster connection between the participants (McFerran et al., 2010). It is also a therapeutic way to express emotions, cope, and process one's grief (McFerran et al., 2010; Myers-Coffman et al., 2020). Myers-Coffman et al. (2020) found that the Resilience Songwriting Program for bereaved adolescents encouraged the discovery of one's inner resources and the nurturing of one's strengths, both of which align with the tenets of positive psychology. Grieving children can also benefit from art therapy, as it increases overall positive affect and decreases negative affect through the exploration of one's emotions (Green et al., 2021). There are many creative interventions that are backed by empirical evidence, though it is also possible that young people can utilize their creativity for healing without participating in a specific intervention program.

Storytelling/Narratives. Another healthy way of processing grief is achieved through the use of narrative (Pangborn, 2019; Perschy, 2004; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017). This can be utilized in a therapeutic setting, group or otherwise, or in a more personal capacity (Pangborn, 2019; Perschy, 2004; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017). Family storytelling helps youth to build resilience, communicate and legitimize their grief, and connect with their peers (Pangborn, 2019). It also helps young people to work through the grief task of remembering the person who died (Perschy, 2004; Wolfelt, 2001). Additionally, culture can be emphasized in narrative grief processing; Thurman et al. (2017), who conducted their research in South Africa, found that through the telling of indigenous stories, bereaved female adolescents had significantly lower rates of intrusive grief, complicated grief, and depression than their

peers who did not participate in the narrative sessions. There is additional research

showing that writing about profound topics in a private setting can reduce suicidal grief

(Thai & Moore, 2018). At this time, the literature clearly shows the benefits of narrative

grief processing strategies.

Mourning Rituals. In addition, many bereaved people find comfort in

participating in mourning rituals (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Djelantik et al., 2021; Thai

& Moore, 2018). According to Thai & Moore (2018), "rituals act to preserve social order

and are a way to understand the complexities of human life," (p. 19). When used during

bereavement, rituals can be both a way to express continued love for the deceased and to

feel a sense of personal empowerment (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Djelantik et al., 2021).

Rituals, being tied to social order, are often cultural in nature (Djelantik et al., 2021; Thai

& Moore, 2018). Rituals can be used not only as a healthy coping strategy but can also

assist young people in the resolution of their grief (Thai & Moore, 2018). Examples of

rituals include creating roadside memorials, holding memorial services, wearing bracelets

pertaining to the deceased, gathering to eat their favorite foods, or a wide variety of

religious rituals such as Balinese Hindu people bringing what is considered to be their

loved one's soul to sacred sites and uniting the deceased's body with the soil of the Earth

(Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Djelantik et al., 2021; Thai & Moore, 2018). It is important

to note that different cultures will carry different beliefs about appropriate mourning

practices/rituals. Arguably, the act of practicing a ritual holds more value that the

particular characteristics of any given ritualistic practice. Ultimately, there are many

ways in which bereaved adolescents can be supported, such as through interpersonal

support, intervention strategies, and personal adaptive coping techniques.

Post-Traumatic Growth in Bereaved Individuals

Despite the vast amount of literature discussing the negative effects of traumatic

loss during adolescence, there is also a growing body of knowledge examining the

possible growth that comes of such an experience. Research with adolescents and young

adults shows that the majority, if not all, participants in such studies experienced a period

of subsequent growth following (and due to) living through the loss of a loved one

(Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021;

McClatchey, 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Simsek Arsland et al.,

2022; Stein et al., 2018). Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996) created their PTGI, ushering in a

wave of research on the possible positive outcomes associated with traumatic events,

including death of a significant person in one's life. In this section, I will discuss the

recent literature surrounding PTG as a later stage in the adolescent bereavement process.

Predictors of PTG

Relationship & Closeness to the Deceased. The academic community has found

a number of factors and/or predictors of PTG outcomes, the first of which is relationship

to the deceased. While some research is conducted on PTG after loss of a parent, such as

that of Asgari & Naghavi (2020), Morris et al. (2020), and Simsek Arslan et al. (2022),

other research looks at loss of a sibling or close friend, such as that of Howard Sharp et

al. (2018), Johnsen & Afgun (2021), Papadatou et al, (2018), and Stein et al. (2018). Loss

of a father tends to take adolescent offspring through periods of initial confusion and

reactions to grief into an experience of growth over time (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020). As per the systematic review conducted by Simsek Arslan et al., parentally bereaved children and adolescents ubiquitously experience PTG effects, but there are factors at play that correlate with the degree of the PTG. If young people's parents die due to cancer, they tend to have higher maladaptive coping skills; however, if adaptive coping techniques are in place, these young people are likely to have higher PTG, resilience, and positive affect over time (Morris et al., 2020). When siblings die, adolescents tend to have greater grief-related growth if they are surrounded by supportive parents, teachers, and friends (Howard Sharp et al., 2018). Despite a tendency for many to sideline the grief of young people after the traumatic death of a close friend (versus a sibling), the literature demonstrates that there is no significant difference in PTG scores between bereaved siblings and bereaved friends (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021). According to Papadatou et al., youth grieving the loss of a friend take long periods of time to begin to heal, remember, and move on. Positive long-term changes, both behaviorally and in one's outlook, have been documented regarding adolescents who have lost close friends (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Papadatou et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018). Though each of these populations of grieving adolescents appears to experience PTG several years after the loss, it is important to specifically examine each type of loss, as subtle differences begin to emerge.

In addition to relationship to the deceased, the degree of emotional closeness that one had to one's lost loved one impacts the PTG outcomes. Post-loss growth is shown to vary, depending on closeness as well as attachment to the deceased (Armstrong & Shakespeare-Finch, 2011; Captari et al., 2021; Simsek Arslan et al., 2022). The closeness

of the relationship that a bereaved young person has to the deceased is perhaps more important than the title of the relationship (Simsek Arslan et al., 2022). Attachment plays a key role in loss of a parent, as this type of loss can create separation anxiety, attachment anxiety, identity distress, and shattered assumptions (Captari et al., 2021; Simsek Arslan et al., 2022). According to Armstrong and Shakespeare-Finch (2011), the relationship to the deceased as well as the subjective severity of the loss impacts PTG outcomes. In fact, the more severe the loss is perceived to be, the higher the post-loss growth level (Armstrong & Shakespeare-Finch, 2011). This is promising, as it implies that while traumatic losses may result in more negative outcomes initially, the long-term results are higher levels of PTG.

Cause of Death/Circumstances. The circumstances surrounding a death also seem to have an effect on an individual's PTG outcomes (Armstrong & Shakespeare-Finch, 2011; Ickovics et al., 2006; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; McClatchey, 2020; Simsek Arslan et al., 2022; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Sudden versus expected deaths are a predictor in PTG outcomes, with traumatic events providing a possibility of more positive long-term changes (Armstrong & Shakespeare-Finch, 2011; McClatchey, 2020; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Simsek Arslan et al. (2022) found there to be some discrepancy in findings between long-term outcomes for expected versus unexpected deaths. However, as previously shown, more severe or traumatic losses appear to indicate both an increase in negative reactions as well as longer-term growth outcomes (Armstrong & Shakespeare-Finch, 2011; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). As Ickovics et al. (2006) write of urban teen trauma, "more life-threatening or life-changing events… result

in greater posttraumatic growth," (p. 846). These sources lead to the present conclusion that the more traumatic the loss, the more potential there is for growth in the bereaved.

Additional Factors. There are several additional factors which are pointed to as influences of PTG outcomes within the academic literature. Whether a person is male or female plays a role in one's PTG outcomes. According to the seminal research by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), women tend to experience more post-traumatic benefits than men. This finding has been replicated in recent research on sibling and close friend death during adolescence; Johnsen and Afgun (2021) found that females had higher PTG scores than their male counterparts. Tedeschi and Calhoun posit that this difference may be due to women having a different "ability to perceive spiritual and relationship changes," (p. 468). Several personality traits may also impact an individual's PTG. Optimism and extraversion have been positively correlated with long-term PTG benefits (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Additionally, one's human attachments as well as divine attachments (spirituality/relationship to one's God), which together form one's internal working model of attachment, are related to an individual's ability to effectively work through grief and experience PTG (Captari et al., 2021). A young person's capability to adaptively cope is associated with higher levels of PTG, highlighting the importance of the teaching of adaptive coping skills to bereaved adolescents (Morris et al., 2020). These are several of the notable factors that act as bolsters for PTG.

Time Since Death. Much research on PTG takes place a year or more after the death of one's loved one; this is because the literature shows that the development of PTG outcomes is a process that unfolds across time (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Papadatou

et al., 2018). Specific timeframes are difficult to ascertain, as various studies demonstrate different results with only slightly varied populations (Simsek Arslan et al., 2022). This is reasonable, as individuals will respond to grief in different ways and on different timeframes. However, it is usual for the literature to show an increase in grief around the 9-month mark and then a decrease over time after that (Simsek Arslan et al., 2022). Papadatou et al. (2018) examined the PTSD and PTG effects at the 18-month post-loss mark as well as the 36-month mark and demonstrated a gradual decrease in PTSD and an increase in positive changes over time. Asgari & Naghavi's (2020) data was collected from participants multiple years after the deaths of their fathers. Overall, though it may be unfeasible to create a definitive time schedule for these effects, it is reasonable to assume that collecting PTG data several years post-loss is more informative than directly after the death.

Interventions, Support, and Coping. While this is not the primary section on interventions, support, and coping methods, it is worth note that each of these has been shown to increase PTG outcomes (Howard Sharp et al., 2018; McClathey, 2020; Morris et al., 2020). McClatchey's (2020) research demonstrated the positive PTG impacts of trauma-informed care and healing camp participation. Additionally, school-based support, particularly from teachers and friends, is positively correlated with growth after loss, as is parental support (Howard Sharp et al, 2018). Adaptive coping strategies have been shown to positively increase PTG in adolescents as well as young adults (Morris et al., 2020). It is vital to keep in mind that interventions, interpersonal support, and specific

forms of coping have the possibility of impacting a bereaved adolescent's long-term PTG results.

Posttraumatic Growth Inventory and Positive Effects

The PTGI was developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996); it is a 21-item inventory that is used to this day to assess an individual's long-term growth after experiencing a traumatic life event. The five categories that the PTGI identifies are: new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). These, in addition to several other positive benefits, are discussed in the following sections.

New Possibilities. New possibilities is one of the PTGI factors and describes a person's ability to develop new interests, establish a new life path, do better things with their lives, take opportunities that would otherwise have been unavailable, and work to change aspects of their lives that need changing (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This factor has also been demonstrated in more modern adolescent bereavement research (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Papdatou et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018). For instance, teenagers whose fathers had died several years prior found that they experienced growth over time that included taking time with a positive outlook (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020). Adolescents whose friends had been killed in a fatal bus crash found that after three years, they had begun to remember and move on and had experienced positive changes in perceptions of their lives ahead of them (Papadatou et al., 2018). This is corroborated by Stein et al.'s (2018) research, which found that adolescents who had lost a close friend eventually

came to experience positive changes in their outlook. New possibilities begin to be

perceived by bereaved adolescents and are especially evident several years post-loss.

Relating to Others. Another of the PTGI dimensions is relating to others

(Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This is measured by the PTGI questions regarding knowing

that one can count on others, feeling a sense of closeness with others, a willingness to

express emotions, compassion for others, putting effort into relationships, belief that

people are wonderful, and acceptance of needing help from others (Tedeschi & Calhoun,

1996). In current bereavement research, Johnsen and Afgun (2021) and Papadatou et al.

(2018) have noted this change in adolescents who experienced the traumatic loss of close

friends. One of the greatest measured PTG effects in Johnsen and Afgun's participant

group was an increase in relationships with others. Papadatou et al. collected a similar

result from their data, which showed that post-loss changes included an increase in

positive perceptions of others and young adults in Stein et al.'s (2018) study altered their

interactions with others due to their experiences of grief. These relevant studies show that

when an adolescent loses someone they care for, they further their belief in the

importance of valuing close relationships with others.

Personal Strength. Personal strength, another factor on the PTGI, encompasses

feeling self-reliant, knowing that one can handle difficulties, accepting the way that

circumstances work out, and discovering a previously undiscovered strength (Tedeschi &

Calhoun, 1996). This is perhaps most exemplified in recent research by Papadatou et al.

(2018), who found that positive perception of self increased several years after the loss of

the adolescents' friends. Positive identity changes are a common PTG effect of

bereavement in young adulthood (Stein et al., 2018). This aligns with research on resilience and the strengthening effects of surviving trauma.

Spiritual Change. The fourth of Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) dimensions of PTG is spiritual change, which includes both individual perception of better understanding spiritual matters as well as having a stronger religious faith. Spiritual change in particular was different for men than for women, as men's spiritual/religious faith was lower in the group of men who had experienced a traumatic event within the past 12 months. Adolescents who have lost their fathers report an overall existential improvement after several years have passed (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020). As per Captari et al. (2021), a religious individual's divine attachment (relationship with their God) is tied to their attachment to other humans, which means that changes in one form of attachment would likely result in an alteration to the other.

Appreciation of Life. The final dimension of the PTGI is appreciation of life (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). This includes having priorities about what is important in life, appreciating one's own life, and appreciating each day (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Appreciation of life is one of the PTG effects that increases the most for adolescents who have experienced the death of a close friend or sibling (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Papadatou et al., 2018). A positive outlook is also shown to be a PTG effect associated with losing one's father (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020). Part of this concept is "wanting to live each day to the fullest," which in turn allows individuals to appreciate each day and their life as a whole with greater depth (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021, p. 255). Though the PTGI was created more than two decades ago, the five factors of the PTGI are each

mirrored in modern adolescent bereavement research, demonstrating the timelessness of the PTG model.

Continuing Bonds. Another concept that also appears to be tied into PTG is that of continuing bonds (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018). Continuing bonds include personal communication with the deceased, personal change, and homage activities, and were discussed at length in the previous thematic section (Stein et al., 2018). The relationship between PTG and continuing bonds appears to be bidirectional, as the strengthening of bonds are both a facet of growth over time as well as a healthy approach to moving forward with one's grief (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018). This concept will be something to look for in relation to PTG throughout the course of this research. Ultimately, despite the hardship and suffering that accompanies losing a loved one, research on PTG illuminates hope that these sorrowful experiences may also bear great gifts to the bereaved.

Summary and Conclusions

After a semi-exhaustive review of the literature was conducted, it became apparent that several central themes frequently recur throughout teenage grief studies. Within the sphere of academic knowledge that focuses on adolescent bereavement, sudden/traumatic death, negative effects of grief, support/resources/coping techniques, and PTG emerged as common threads connecting much of the research to date. Much empirically backed knowledge has been gained in the conceptual realm surrounding adolescent bereavement. It is known that traumatic loss both increases negative consequences as well as increases the likelihood of long-term growth. Additionally,

bereaved adolescents benefit from interpersonal support as well as many other forms of

grief-centered resources. Much is also understood about the experience of losing a parent

or sibling during this developmental period. Despite this information, there is currently an

insufficient amount of research surrounding loss of a close friend during adolescence and

how this form of loss differs from that of a parent or sibling. The present study helps fill

this gap in the literature and extends the collective knowledge of the discipline to include

more nuanced information on the grief and healing experiences of young people after the

death of a close friend. In the following chapter, the methodological choices of the

present study will be explained, including how the specific methodology met the

academic need to understand the sudden loss of a close friend during adolescence.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

This study explored the lived bereavement experience of emerging adults in the United States who have experienced the sudden death of a close friend during adolescence. Perceptions of support resources, positive and negative outcomes, and additional factors that may support PTG, as well as the meaning that individuals ascribe to this experience are considered. The purpose of this qualitative study is therefore to describe the essence and meaning of the lived experience of the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence and the subsequent bereavement process.

Within this section, the methodology of this study is described. The chapter includes information related to the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, and the more specific methodological choices such as participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis. Additionally, contained herein is a discussion on improving trustworthiness throughout the research process and many of the ethical considerations of this research. Overall, this chapter serves to outline the specific methodological choices that have been made for this study in order to enable other researchers to closely replicate this research.

Research Design and Rationale

Phenomenological Research Question

What is the essence of the lived bereavement experience of emerging adults in the United States who have experienced the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence?

Sub-Questions

- How can we understand the perceptions of these young adults and their experience of loss?

- What is the experience of PTG in this population?

- Can we characterize bereavement resources and support as meaningful?

Central Concepts and Phenomenon

The primary phenomenon that this research has examined is adolescent bereavement after the sudden death of a close friend. This specific phenomenon encompasses several concepts that are central to this exploration. The emotional state and experience of grief is one such concept, as is the process of bereavement associated with loss. Additionally, the concept of adolescent identity has been explored, especially in relation to close peer friendships during this period of development, as per Berk (2018). Another core concept associated with this research is the meaningfulness of support resources, either community-based or school-based.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in PTG theory, developed by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), which elucidates the ways in which individuals who have lived through trauma can later experience positive growth as a result of the aforementioned trauma. Their initial inventory included five domains of PTG: relating to others, new possibilities, personal strength, spiritual change, and appreciation of life, each of which have been considered throughout the process of this research endeavor. The conceptual framework for this research also utilized ideas and concepts surrounding resilience, especially as it

has been related to adolescents and its mitigating effects on trauma (Garmezy, 1991).

Additionally, positive psychology concepts are incorporated (Seligman &

Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). PTG, resiliency, and positive psychology each serve as pieces

of the conceptual framework of this research, as they can all be linked to the way in

which adolescents take their experiences of bereavement over sudden peer death and

experience subsequent healing and growth.

Chosen Research Tradition

This research has adhered to a qualitative, phenomenological design. More

specifically, IPA was used as a methodological framework for this research. Though

several subsects of phenomenology exist within the psychological domain, IPA was

chosen for its emphasis on the sense-making and meaning attributing of the individual

participants regarding the particular experience in question (Smith et al., 2009). IPA

stems from three epistemological traditions: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and

ideography, each of which serves a vital role that, when bound together, create the

foundations for IPA methodology (Smith et al., 2009).

From the phenomenological roots in philosophy comes the focus on the meaning-

making of individuals, as applied to their experience of and experiences in life (Smith et

al., 2009). This component has proven essential to this research, as the study's aim was to

explore the meaning that bereaved emerging adults have ascribed to their experience of

grief during adolescence. Hermeneutics is also a key facet of IPA, as this tradition

engages with the process of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). Smith et al. (2009) invited

social scientists to consider the "double hermeneutic," wherein "the researcher is making

sense of the participant, who is making sense of *x*," and perhaps even the triple

hermeneutic, as the reader of the research will also engage in an interpretative process of

making sense of the written research (p. 35). Perhaps most relevant of the ideas

associated with hermeneutics to this study are both the recognition of preconceptions and

bias, and the cyclical nature of the hermeneutic circle (Smith et al., 2009). Within this

study, many steps have been taken (as outlined below) to bracket preconceptions, practice

reflexivity, and remove researcher bias where possible. Additionally, the circularity of

moving between the parts and the whole will be practiced throughout the process of

analysis. Finally, IPA incorporates elements of ideography, or the study of the particular;

woven into IPA is an idiographic emphasis on detail and rich data (Smith et al., 2009).

This need not be misinterpreted as a focus on an individual or single case study, but

rather as a focus on a very specific phenomenon occurring within a niche population

conducted with attention placed on mining rich and detailed data (Smith et al., 2009). As

this study utilized semi-structured interviews to gather detailed data from participants

who had undergone a particular phenomenon (sudden loss of a close friend during

adolescence), it heavily drew from these idiographic roots. Ultimately, IPA aligned with

the research purpose and research questions of this study and was therefore used as a

guideline for creating the methodological structure described herein.

Role of the Researcher

As is inherent in qualitative research, the role of the researcher is primarily as the

data collection instrument (Xu & Storr, 2012). Within the framework of this

phenomenological study, I as the researcher have collected data via interviews and

artifact examination. Because qualitative data is not quantifiable, previously vetted survey instruments are not typically used; therefore, the researchers themselves act as the conduit between the data and the data analysis process. Due to this aforementioned closeness of qualitative researchers to the data itself, researchers must be especially intentional in their acknowledgment and reduction of researcher bias.

This essential component of the research process can be examined from several angles and addressed in numerous ways. One concern arises if the researcher has any personal or professional relationships with the research participants. Though it was unlikely that I would have any direct personal or professional connections with my research participants, I did have first-hand experience with the phenomenon under study, which was another possible bias to consider. As an adolescent, my closest friend was killed in an automobile accident. This personal experience with the subject matter of this study needed to be carefully handled in order to mitigate any potential bias that it may have incurred. Though heuristic inquiry was considered as a potential research approach, as it allows for the researcher to include their own account of their lived experience of the phenomenon in question, I ultimately decided to focus on reducing bias within a phenomenological framework (Sultan, 2019).

Several strategies can be used that help to reduce researcher bias in qualitative studies. One such strategy for maintaining reflexivity is reflective journaling (Ortlipp, 2008). The internal act of being reflective allows a researcher to practice reflexivity, which specifically demands the researcher to examine their own preconceptions, experiences, and biases as they relate to the research. I kept a research journal throughout

the course of my research to increase my awareness of potential bias and thereby reduce its influence on my work. A corresponding concept for reducing bias to that of reflexivity is the employment of bracketing. Bracketing can be used in interpretative phenomenological studies, though it is applied in a slightly varied way than in a descriptive phenomenological research effort; in the context of an interpretative phenomenological study, researchers bring in prior knowledge to provide context to their interview data, yet bracketing can still be employed to reduce preconceived notions of what a research participant may intend to convey (Sorsa et al., 2015). Bracketing has been widely explored and can include techniques that address the researcher's specific experiences with the phenomenon as well as higher level theoretical, epistemological, and philosophical-based techniques (Sorsa et al., 2015). In this research, personal bracketing was used to carefully examine my past experience with this phenomenon and ensure that my experiences were not overlaid or superimposed upon those of the study's participants. Many actionable steps can be taken to employ bracketing during the interview process, such as the avoidance of leading questions, affirming statements, or assumptions of meaning (Sorsa et al., 2015). Throughout the research process, various levels of bracketing were utilized when appropriate and necessary.

Power dynamics and potential relational disparities are also a consideration when examining the role of the researcher. Qualitative research has been argued to intrinsically include a hierarchical power dynamic between each research participant and the researcher (Sorsa et al., 2015). This power disparity may be aggravated if the researcher also holds a parallel position of power over the participant, such as in a supervisory

relationship. Though this study was not conducted with participants that were simultaneously subordinate to the researcher in any way, the innate discrepancy between the researcher, who asks potentially sensitive information of the participant, and the participant, who is asked to reveal aspects of their experience, creates a vulnerability for the participant that could be misused or misconstrued. Prior to each interview, participants were provided with a list of the topics to be covered as well as walked through the interview process itself. These steps were intended to give the participants a more robust sense of control over the situation, which had the potential to reduce the perceived power incongruity. A small incentive was offered as compensation for each participant's time. This too needed to be handled with care to the ethics involved. All participants were given the same incentive, which was not so large as to encourage participation for the sake of the incentive. As has been briefly explored, the role of the researcher needed to be carefully considered within the context of a phenomenological study in an effort to reduce bias and increase internal validity. Internal validity is typically conceptualized as credibility in qualitative research and will be further examined in a later section on trustworthiness.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Target Group and Sampling Criteria

The target group of interest was emerging adults (aged 18-25) who during adolescence experienced grief from the sudden death and subsequent bereavement of a close peer. When utilizing purposive sampling, such as was applied in this study,

criterion-based selection is often employed (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For a study

examining grief experiences of adolescents who have undergone the sudden loss of a

close peer, several criteria were necessary for participation.

1. The first is that the participant must have been between 18-25 years of age, as

   this places the participants in the "emerging adulthood" age bracket (Berger,

   2014). Interviewing participants of this age ensured that ethical dilemmas

   related to including children in research were eliminated from consideration.

   It also guaranteed that the participant was not far removed, in terms of years,

   from their bereavement.

2. A second criterion was that the participant must have experienced the death of

   a close friend when the participant was between the ages of 13 and 19, in their

   teenage/adolescent years. Though there is some debate surrounding the exact

   ages that define adolescence (sometimes seen to be biologically determined,

   sometimes culturally determined), the ages of 13-19 are technically defined as

   the teenage years, which is the rationale behind why they comprised the range

   for this research (Berger, 2014). Note: the degree of "closeness" in the

   friendship was determined by the individual participants' perceptions. A

   Likert-scale questionnaire (See Appendix B) was distributed to potential

   participants, asking them to rate their degree of closeness to the deceased on a

   continuum between "vague acquaintance" to "closest friend." Only those who

   self-reported the friendship to be in the upper range of closeness were

   considered for this study.

3. Thirdly, the deceased individual must also have been between 13 and 19 years of age at time of death. This ensured that the friendship was between peers, and not between mentor and mentee or between adolescents and young children.

4. The fourth criterion was that the participant must not have been biologically related to the deceased individual; sibling relationships were not included in this study.

5. Lastly, in order to be considered, a potential participant must have experienced the death of this close friend at least one year prior to their involvement in the study; this was to account for the theoretical framework of PTG, for it would be unlikely to see indication of potential growth within a short timeframe between initial bereavement and participation in this study.

These five criteria made up the basis of the requirements for participation in this study. Each potential participant was asked brief pre-interview questions that established whether the criteria were met.

Sampling Strategy

Due to the nature of phenomenological research, this study called for the participants to have experienced a certain life event which is not commonly experienced by the general populace. Therefore, my sampling strategy was by necessity purposive. I used what Walden University (n.d.) deems a unique sample, wherein the participants were chosen based upon a specific, atypical characteristic/experience of the phenomenon in question. Purposive sampling was the primary sampling strategy. Additionally, I

implemented the snowball sampling technique, as it was considered likely that

individuals who experienced the death of a close friend may know others who were also

close to that same friend prior to their death. This complementary strategy was used

sparingly in order to avoid over-sampling from the same small population, a situation

which could have altered the results. As this was not a case study, I strove to sample

more broadly from the population of emerging adults who experienced the death of a

close friend during adolescence. However, because obtaining participants from this

population may have proven challenging, snowball sampling was thought likely to be

used in order to find a sufficient sample size in a cost-effective manner.

Sample Size and Saturation

For qualitative research approaches, saturation is often seen as the guiding

principle when determining an adequate sample size (Mason, 2010). However,

determining the precise moment of data saturation can be complicated, as it requires the

researcher to simultaneously undergo the processes of data collection and data analysis

(Baker et al., 2012). Data saturation occurs when new interview data ceases to produce

demonstrable changes in the discovered themes/codes (Guest et al., 2006).

Prior research shows that the majority (up to 92%) of qualitative themes and/or

codes are found by the time twelve interviews have been conducted (Guest et al., 2006).

Promisingly, when codes appeared important in the earlier interviews, those themes often

continued to be primary themes in later data (Guest et al., 2006). Baker et al. (2012)

corroborated Guest et al.'s (2006) conclusion that twelve interviews is often sufficient,

especially for student researchers. For this study, the initial aim was to collect data from

nine to twelve interviewees, via purposive and snowball sampling; monitoring for saturation throughout the process of data collection and analysis occurred after each interview. If data saturation was not reached by 12 interviews, additional participants were to be sought out. However, data saturation was reached after eight participants were interviewed.

Instrumentation

A specific instrument was not used for this research, as phenomenological studies typically call for a semi-structured interview format. However, as the study was grounded in Posttraumatic Growth Theory, Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) instrument was consulted when developing possible question categories for the interviews. Researchers themselves are regarded as the primary data collection instrument in qualitative research, as was the case for this study (Xu & Storr, 2012).

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Various relevant and local organizations were contacted with a brief description of my proposed study and contact information should anyone meeting the inclusion criteria be interested in participation. Initial organizations to be considered/contacted included: a local school district, several grief support groups for young adults, local hospital bereavement resource centers, a local homeless shelter for youth, and several colleges with which I have been affiliated, as these universities may have granted me access to their student research participant pools. Specific organizations that were initially contacted included: Interior Distance Education of Alaska, University of Alaska Anchorage, Matanuska-Susitna College, and MyHouse. Additionally, when applicable,

each study participant was asked to pass along a study participant document to one or more person who may have been interested in participating in this research.

Interview data was collected either in a face-to-face setting or via video conference where feasibility required or preference dictated. Phone interviews were presented as an additional option. Telephone interviews have become increasingly common; one distinct advantage to telephone interviews over other online modalities, such as email or chat room interviews, is that phone interviews take place synchronously (Opdenakker, 2006). They also allowed access to potential interviewees from a wider geographical region (Opdenakker, 2006). These advantages also applied to video conference-based interviews. Additionally, Opdenakker (2006) and Novick (2008) each mentioned that telephone interviews are often preferable for interviews that contain sensitive information, as the non-face-to-face environment may put the participants at ease; due to the sensitive nature of my topic, telephone interviews may prove preferable for some participants. Unfortunately, phone interviews reduce the researcher's ability to see body language and other social cues (Opdenakker, 2006). Ultimately, there is a lack of evidence demonstrating inferior qualitative evidence from phone interviews (Nandi & Platt, 2017; Novick, 2008). Modality of the interview was therefore largely determined by the physical distance between myself and each participant.

All interview data was personally collected by myself, the sole researcher of this project. Each interview was approximately one to two hours in length and was audio recorded, both via computer and via the VoiceMemo application on an iPhone for redundancy purposes. In the case of video conferences, only audio (no video component)

was recorded to respect the confidentiality of the participants. Data collection only occurred once for each participant, unless during analysis, something that was said was unclear or in want of clarification. In that case, the participant was emailed for member checking and clarification.

Prior to the interviews, participants were asked to bring one to three objects of significance related to their bereavement. These artifacts were the second source of data but were only analyzed within the context of the interviews themselves. As can be seen in Appendix, several of the semi-structured interview questions related to the personal artifacts; in this way, these objects helped to illuminate the meaning ascribed by each participant to the phenomenon.

At the end of the interviews, participants exited the study through a debriefing procedure. This procedure included an unrecorded and unanalyzed period of conversation regarding the interview itself. Participants were invited to express how the interview may have emotionally impacted them. The confidentiality of their responses was again assured, and the purpose and goals of the research were reiterated (Given, 2008). Additionally, each participant was provided with a list of local and national support resources, should they choose to make use of them. At this time, the participation incentive was provided, which was equitably distributed to each participant. There were no requirements for follow-up interviews. However, aforementioned instances of email-based member checking were occasionally requested of the participants. Participants were offered a copy of the final study upon its completion, but after the initial interview, their involvement was largely complete.

Data Analysis Plan

This study included two types of data: interview data and personal artifacts. Interviews were the primary form of data for this study, as is common for phenomenological research (Smith et al., 2009). Because the primary research question asks after the essence of the lived bereavement experiences of the participants, interviews allowed for personal meaning and the essence of the experience to be explored. The sub-questions, which delve into the understanding of the perceptions of loss, experience of PTG, and the underlying characterization of bereavement resources and support, were further explored through the medium of participant interviews. Personal documents and artifacts were also utilized for this study. Each participant was invited to bring one to three documents or objects related to their bereavement to be discussed during their interview; though these documents and artifacts were not to be analyzed separately by the researcher, they served to add richness to the individual conversations regarding the essence of participants' bereavement experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data was analyzed throughout the process of data collection, rather than leaving the entirety of the analysis work until after all of the interviews had been completed, as per Merriam and Tisdell (2016). After each interview, I personally transcribed the data; this hand transcription process enabled me to reach a greater depth of intimacy with each interviewee's described experience. NVivo was chosen as a software to aid with the transcription process, as it allows researchers to slow down the speed of the interviews for ease of transcription (Boston University, n.d.; QSR International, 2021). The interview transcriptions were then hand coded (open coding) using Microsoft Word's

comment feature. This process moved from being predominately inductive toward becoming increasingly deductive as additional data was coded (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

After each of the interviews was open coded, I could then create broader categories/themes, which is often referred to as axial coding (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Once the codes were categorized into a number of unifying themes, they were examined to ensure that these themes existed on the same conceptual level (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As I moved through the analysis of each subsequent interview, I continued to add to/adjust my list of themes until reaching data saturation. When discrepant codes arose, I considered whether to alter the existing thematic structure to include the discrepant data or to retain the current themes into which the discrepant data did not fit. In either scenario, sufficient detail of discrepant data was to be described in this final study.

Issues of Trustworthiness

For quantitative research, there are many established forms of developing validity and reliability; however, qualitative research markedly differs in many of its components. Therefore, attempting to directly transfer validity and reliability into qualitative research would likely result in confusion and error. Therefore, related concepts have been developed that align with qualitative methodology and are themselves more valid measures of the research. These concepts have been deemed issues of trustworthiness and can be demonstrated through a variety of means.

Internal validity has been transformed into measures of credibility; for this study, I used member checks with my participants, data collection until saturation was reached,

reflexivity through an examination of my own potential biases, and peer review, which was inherent in the dissertation process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Reliability has been re-conceptualized as dependability through ensuring that one's results are consistent with the data that was collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Several of the previously discussed methods, such as peer examination and reflexivity can also apply here, as well as including a detailed audit trail. (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For qualitative research, external validity is alternately considered to be transferability, a concept that can be achieved through thick description of the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In order to provide sufficiently thick description, I tied in an interpretation of data based upon context and background information as well as thoroughly described the steps taken throughout each phase of research. Finally, confirmability is the conceptual equivalent of objectivity and is often gauged by intercoder reliability. However, as I am the sole researcher for this study, intercoder reliability has been replaced with careful faculty review as well as the reflexive documentation of potential researcher bias.

Ethical Procedures

Several procedures were put in place to ensure that ethical standards of research were met. Prior to participant recruitment, the approval of Walden's Institutional Review Board (IRB), a body that is responsible for ensuring that doctoral researchers' studies comply with ethical guidelines and remain within the bounds of the law, was sought; any requirements of the IRB were met and adhered to (Walden University Center for Research Quality, 2020). Additionally, informed consent documentation was provided and explained to each participant prior to their interview. This document was issued in

writing to each participant and a copy of the signed form was returned to that individual.

If a participant was remotely located from the central research locale (anywhere outside

of the Matanuska-Susitna Valley region of Alaska), the informed consent document was

issued via electronic document with the ability to sign electronically. These forms were

returned either by mail or email. If signed electronically, participants already possessed a

copy of the document. Physical documents were copied, scanned, and emailed to the

participants. Moreover, participants were made aware at multiple junctures that they were

free to withdraw from the process at any time prior to or during data collection with no

repercussions. The specific times at which this occurred included, but were not limited to,

the initial recruitment date, during the discussion of the informed consent form, and at the

start of each interview.

     Several ethical considerations arose surrounding data collection itself. As

previously discussed, concerns related to power dynamics must be addressed. For this

study, I did not include participants that I personally knew and/or were involved in a

supervisory relationship with. However, caution still needed to be taken in an effort to

reduce the perceived power disparity between researcher and participant. This dynamic is

addressed in greater depth in the above section "Role of the Researcher." Participants'

privacy was protected throughout data collection and beyond. Each participant was

informed in writing of the confidentiality policy and the difference between

confidentiality and anonymity was described. During data analysis, each participant was

assigned a pseudonym under which their interview data was placed. Within the

dissertation itself, participants are never named by their legal name, but only by their pseudonym.

There were two primary concerns regarding the ethics of this specific proposed study. One of the primary ethical concerns was the inclusion of children in this research. Because the study focuses on adolescent bereavement, the implications of using "children" as research participants needed to be considered. As those under 18 are not legally adults, there would have been a host of precautions and safeguards that would have had to be in place in order to ethically interview teenagers. To remove this as an ethical concern, individuals who are "emerging adults" were recruited as participants, therefore eliminating the additional considerations of using children in research. This idea originated with Papadatou et al.'s (2018) study on adolescent bereavement, in which the authors used a sample of young adults who had lost friends during adolescence for their research. The added benefit of this approach is that it allows for the participant's grief to have developed and evolved over a period of several years, enabling the research to be reflective in nature.

Another ethical consideration of this study relates to the innate sensitivity of the topic of death. When discussing topics such as grief and loss, it is important to understand that participants may be emotionally triggered. Though discussing these topics is inevitable in this realm of research, it was essential to ensure that participants' mental health was considered and that these moderate psychological risks be acknowledged. To mitigate the potential for re-traumatization, a debriefing period after the interview was incorporated into the interview procedure; this allowed the participants

to discuss any emotions that may have arisen. The debriefing period provided the participants with the opportunity to explore their reactions to both the content and process of the interview and to talk about the emotions, positive, negative, or otherwise, that occurred throughout the interview process. Prompts for the debriefing period are included in the interview protocol (located in the Appendix). At this time, participants were also provided with a list of available support resources. If a participant was experiencing a difficult emotional response post-interview, this list of resources was discussed in greater depth with the intent of diminishing any potentially negative interview-related outcomes. Ultimately, this study proceeded with the intention of beneficence to its participants through any and all feasible avenues.

Summary

It is essential to ensure alignment between one's research purpose and methodological decisions. For this qualitative study, the stated purpose was to describe the essence and meaning of the lived experience of the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence and the subsequent bereavement process. Within this chapter, each methodological choice was described and justified, enabling a clarification of the connection between the purpose and the methodology. This chapter discussed the chosen research design, the role of the researcher, participant selection, instrumentation, data collection, data analysis, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations. Several pertinent documents are included in the appendices, which may assist other researchers in the replication of this study. Ultimately, thick description of the methodological choices of this proposed study assisted myself as the researcher when conducting the study and may

assist other scholars in the future who may wish to recreate various aspects of this

research.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

As has been established, the purpose of this qualitative research study is to describe both the essence and meaning of the lived experience of emerging adults in the United States who lost a close peer during adolescence to a sudden death. In order to fulfill this purpose, one central phenomenological research question was created: What is the essence of the lived bereavement experience of emerging adults in the United States who have experienced the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence? Three sub-questions were formed which ask after the perceptions of this population's experience of loss, the experience of PTG, and whether we can characterize bereavement resources and support as meaningful. The study was then conducted with the intent of exploring these questions. Within this chapter, I will briefly discuss the setting of the interviews, relevant demographic data of the participants, and the processes of data collection and data analysis, as well as evidence that this research is trustworthy by the measures of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These sections will be followed with an in-depth analysis of the study's results, which is organized by research sub-question. Overall, Chapter 4 elucidates the findings of this research effort.

Setting

As was intended when crafting the methodology of this study, the interviews took place in person, over the phone, or over a video conference call. All participants chose a day and time for an interview that worked best for them as well as whether they preferred virtual or in-person meetings. For those participants within my own state of Alaska, the

option was given to conduct the interview face to face. If participants lived outside of my state, they were given the options of either a phone or video interview. For the interview that took place face to face, the participant chose the location, which was semi-private: a private room within a public building. For the video conference interviews, the participants were sent a link to a Teams video meeting which could be accessed at their appointed time from their own homes. Those interviews that were conducted via telephone or video call allowed the participant to choose their own location; I as the researcher always called in from my home office. There was little to no ambient noise that could have distracted from the interviews, though one participant did receive a telephone call in the middle of the interview.

Demographics

In this IPA, data from eight discrete participants were collected. The study proposal called for nine to twelve participants or until data saturation was reached. After data from eight participants were collected and analyzed, data saturation was confidently reached. All eight participants lived within the United States, and all eight had been living in Alaska when the death of their friend occurred during adolescence. Three participants had since moved out of the state of Alaska and lived elsewhere in the United States. As per the inclusion criteria, all eight participants were between 18 and 25 years old at the date of their interviews. One participant was 18 years old, one was 19 years old, one was 21 years old, two were 23 years old, and three were 24 years old (See Table 1).

Table 1

Age Demographics

Age of participants:	Names of participants		
18 years old	Isabella		
19 years old	Jacob		
21 years old	Sara		
23 years old	Alexis	Nicholas	
24 years old	Brandon	Josh	Matthew

Note. This table reflects the ages and pseudonyms of the participants at the time of their interviews.

Each death occurred when the participants and their close friends were teenagers, and all were sudden. Causes of death included a hiking accident, several drug related deaths, and multiple suicides by various means. Five participants were male and three were female; no participants specifically mentioned alternate gender identities. As can be seen in Table 2, four participants identified their deceased friend as their "Closest Friend," while four identified their friendship as an "Above Average Bond." No participants identified their friend as a "Moderately Close Friend," a "Friendly Acquaintance," or a "Vague Acquaintance," as this would have precluded them from participating in the study.

Table 2

Likert Scale of Closeness Responses
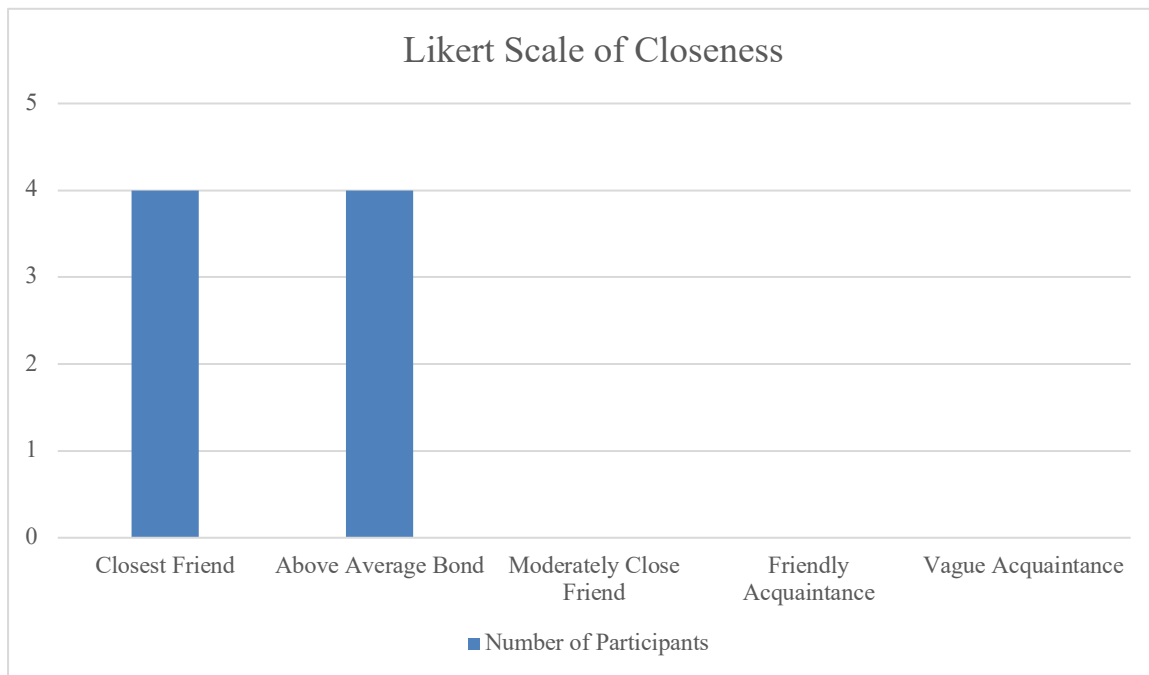
Note. This table reflects the self-reported closeness between the participants and their deceased friends.

Data Collection

Within this study, there were eight participants. Each answered some basic questions before they were deemed to fit the inclusion criteria. They were each then asked to participant in a single semi-structured interview. The participants were informed to expect the interview to last between 30 and 90 minutes. In actuality, the temporal range for the interviews was 25 to 70 minutes. One interview took place in person, four via video conference, and three over the phone. The in-person interview took place in a public, semi-private location of the participant's choosing and I was in my own home office when conducting all of the virtual interviews. All of the interviews were audio

recorded on a phone and a computer for redundancy. Another imbedded form of data mentioned in the methodology section was the inclusion of personal artifacts or items of significance. The intention was for these items to be brought to the interviews and discussed. While many participants chose not to include the physical item in the interviews, all interviewees did verbally share about meaningful artifacts of their friendships with their deceased friend. After the data were collected, I personally hand-transcribed the data from each interview to create a written transcript on Microsoft Word. I transcribed the data myself in order to deepen my familiarity with each interview.

Data Analysis

The data analysis strategy was informed by both Merriam & Tisdell's (2016) discussion of phenomenological data analysis and Smith et al.'s (2009) extensive guide to IPA data analysis. Phenomenological data analysis is naturally inductive, moving from individual coded units to thematic representations of the data. My data analysis stage took place concurrently with my data collection stage. After each interview was conducted and transcribed, I combed through the interview and wrote open codes. This was done using the Review Comment feature on Microsoft Word. I then examined the codes from the interview and placed them in thematic categories, which constituted my axial coding. As I progressed from interview to interview, I added, removed, and adjusted themes as necessary. Throughout the process, I kept in mind the importance of creating themes that were on the same conceptual level. Once seven interviews had been coded, my themes no longer changed and I only added open codes to the established thematic headings in my axial coding document. This is when I knew that data saturation had been reached.

As will be discussed in much greater detail in the results section below, the themes were organized within the research sub-questions that they were respectively associated with. Within the research sub-question related to perceptions of loss, three themes emerged: negative internal effects and the bereavement process through time, descriptions of relationships, and meaning ascribed to the experience. Two of these themes contained a number of sub-themes that are explored in the results section. The themes that fell under the banner of PTG were: gratitude; empathy, perspective taking, and helping others; living fully and future planning; religious and spiritual contemplation; self-reflection and the acceptance of the authentic self; re-evaluation of relationships; resilience; breaking away from unhealthy behaviors and situations; and emotional openness. Finally, the themes associated with bereavement support and resources were resources, intangible support, school responses, and ambivalent attitudes towards support. One superordinate theme emerged from the research: juxtapositions. This superordinate theme transverses across all three of the research sub-questions and is discussed at the end of the results section.

Conceptually, "discrepant cases" is difficult to apply to an IPA study. As per Smith et al. (2009), IPA research is idiographic by nature and seeks to "analyz[e] the pattern of convergence and divergence" of individuals' experiences of a similar phenomenon (p. 50). Throughout the results section, I seek to explain both similarities and differences that were noted within each sub-theme. For instance, even though many participants experienced anger during their initial time of grief, some felt anger towards their friend while others felt it towards their peers, themselves, or their schools. The

intent of this study was not to demonstrate that adolescent bereavement after the sudden loss of a peer is experienced in exactly the same way by every person (as it is not), but to delve into the thick descriptions of idiographic interview data to better understand the aforementioned convergences and divergences of experiencing this particular phenomenon.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

Credibility

In qualitative research, credibility is the measure that is used in parallel to what would be deemed internal validity in quantitative studies (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). For my study, I intended to use member checks, data collection until data saturation was achieved, reflexivity, and peer review. I did sparingly utilize member checks for several of the participants through emailing them with a further clarification question. I was conscious that once the participants completed their interview, they would be unlikely to want a continuation of the conversation. One participant, unprompted, emailed me with an additional comment that she wanted to add. In terms of data collection until data saturation was reached, I did continue to collect data until two interviews past when I felt satisfied that I was approaching saturation. Between the sixth and seventh interviews, I no longer felt the need to make large-scale changes to my thematic coding. To combat my personal biases, I consciously bracketed my own experience when listening to each participant. Additionally, I kept a reflexive digital journal chronicling my thoughts on potential bias as I moved through the data collection process. Finally, peer review was thoroughly implemented, as the nature of a dissertation requires extensive faculty review.

Transferability

Transferability is most akin to external validity and is typically attained through thick description of one's data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In Smith et al. (2009), the authors discussed how thick description is inherently a part of interpretative phenomenological analyses, as this type of study is idiographic by nature. Through asking participants a series of pre-determined questions in the interviews and following up with probing questions to acquire further detailed accounts of their experiences, I attained thick descriptions of each participant's lived experience. Additionally, I clearly delineated the inclusion criteria for participation, which created a defined and niche population. In these ways, I strove to achieve transferability.

Dependability

Dependability, which closely aligns with the concept of reliability, was achieved through several means (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In my methodology section, I noted that I intended to use peer examination and reflexivity as well as an audit trail to ensure dependability. As was previously mentioned, I did use peer review and reflexivity. My audit trail is predominately digital and includes a plethora of documents that could be used to follow the analysis journey. For example, I have clearly labeled folders of documents that included interview transcripts, open codes, the progression of axial codes, and each sub-theme that I explored.

Confirmability

What is called objectivity in quantitative studies is conceptualized as confirmability in qualitative research efforts (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). As per my methodology section, intercoder reliability is not a strategy that can be used on a single researcher dissertation. However, to replicate the intent of intercoder reliability, I adhered to faculty review. Multiple faculty members and boards reviewed my work prior to submission. Additionally, I intended to make use of reflexive documentation throughout the study. As has been discussed, I created a reflexive digital document throughout the data collection and analysis processes. After reviewing both my intended steps and actual actions to ensure trustworthiness through strategies related to credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability, I strongly believe that I succeeded in conducting a study that is trustworthy along all four of these domains.

Results

In this section, the results of the data analysis will be discussed in detail. This results section is organized hierarchically by research sub-questions and then themes and sub-themes which address each in turn. Finally, a superordinate theme will be explored that has been interpreted to cut across each sub-question, drawing the results together into a cohesive whole.

Perceptions of Loss

Negative Internal Effects and the Bereavement Process Through Time

One of the main themes within the research question asking after individuals' perceptions of loss is the onset of initial negative internal effects. This theme is one of the

most strongly defined results of the research. Though participants may have experienced a variety of negative internal effects, every single participant reported negative impacts on their mental and emotional states. This theme predominately focuses on these negative effects, organized by type of emotional reaction, but also includes a discussion of delayed reactions and complicated grief as well as the fading of pain across time.

Shock, Surrealism, and Denial. A common set of emotions experienced by many of the participants upon initially hearing of their friend's death was shock, a sense of unreality, and denial. While these concepts could be separately defined, they also have overlapping zones of meaning. While shock may be an initial reaction of surprise to an unexpected emotional blow, surrealism may encompass the feeling of reality having been knocked off its axis, and denial may include the rejection of this new reality, all three nestle together in an amalgamation of dismay that can be displayed through disassociation, confusion, numbness, and even foggy memories. These associated reactions were most evident in the initial phases of grief and were especially present for participants directly after finding out about the death of their close friend.

Brandon described that when he first found out about his friend's suicide, in addition to sadness, one of the first emotions he experienced was disbelief. He explained that:

> But, um, disbelief as well, that's another thing. Um, when I first found out, the very initial reaction, um, I remember sitting down, cause like, I couldn't like, I don't know, I was a fifteen-year-old kid and I couldn't process that. Couldn't wrap my head around it, cause I had just seen him the night before. So really, I

had, I had, like it just sounded fake to me. Like people say, you know, it sounds

like a bad dream, like a nightmare. And I don't even know if it sounds like that.

It's it's it's this period of being in limbo. Of like, like, is this actually real? Like, it

was weird. I've never had that experience before, to this day…about anything.

Several words and phrases in this response that appear especially imbued with

meaning were "it sounded fake to me," "I had just seen him the night before," and "is this

actually real?" For Brandon, reality set in "when [they] went to the hospital because he

was kept on life support for two days," but "seeing him still didn't lock it in, but when I

looked at his parents, I remember that very, very clearly…seeing those two together, it,

that's what drove it home." He repeated throughout the interview that one of the first

reactions was this shock and disbelief. After it became clear that the loss was real, he

continued to feel confused.

Harkening to the linguistic description of loss as a "nightmare" that Brandon

referenced, Sara also used this exact language to describe the time surrounding her

friend's death. She called this time "a total nightmare experience." The term nightmare

invokes an image of an inescapable and surreal dreamscape in which one feels helpless;

in nightmares as in grief, there is often the simultaneous confusion over what constitutes

reality and a sensation of futility to change one's circumstances.

The word that Jacob continued to return to in order to describe his shock and

disbelief was disassociation, a word which was evidently important to him to reiterate, as

he mentioned it throughout the interview. Immediately upon hearing of his friend's death,

he was "very…disassociated. I was very, I was constantly like, you know, this doesn't

really feel real." He later repeated that "I would say I was very like dissociative," and again he referenced "the, like, disassociation and [how] it did not feel real at all." Surrealism goes hand in hand with the denial of the new and unpleasant reality of a traumatic loss. Jacob also described his denial through the mental removal of the identity of his friend from his friend's physical body: "even looking at him, cause we had an open casket. Um, since he fell, uh, everything was really swollen, so it *didn't even look like him*. Like it looked like someone had been stung by like, a hundred bees."

Shock and surrealism were also the first emotional reactions for Josh upon learning of his friend's suicide. He described how "it was almost like at that moment that I hit a brick wall and just, reality separated from itself." As with the utilization of the word nightmare by other participants, the metaphor employed by Josh is notable as it both further separates the speaker from the physical reality of the event and simultaneously makes the pain manifest, placing the experience of pain on a plane not only separate from reality but also more physical. Josh was then able to reckon with reality only once he gathered with mutual friends who could together come face to face with the method of their friend's suicide:

> We kind of all met up and everything that was going on at the time, uh, seemed to just, fade away. And… that was really when reality hit us that, like, I mean, he's he's dead. Like, he is dead dead. That's not undoable. So, I mean, it, it wasn't, it wasn't like he just tried to take a bottle of pills and he was at the hospital getting his stomach pumped. Like, I mean, he legit just hung himself. It was like: Oh. Shit.

Isabella was contacted while in a class at school and told via a text message of her friend's sudden drug overdose. Her initial reaction was that she "kind of just went blank for a second because like, I didn't, I didn't believe her." As time wore on, she continued to feel a shock at the loss, stating that "you wouldn't expect to lose her first… you, that is like the last person that you'd expect to lose." She later reiterated that "you didn't expect it to be this young or somebody that young that was that close to you" and explained that death had been a topic that she intellectually knew about but hadn't previously experienced in her heart. This feeling of inherent wrongness over the sudden death of someone so young cuts across the experience of many of the participants and is tightly bound to the difficulty of reckoning with the reality of the death of a teenager.

Sorrow and Devastation. Feelings of sorrow and devastation, more universally and simply called sadness in much emotion-based research, were mentioned by each of the eight participants. Though several of the participants communicated that sorrow was an emotion associated with their grief in less than straightforward ways, they still mentioned its absence or complicated presence, drawing attention to the widely recognized expectation of sadness over a significant loss.

Experiencing Sorrow. A devastating sorrow overcame most of the participants in the wake of their close friend's death. Many words were used to describe this sorrow, which will be further explored below; some of the most potent words included despair, distraught, and heartbroken. In the data, sorrow was described as both an initial reaction to hearing about the death and also as an enduring condition. When asked about his initial experience of grief, Matthew stated a simple and powerful, "I was really heartbroken."

His sadness continued for what he described to be "a long time." Similarly, upon receiving the news of her friend's death, Isabella started running down a hallway: "I think I tripped over something, but I fell and I was just on the floor sobbing." For Isabella, this sorrow, pain, and futility continued through time. She described how "the first couple months after [were] very difficult," and how she would experience bursts of tears that seemed to have arbitrary onset. More than a year after the death of her close friend, Isabella cried consistently throughout the interview for this research. Despite this reaction of sadness, she did choose to continue with the conversation, but commented on how surprised she was that she would still succumb to bursts of tears when thinking or conversing about the death of her friend.

Josh made the linguistic choice to utilize the word "distraught" to explain how he felt, which he clarified included sadness and anger. Later in his interview, he repeated "I was very sad. I was distraught." He said:

I mean, you're just, it's, you're dealing with a lot of emotional things at that time and, it was very…yeah, it was just like an *overwhelming sadness*, like, I mean that's just, the only way to describe it, just an overwhelming sadness and loss. Like a piece of you that's not like…I don't have any family members that have died, like close family members, but if that's what I can compare it to, that, that would be what I would compare it to.

Josh used the phrase "overwhelming sadness" twice more throughout the course of his interview, reiterating the potency of this aspect of his grieving experience.

In addition to shock, which was explored in a prior section, Brandon experienced an initial sense of "despair" and sadness, naming experiences of loss as "devastating." For Brandon, sadness came and went. Sorrow was his immediate emotional reaction though it later morphed into anger and back again. He explained that "the initial sad and the confused and, kind of, changed to being upset and confused," and "that sadness turned into like, mild resentment." After the "following year, um I I don't know. Now it's, when I think back to it now, uh, it's sad. I'm not angry anymore, but just sad."

Throughout his interview, Nicholas repeatedly described how he was "very sad" over the death of his friend. When he first found out about her death, he cried and expressed that he felt sadness that he would no longer be able to talk to her. Nicholas allowed himself to feel this sorrow: "I took my time to cry and be sad and be miserable," and explained that he wants other grieving teens to know "that it's okay to cry and it's okay to you know, weep and feel grief and to have that heavy heart." While Nicholas and others openly felt and expressed their sorrow, several other participants articulated more complicated relationships to sadness.

Complicated Relationships to Sadness. As previously mentioned, Jacob's initial grief reaction was a feeling of disassociation. In terms of sadness, he expressed feeling a social restriction of sorts. In his interview, he stated:

> I remember, I I remember feeling like I didn't have a right to cry. That was, like, a really big, like, thought that I thought a lot, like. Like cause I remember, his mom never really cried. And I felt like, if she didn't cry, I shouldn't be allowed to cry.

Though tears can be shed in response to a myriad of internal emotional states, the aforementioned statement indicates that Jacob repressed both feelings and expressions of sorrow because of a perceived social hierarchy of grief. Because his friend's mother did not cry publicly, or at least not in the direct presence of Jacob, he experienced a need to not only match his grief response to hers, but to undersell his grief in order to avoid surpassing the grief of someone he deemed more deserving of sorrow.

Of tears, Sara described how her first response upon hearing the news of her friend's death was to start crying. However, she also stated: "I haven't, like, really, like, had the, or felt the need to be sad about it." Sara later said that "I don't feel any sadness towards it, really." After a pause, she added, "Anymore." This indicates that she did, at some point(s) feel sadness, if it is an emotion that she doesn't feel *anymore.* Earlier in her interview, she expressed that she felt "hurt" by the death, which may indicate sadness, but may also be more aligned with her primary reaction of anger, which will be discussed in a future section.

Alexis rejected her feelings of sadness. She explained:

When I, I first heard about it, there was, I think I did feel really sad about it…and then, um, when she, like, told me that he was, like, on life support and they were going to be taking him off later that day, that… I was, like, really sad about it and then I was, like, no. Like, I don't wanna, and then immediately just shut everything down after that.

As has been demonstrated by these statements, individuals vary on their perspectives on the place of sadness in the grieving process. While some participants felt

that their sadness was a core element of grief and was meant to be fully felt, others

decided to repress their sorrow for a variety of reasons. Ultimately, these interviews

showed that sorrow and devastation are a common, but not ubiquitous, facet of the

adolescent grieving experience. However, sadness remains an essential aspect of grief in

this population, as each and every participant found it to be a vital enough element of

grief to discuss.

Anger. Another negative emotional response to the death of one's friend that

surfaced repeatedly throughout the data was anger. Reactions of anger were noted by

three of the eight participants and were spoken about at length by each. These feelings of

rage were aimed at a variety of individuals, from the deceased friend, to one's parents,

friends, or acquaintances, as well as to responses by institutions. For multiple individuals,

this anger was sometimes a manifestation of a certain jealousy and social comparison of

grief. Several participants also expressed irritability, which has been included as a

subsection of this theme. Overall, though not all participants expressed anger as a part of

their grieving process, those who did communicated its powerful impact on their

experience of loss.

Brandon expressed anger towards his school, his classmates, and his deceased

friend, stating:

> And school was annoying too, I remember, um, the, like, administration at the
>
> school wanted to create some, like, silent walk around the building for him. Um,
>
> the way that certain kids reacted to it made me really mad. Um, I initially like I
>
> said, I was, like, upset and confused and you know, that despair feeling, but I

remember going to school. And I was happy at school cause I saw my friends, but that's when I started to get mad at the whole situation cause I saw a bunch of people reacting in ways I didn't like. The way the school was treating it, I didn't like. Um, it just, it made me really upset. And then I was getting upset at him because of the choice he made. And so, uh, for the latter month, I spent a lot of time being really frustrated and angry with people who, some I'm sure, deserved it, but most of them didn't, you know.

Part of his anger was associated with jealousy and a social comparison of grief. When those who had been friends with Brandon's deceased friend for less time than he had claimed a deep grief, he felt an indignation at their response because he believed that they didn't deserve to grieve as deeply as he did. He explained:

I spent a lot of time feeling really jealous cause there were a lot of kids that were like, I I had never seen a lot of these kids spend time at his house, at these events, with him. Uh saying things like, 'oh, he was my closest friend,' and that would always drive me nuts, cause I felt like that degraded my relationship with him. And, it just, I mean to be transparent, it made me really jealous and upset. Um, because I was not saying those things at the time. And that's what was making me really mad… so, at the time, that made me upset because I I, uh, I can't even remember the first time I met [closest friend] because we, my parents were friends, our parents were friends well before we were born, so I mean, I knew him my entire life. Um, and to have these kids at school that I met that year, you know, at the beginning of the school year be like, 'oh he was my best friend,' you

know, 'I'm distraught, I'm torn apart.' And sometimes it felt like a *social display*
and that made me upset.

Brandon also used the term "social soapbox" to describe the way that he
perceived certain peers used memorial activities to amplify their grief expressions. He
explained how he saw "all these other people pretending to be, or even if they were
really, you know, close friends with him, you know, it-it like I said, initially it, in my
mind it degraded how I felt personally and my relationship." Josh corroborated
Brandon's anger at casual acquaintances' displays of grief, expressing a similar need for
a social hierarchy of grief responses. He said:

> And you're seeing all these people that you know did not spend a lot of time with
> him and were just, like, maybe casual acquaintances and friends with them, and
> they're comin' in, cryin', wailin', and like, 'oh my God! He was my best friend!'
> and I'm just like… I am three seconds from ripping your head off if you are
> making this about you right now, cause this is horrible. It was, it was very
> aggravating. It was more aggravating than anything. And I'm just like, 'I need to
> get the hell out of here,' like, I don't, I can't stay here anymore cause this is, this
> is not productive and if the next person walks through the door and says
> something like that, I'm gonna punch somebody.

This desire for recognition of closeness to the deceased teen was wrapped up in
this response of anger. When speaking of the grief counseling session offered by the
school on the day of his friend's death, Josh said:

> When you open it up to just be like, oh general everybody can come in,
> like, obviously there are going to be more people that are closer to that
> person that they're not gonna like what everybody else brings to that
> room.

When asked if he would have felt that the school sponsored grief counseling session was more helpful if it had included a limited number of individuals, he said:

> Yeah. I feel like that would have probably made everything a little bit better and
> kind of like, more, I mean, it's not going to be more of a personal experience, but,
> knowing that you have a very tight group of friends that were like, like I said, we
> were with each other every day all day. Doing all sorts of activities, adventure-
> type stuff and it's like, somebody that was in class with him that, like, had a
> casual conversation every once in while or whatever has a totally different
> relationship than his closest friend group. And that would have been, like, a better
> moment to just kind of pull us aside and had us separated from everybody else. At
> least in my, at least in my experience, that's what would have, it would have been
> better because it would not have produced the amount of rage and frustration that
> it did.

Josh's discussion of how the school's reaction "produced…rage and frustration," will be discussed in detail in the section on school responses to adolescent death. Ultimately however, this connection between anger and social grief comparisons was strong in several participants. Multiple times throughout his interview, Josh brought up

how he became verbally aggressive and emotionally volatile after the death of his friend. Josh described it in one area of his interview in this way:

> I was definitely a lot more reactionary. Like, when people would, so I, I dealt with a lot of, uh, bullying on the swim team, just from dudes on the swim team being jackasses. Uh…so I definitely became more, like if they would give me crap or whatever, I'd just go flip out. Like, I just, I'd go straight to… it wouldn't be like, they'd push me and then I'd push back. It'd be like, they'd push me and then, figuratively, this didn't actually happen, figuratively, it was like, I would push back in such a way with verbally or whatever or just like, my general attitude would have been straight to a chokehold. Like there's no, there's no, it was either zero or a hundred…I don't know how to describe it besides reactionary.

He used the word "rage" to describe his short-term emotional reaction to the loss. Though Josh both felt and expressed a lot of anger, he clarified that he "wasn't angry at [his deceased friend] necessarily," despite the fact that his friend had committed suicide. On the contrary, Sara, whose close friend died in a drug related incident, did feel anger towards him. She said, "I was just like, really angry that he was, you know, I mean this sounds shitty to say about a dead person but, I was just really angry that he was stupid." As was seen in Brandon's previous statement, he also felt anger towards his close friend after his friend's suicide. He said that his anger "faded from people that I knew and kind of solely rested on him and the decision he made."

Sara remembers the anger lasting for around one year, though it wasn't all aimed at her friend. She also developed a new anger towards her mother, who she felt did not

know how to handle a grieving daughter. She mentioned that this anger was only for the first year after the death. In addition to anger at his friend, the school, and those who socially displayed their grief, Brandon also experienced anger at perceived disrespect toward his deceased friend. He described his anger over the spreading of inaccurate details in school:

> Uh, that was another thing, a lot of people were spreading rumors, like on the details of how he killed himself and some of them were really graphic and gory. I mean, him killing himself with a gun is just, unavoidably, it's graphic and gory. Those are the true details, but the way they would explain in their own, you know, embellished details were, it was obnoxious and disrespectful. Um, it was just, it was frustrating to see these people who didn't know, you know, you didn't really know him, for one, or really what happened.

> Like Sara, Brandon's anger was also not short lived. He stated, "I held onto the anger for a long time." Though anger was a part of his grieving process for a prolonged period of time, it did eventually go away. Now, nine years later, Brandon says "I'm not angry anymore."

> ***Irritation.*** A facet of anger that several of the participants brought up was irritation. Even when his rage had simmered down, Josh felt an increased irritability at many around him. Brandon also experienced annoyance towards people and situations he otherwise would not have found annoying. For instance, after the death of his friend, Brandon said that he felt that his "parents got pretty annoying." He clarified:

The reason my parents were annoying me at the time anyways, um, was because

my mom, I shouldn't even say my parents, mostly my mom, uh, she she kept

asking me if I was okay and she kept asking me, you know, like, or she kept

telling me she's like, 'you're not really reacting to this.'

In addition to feeling irritated by his parents and mother in particular, Brandon

also said "school was annoying too." He found other people, while well intentioned, to

be an irritant at that time. "It's a very annoying question when some would say: are you

okay? *Like, clearly, I'm not*." Though participants' reactions to school responses will be

explored in detail in a later section, it is worth briefly noting that Josh felt irritated by his

school's response to the death of his friend. Josh also became irritable in the sense that he

lost patience for others who he felt were not taking action to improve their lives. He

described this mindset shift by saying:

If you're just being lazy, like, and you're like 'oh my God, I hate my life because

my mom did this or my dad did that' or like lalala, it's like then change your

frickin' circumstances, dude! Like…there's a lot of people that just want a pity

party.

Ultimately, anger was experienced and expressed in a variety of ways by multiple

participants following the death of their close friends. While some felt outright rage

towards the grief-based reactions of others, other participants directed their anger at their

deceased friend. Irritation also increased for several of the participants. Though anger

was not an emotional response experienced by all of the participants, it seemed to heavily

play into the bereavement process of three of the interviewed individuals, rendering it a response worth considering in future adolescent grief research.

Guilt. Another negative reaction that was mentioned by four participants was guilt. However, the way in which this negative emotional response was discussed differed from participant to participant. For one, guilt surrounded the fact that her close friend died by his own hand. For others, guilt was associated with emotional reactions to their losses. Yet another participant rejected the concept of guilt as something often associated with those who lose loved ones to suicide. Regardless of the role guilt played in their experiences, it is an emotional response that recurred throughout the data.

For two participants, guilt was an emotional response associated with their friends' suicides. Alexis experienced deep feelings of guilt for not realizing that her friend was planning on killing himself. She stated:

> I know that a lot of people kind of have similar, like feelings when something like this happens where I just felt guilty and I felt like I could have done more. Or there was, like, I could have noticed, like, warning signs or just different things like that that I didn't. And so I felt incredibly guilty.

This guilt lasted for upwards of seven years for Alexis who conveyed that "it wasn't really until that last year that I could understand, like, I did what I could and, like I, I was a good friend. I was there. Um, I just can't fix everything." She continued, "And I can't be everything that I, like wanna be, so it's, it's understanding that, you know, there are limitations and it's not my fault that something happened."

Josh also spoke to the concept that many individuals who have lost someone to suicide experience guilt. He rejected the idea that he would feel guilty, saying that he had seen many of his friends "flogging [themselves], just going, 'oh my gosh! My friend killed himself!'" The word flogging conjures a visceral image of the painful process of self-flagellation. Josh called this a "fork in the road" of his life where he could choose to either succumb to guilt or move away from it. He was adamant that he would not be among the ranks of those who hurt themselves by accepting feelings of guilt.

Guilt also manifested itself in the domain of responses to one's emotional reactions. Several of the participants commented on feelings of guilt that surrounded their grief responses. When Nicholas learned of his friend's death, he worried about what he was going to do logistically, as he had planned to move in with his friend in a few short weeks and then found himself without a place to live. He commented about the guilt he felt when he realized that he was thinking of himself rather than how his friend must have been feeling, stating, "and then during that time, I was like, I shouldn't be thinking of myself in this way. I should be thinking of, how she, how she felt." As was touched on in the section on sorrow, Jacob repressed his tears, feeling that he was not allowed to cry if his deceased friend's mother did not cry. Though not explicit in his wording, this indicates a certain level of guilt over his feelings of sorrow based upon the preestablished desire for a social hierarchy of grief. Ultimately, though participants' experiences of guilt varied, guilt was one of the negative emotional responses that made up part of the bereavement process for multiple individuals in this cohort.

Loss of Control and Fear. Another related set of emotional responses that many of the participants experienced during their time of grieving was fear and the sense of a loss of control. These root feelings of fear were exhibited in a variety of ways by the different participants, such as through nightmares, magical thinking, and volatility. This section will explore how the participants described their experiences of feeling a loss of control and fear after the death of their friend.

For Matthew, his fear was twofold. On a more physical level, Matthew's fear for his physical wellbeing and safety increased, as his deceased friend had formerly protected him from being bullied. He explained that he "was bullied a lot and [his deceased friend] kind of helped [him] through that." Matthew went on to say that after his friend died, he was still bullied, but now his friend was not able to protect him from the bullies. On a more metaphysical level, Matthew experienced fear in the form of nightmares. He explained how he connected his nightmares to cultural Yupik (Alaska Native) metaphysical beliefs and traditions; Matthew believed that the bear symbolism in his dreams was connected both to real bear encounters and to his own inability to emotionally let his friend go. Matthew said:

> I think I had bad luck because during those times when I was sad, a bear keeps coming around and taking our family's moose meat that they caught, and all that stuff. And also those bears were appearing in my dreams… It's kind of like a Yupik tradition that if you get close to someone and like if you cannot let go, some bad things will happen.

While Western Psychology might deem an individual's belief in the connection between their own actions/thoughts and an outcome that is out of their control to be magical thinking, Matthew's belief that he was the cause of these bears (both nightmare and physical) was buttressed by his cultural perspective. Regardless of the name for this connection, he experienced fear as an integral part of his grieving process. He stated, "it was affecting me and I felt like I was being attacked." Matthew had other fear-based dreams also. These dreams featured his deceased friend:

> During that time, he was appearing in my dreams saying, 'Come join me. It's nice over here.' But he didn't look the same as the real world. He was really pale. He had really dark eyes and all that stuff.

> It is clear that fear played a large role in Matthew's experience of loss. Other participants, such as Isabella, also experienced fear. Hers was more immediate than Matthew's. Isabella described how after she found out about her friend's fatal overdose, "I knew I was going to panic, so I got up and I, I ran down to the um, the the office." While her panic did eventually morph into other emotional responses, this fear defined the first moments of her grief. Nicholas reported worry over his own wellbeing after the death of his friend because he had planned to be housed by her in the upcoming months. Therefore, his worry was logistic in nature.

Several other participants experienced the sense of losing control, either of their emotions, their bodies, or their lives more generally. Sara shared that after the death of her friend, she wrote in a public journal entry that "I do know I've lost control of my life." This loss of control included what she described as "hard drugs" that she used as a

form of self-medication. Another way in which a loss of control was experienced was in Josh's emotional volatility. As explored above in the section on anger, Josh became verbally aggressive, emotionally reactive, and experienced intense anger to the point where he worried that he may become physically violent. Of this, Josh said that he did not have the same restraint that he had in the past and that "I'd just go flip out." He explained that this loss of emotional and verbal control was new to him after the death of his friend. A different way that loss of control manifested itself in Jacob was through psychosomatic responses. He reported poor sleep and headaches related to his grief. As has been explored, fear and the sense of losing control were experienced in a variety of ways by the participants. While fear was a common grief response in this group of participants, it can be noted that fear in this demographic may be experienced in a vast array of manners and through various modalities, including the feeling of losing control.

Numbness, Emotional Shut-Down, and Social Withdrawal. Many of the participants experienced some form of numbness or emotional shut-down upon finding out about the death of their close friend. This oftentimes was paired with a social withdrawal, a pulling away from one's other friends and/or family members. It was also sometimes accompanied by a lack of desire to foster new relationships. In this section, we will explore participants' experiences of numbness, emotional shut-down, and social withdrawal.

In her experience of grief, Alexis found numbness to be a prominent feature. Of the experience, she shared, "emotionally, I didn't…feel the need…to feel anything. Cause I I I didn't want to be sad or I didn't want to have negative feelings or to feel bad

about things or anything like that." She effectively turned off many of her emotions immediately upon finding out about her friend's suicide:

> When [the school nurse], like, told me that he was, like, on life support and they were going to be taking him off later that day, that… I was, like, really sad about it and then I was like, no. Like, I don't wanna, and then immediately shut everything down after that.

When speaking about the length of her numbness, Alexis said, "I didn't really do anything for a really long time and I stayed shut down, honestly probably up until the last couple years. Until, like, my early to mid-twenties." She explained:

> Yeah, I didn't really know how to get past it, or how to…not be so numb or shut down and to still allow people in my life and open up and all the wonderful things about making new friends and new connections and different things like that.

Of this, she further explained that she "didn't wanna let people into [her] life because [she] didn't want to experience it again." Alexis described how it impacted her ability to foster new connections, stating, "I think because, like, that numb feeling that I have or that I had, I wasn't fully able to develop, like, long term relationships." For Alexis, this included both platonic friendships and romantic relationships. She further explained how her numbness impacted her ability to heal: "I think because I was so shut down for a lot of time, I haven't really been able to start growing from it until recently."

Sara described how she both ignored her true emotions and went into a state of social withdrawal. Right after the event, she spent several weeks "hid[ing] in [her] room." She said, "I kind of hermit-ed a bit." According to Sara, this period of social withdrawal

lasted for around a year. She even eventually chose to leave school in order to avoid being around her peers. After working with her therapist, she realized that she had been pushing away negative emotions related to the death.

The way that Jacob experienced his numbness was through what he classified as "disassociation." His experience of numbness was heavily tied into his shock, which is discussed in a prior section. He also described how he was too numb and disassociated to feel sadness. In our conversation, he explained:

> I'd go like, a whole week and not even realize that a week just went by, or I'd be sitting there and having a conversation and wouldn't even, like, remember what I'd just said to the person because I was just, like, completely lost in my thoughts.

Isabella also went through a period of isolation, a phase of her life which has not yet managed to ebb away. She said that since her friend's death, "I've been kind of isolating." Her friend died over a year prior to our conversation, meaning that her period of social withdrawal had lasted over twelve months. Overall, many participants experienced an interplay between developing numbness, shutting off painful emotions, and social withdrawal.

A Pretense of Being Okay. Four of the participants described feeling the need to put up a façade that communicated to the world that they were not really grieving. Three of the four were the three young women in the study. Alexis spoke of how she hid her grief from her family, saying "I didn't want to worry them about it and so, I kind of would just pretend." Sara explained how part of her personality includes an affected nonchalance to the point where "no one can really tell when things affect me." She said

that "a coping mechanism I used was masking. So, like, just pretending like I'm happy, but, like, at the end of the day, like, I'm not. You know? Um, and then humor would be another mask." For Sara, she had a desire to "not look weak in front of other people," which led to her concealing her true emotions. She admitted that masking "can make, like, you know, relationships not healthy." Both Sara and Alexis acknowledged the benefits of letting go of these pretenses around people they cared about, though they each kept up these pretenses throughout their bereavement processes.

Josh and Isabella put up these facades in a different way. For these two participants, pretending to be okay came in the form of outwardly maintaining other areas of their lives. Josh described how his pain created more of an internal impact and that he did not allow things to effect "parts of his life outwardly." For instance, he wanted to maintain his school and athletic performance. Isabella spoke to the tension that this created in her life, saying that her grieving process was "hindered… [because] I still had work and school and I still had, like, a schedule and it was, like, I had to pull myself together even though, like, I wasn't, to go do those things." Either through emotional facades or the maintenance of external activities, these four participants experienced perceived pressure to maintain an air of being okay, even when their internal worlds were crumbling.

Delayed Reactions and Complicated Grief. Half of the participants described experiencing delayed grief reactions and/or longer-term negative emotional effects that may fall under the category of complicated grief. These extended bereavement processes often lasted multiple years; some of the participants claim to still be negatively impacted

to this day. It is worth noting that three of the four participants who described complicated grief effects were the three female participants.

As was previously explored, Alexis experienced initial numbness and described intentionally shutting off her emotions to avoid the pain of loss. She stated that "even though it happened when I was a teenager, it's still like, I feel like a new process for me. Like I've, I'm kind of going through it now, years later, so." She said, "I think because I was so shut down for a lot of time, I haven't really been able to start growing from it until recently." According to Alexis, there was a dual catalyst for processing her grief:

> It felt like enough time had passed where I felt like I was able to do it. I also had moved, um, out of the state and out of that town where I felt like being in a new environment, it felt like, okay I can kind of have this space that I feel like I need to do it.

She talked through how difficult it was to process her grief after she moved out of state and began attending therapy again. "It didn't really get hard again until after I was like, you know I actually need to try and work through this." Prior to that, she spent years avoiding relationships, stating "I think because of, like, that numb feeling that I have or that I had, I wasn't fully able to develop, like, long-term relationships."

Similarly, Sara continues to have difficulty developing new relationships. She said, "I'm definitely more wary of, like, the people I surround myself with. Like, I have a hard time. I have really bad trust issues with people, so, it kinda makes it harder for me to feel close to people."

She claimed that when she did make new friends, she tended to "trauma-dump" the story of the death on them. Because she felt that she was largely numb to the pain of the loss when it first happened, Sara worried that she will still need to go through a grieving process later. She explained how "I think, later on in your twenties is when, like, everything that happened in your, like, childhood, like childhood trauma, starts processing. So, I'm a little worried about that." From the experience of these participants, it becomes clear that the loss of a close friend during adolescence can have negative ripple effects lasting well into one's twenties.

Throughout his interview, Matthew repeatedly mentioned how he was "sad for a long time." He described how even once everyone else had moved on, he "was the only one not letting go." Even at the time of our conversation, which was years after the death of his friend, he said, "I'm just so depressed." He further stated that "I'm stuck in this loop where I say too much of: why do I even exist?" Matthew mentioned his lingering nightmares and how he did at one time experience suicidal ideation; after his friend committed suicide, Matthew "almost did join him." Years after the loss, Matthew was still being negatively impacted.

Isabella, a little over a year after the death of her close friend, was still crying when she thought of her friend; her visceral sorrow had not abated. When speaking of the recent spreading of her friend's ashes on the beach for the memorial that took place one year after the death, Isabella noted that "I realized I still haven't came to complete terms with her death." Though not everyone experiences long-term negative bereavement

effects, these prolonged effects were experienced by half of the participants of this study, making complicated grief a strong thematic link in this demographic.

Relationship Development Retardation. Another perception of loss proved to be the perceived retardation of the ability to develop new relationships. It may be worth noting that this long-term outcome was described by all three females who participated in the study and none of the male participants. For these three young women, developing relationships became something to be prevented, either to avoid pain, because they did not feel that they had the energy to put enough effort into a new relationship, or out of a fear of trusting new people.

For Alexis, this outcome looked like choosing to avoid developing new relationships. She explained:

> I didn't really know how to get past it, or how to not be so numb or shut down and to still allow people in my life and open up and all the wonderful things about making new friends and new connections.

Alexis continued, "I also just didn't wanna let people into my life because I didn't want to experience [loss] again." This included both platonic relationships and those of a more romantic nature. She said:

> I think because of, like, that numb feeling that I have or that I had, I wasn't fully able to develop, like, long-term relationships. So even my friendships, I had my friends from high school and then, like, the minute we graduated, I, like, just cut ties completely. And then it happened as well just even in, like, romantic relationships where just because I was so shut down and everything, it would go

for a few months and then it just, it wouldn't really stick around or anything, just cause I felt like I couldn't.

Isabella experienced a similar reluctance to become attached to new people. She described how "I don't think I've gotten as close to anybody since that happened. Um, I've kind of been isolating….I don't think I am able to get as close or, like, as attached to them." Later, Isabella said "I stopped trying [to] mak[e] new friends…I don't try to make friends at school. I don't really talk to anybody. I kind of just show up, do what I'm supposed to do, and I leave." Of people she met at work, she said, "it's work. I mean, like, you know, we talk cause we work together, but that's because, like, we're getting paid to be there…it's not like I'm putting effort into the relationship."

Sara found that after her loss, she developed a difficulty trusting new people. Of this, she said:

> I'm definitely more wary of, like, the people I surround myself with. Like, I have a hard time, I have really bad trust issues with people, so, it kinda makes it harder for me to feel close to people that, like, weren't around during that time period.

For these three female emerging adults, the loss of their close friend as a teenager resulted in an impediment to their relationship development abilities. Whether it was because of a fear of losing another friend, a lack of energy to put out effort, or a wariness of trusting others, these participants found it difficult to develop new friendships and relationships after the death of their close friend. Based on the participants in this study, it may be worth exploring gender differences in relationship challenges post-loss for this demographic.

The Fading of Pain Across Time. The final sub-theme that will be explored in this section on negative internal effects and the bereavement process through time is the fading of pain across time. Many of the participants mentioned that while the grief process may not have been linear, the pain did eventually begin to ebb away, the rawness of anguish melting into something still present, but no longer fresh.

As Isabella experienced, grief can come in waves. While she felt that the pain was going away, she is still sometimes confronted with a more visceral reminder of loss. Josh also expressed this sentiment, stating that "it kinda ebbed and flowed." However, as Josh described, the agony of loss does transmute into more of an echo of pain. Of his experience, Josh said, "it's still like that missing feeling, like you're missing that person, but it's not like an overwhelming sadness." He explained how he came to be at peace with the situation:

> I kind of just took more time to absorb it, think about it, and understand it. And as time went on, I understood it more and then by the, like, after half the year was over, it was kind of behind me.

For Jacob, his dreams reflected his gradual acceptance that his friend really was irretrievably lost, which helped his grieving to morph into something more sustainable:

> I had a lot of dreams of, like, him not being dead and then, after maybe, like, three or four months, the dreams just kind of turned to him, like, being dead. And I feel like that was, like, my subconscious kind of recognizing that, like, he was gone. But as for the disassociation and stuff, that kind of just slowly went away as life kind of, went back to as normal as it could be after he was gone.

Though, as explored in the section on complicated grief, Matthew still had some lingering effects of his bereavement process, he too expressed feeling the pain fade. Over time, he claimed that he did eventually move on because "we all have to move on at some point." He articulated that when "anything happens, it happens. You cannot, like, change it. But I learned that is…time travel is not real. No one can travel back in time." This reflects his acceptance of the need to move forward. Overall, the participants expressed that though the event still impacted them in a myriad of ways, the sharpness of the pain tended to dissolve over time.

Descriptions of Relationships

Another piece of individuals' perceptions of their bereavement was a description of their many varied types of relationships post-loss and how these relationships may or may not have been impacted by their grief. While describing each of these relationships in turn is outside of the scope of this research study, it is worth briefly mentioning them here. In their interviews, participants described relationships with other friends, family members, and peers. They also described relationship dynamics with acquaintances and community members, family members of the deceased friend, and their original relationship with their lost friend. Also included were descriptions of their reactions to others, which are discussed in other sub-sections of the study's results. Perhaps most pertinent were the shared descriptions of their lost friend as a chosen family member, how they experienced morphing feelings toward their friend which created a lack of statis in the relationship pre- and post-loss, the many shared activities that they participated in together, and how much time they spent talking to each other. Some of the changes that

proved more integral to their bereavement processes have been integrated into other portions of the results section where appropriate.

Meaning Ascribed to Experience

Ascribe Greater Meaning to Death. When examining the meaning that participants ascribed to their bereavement experience, it was found that four of the eight discussed how in some way they could see a greater, and perhaps positively impactful, meaning behind the death. These meanings varied, ranging from organ donation to awareness of signs of suicide to aiding the participants in helping others who were grieving. Though they by no means communicated that they believed the death to have been a completely good occurrence, each of these individuals pointed out tangible positive effects that the death had on others in the world.

Brandon ascribed several greater meanings to the death of his close friend. He discussed the legacy that his friend left as well as how the memorial item that he keeps relates to the good that his friend did post-mortem:

> He, all of his organs, he was a donor. So, they were all given to a bunch of people and I went back to the hospital for, like, an event, like two months later…it was held at the hospital, so I'm assuming it was in conjunction with the hospital but they handed out these little ceramic hearts. Um, and it was each one was a life he had saved because of his organs, or made better, so. You know, he saved a couple lives, but, you know, he helped a lot of people…so, um, he was able to give a lot in his own loss. And the, I carry that ceramic, it's a blue ceramic heart about the

size of my thumb and, uh, I, it's transferred from spot to spot, but regardless it's always been with me wherever I'm at.

In addition to believing in the good that his friend had done post-mortem through organ donation, Brandon was later able to use his experience with the suicide of his friend to connect with someone who was in crisis. He was on a mission for his church when he met a woman who "told us, you know, before she had met us, she was considering taking her own life." Brandon stated that "that was the first time on my mission that I ever shared that, my experience with suicide and, uh, we had a good moment and you know, I just told her that, you know, if if nothing else, I'm grateful she's still here." Similarly, Josh felt that going through his experience of loss helped him to support friends who may have been experiencing suicidal ideation. "I mean I really started to understand more about suicide and, like, people when they're in that mentality…just kinda understanding those signs and letting people know that, no matter what, that I would be there for them." He discussed how the experience helped him to shift his focus away from an ego-centered perspective to one where he paid attention to what was important for those around him. Nicholas also used his experience with grief to help others. He described how his mentor asked to tell his story to youth as an example of "how people can handle grief in healthy, in a very healthy way." In his interview, he communicated how he wanted to help others realize that they can meet challenges with joy:

People noticed, not in a bad way, but in a way of like, oh, [Nic], he may have lost someone dear to him, but he realized he can still move on. He can learn to, not

learn to live without her, but learn to live around that and learn to understand how to cope. And he's still joyful and he's still, um, smiling no matter the challenges.

Nicholas further explained that his friend's death was a reminder that "our lives aren't going to last forever. Do things that make you happy but also do things to help encourage others too." The other meaning that he ascribed to his friend's death was spiritual in nature:

> I know that she's gone, I can't talk to her anymore, but I can, I can still feel her love, kindly friendship, and sister greetings on, saying hello. And I was like, but I know that she'll, I know, I pray she's in a better place and I, all I know is she's not suffering, at least here on Earth anymore.

Another type of meaning that was overlayed atop grief was that having gone through his bereavement process, Jacob felt that he could better guide others who would come to experience grief. In our conversation, he explained that about a year after the loss of his close friend, another one of his friends died. When that happened, his prior experience allowed him to help "guide, um, my new friends through that grieving process." It also helped prepare him for this future loss. Even though he was still "consumed by grief," the second time he lost a friend, he said that he "was more, kind of aware about the process, I guess. Like I knew, you know, this, what happens when you grieve." In their interviews, these participants described ways in which they believed that their friends' deaths may have made some sort of positive difference in the world; ascribing meaning to the experience of a close friend's death was therefore an integral piece of each of these four participants' perceptions of loss.

Continuing Bonds and Avoidance. Continuing bonds with one's deceased loved one can be maintained through a multitude of artifacts, activities, and beliefs. Those participating in this research described meaningful objects that remind them of their lost friends, events and memorial activities that maintain the friendship bond, and beliefs in the continued presence or love of their dead friends. However, several also explored the possible rejection or avoidance of these continuing bonds. In this section, both the varied ways that adolescents who have lost close friends continue to uphold the bonds of friendship as well as the ways in which they may reject the retention of these relationships after the death of their friends will be examined.

Meaningful Objects. One way that continuing bonds can be maintained is through the keeping of meaningful objects. Many of the participants discussed one or two physical items that held a special significance relating to their deceased friend. Brandon described the small ceramic heart given to him by the hospital where his friend's organs were donated to help others in medical need. Of it, he said, "it's transferred from spot to spot, but regardless, it's always been with me wherever I'm at." Alexis kept a matching heart, though she described it as made of stone rather than ceramic, as Alexis and Brandon lost the same friend to suicide. In addition to the small blue heart memento, Alexis was given "Christmas ornaments that I have hung on my bookcase, so I see them every day, that are made out of, like, his jeans and shirts and things" by her friend's mother, who had enlisted the help of a family friend to make these meaningful objects.

She also confessed that:

> His mom also after he died went through, like, his journal and so some of the
> things that he wrote in there that were about me…she made, like a copy of it for
> me and so I have it, so I can read it occasionally.

> Similarly to Alexis keeping a small piece of her friend's clothes, Sara said that

"for awhile I had, like, a flannel of his that had his cologne on it that I would sleep with."
Keeping clothes was not only something that the female participants did. Josh also
described how he:

> Grabbed his rainbow scarf that he had that was just like a, I don't know why he
> had it. He did. Um, it was just kinda like a funny, weird thing that he had that he
> would do stuff with and it was, like, alright, cool. Like he would go hiking in it
> and it's just like this giant rainbow thing, like, hanging off of him.

> For Josh, this piece of clothing held sentimental value because of the memories

attached to it. He also was given a meaningful silver coin by his friend's parents, which
had both spiritual/religious significance due to the Buddhist symbolism and personal
significance because of the tiger emblem which represented the Year of the Tiger, which
was the year both Josh and his friend were born. The "two tigers [were] walking side by
side," just as he and his friend had walked during their friendship.

> An item that was important to Jacob was a paracord bracelet that his friend had

made. He explained how he kept it for years. Matthew's item was a photo book that held
pictures of his deceased friend with his friend's family. The book "said 'In Memory Of,'
that kind of stuff." Matthew explained that though the photo book was significant, he lost

it when he moved out of his village and to the city. Another participant who talked about keeping photos close was Isabella. She said, "I also have a little, um, a little necklace that has a picture of us and then, like, it has, um, it's like this little jar kind of thing and it has a couple of her ashes in it." Isabella was the only participant who described keeping any of her friend's ashes. She also described saving a very idiosyncratic item: her friend's eyelash glue, a fact that caused her to giggle when speaking of it. Isabella said:

> I haven't been able to throw it away. I don't think I'll ever be able to throw it away. But she, she loved makeup. She was great at makeup. She would always do makeup on me, she would do it on herself, she would do it all the time. And um, one time she spent the night and she left her eyelash glue, and I know it's not mine, well, I knew it was hers because she liked the the black eyelash glue and I like the clear eyelash glue.

Keeping items that relate to one's lost loved one is one way of maintaining continuing bonds. Another physical representation of continuing bonds is through inking one's skin. Several participants discussed choosing to have memorial tattoos permanently inked onto their bodies. Brandon spoke on this topic quite extensively, as he came from a religious background that largely prohibits the acquisition of tattoos. He described his conversation with his parents after he made the decision to have his friend's name tattooed. "My mom was very, 'I think that's a great idea,' which pretty much knocked me off my feet." Of his dad's reaction, he said, "he gave me the whole spiel, it's like tattoos this, tattoos that, 'but you know, it's a memorial for people you loved and I'm not going to discredit that or disregard that or disrespect it.'" Sara also put her friend's initials on

her body as a tattoo, though she recently had those initials covered up, which will be explored in the section on avoidance. Overall, the participants showed that keeping meaningful objects is an important way for grieving adolescents to maintain continuing bonds with their deceased friends.

Continuing Bond Activities. Another method of upholding continuing bonds with a lost loved one is through memorial activities. A number of the participants described events, activities, and rituals that served to keep the connections to their friends strong. Many of these activities took place on significant days, such as their deceased friend's birthday or the anniversary of the death. There were other ways in which participants acted that strengthened the continuing bonds. Overall, it was clear that young people grieving the loss of a close friend seek connection through memorial activities.

One activity that was discussed by multiple participants was continuing to celebrate their lost friend's birthday. For instance, Alexis described how she and her friend's other close friends would "throw him a birthday party." About this memorial activity, she said, "that was fun because it still felt like, in a way, like, he kind of kept being included in my life now. Um, and that was, like, a good thing for me." Others also commemorated their deceased friend's birthday, though not through a traditional birthday celebration. Jacob explained that "on his [friend's] birthday, we go down and visit his grave and, you know, eat dinner out there." Similarly, Isabella met on the following birthday with her friend's family to release balloons in memory of her lost friend. Though not a birthday party per say, gathering with others who loved the lost friend to honor that

friend's birthday was a method for Jacob and Isabella to continue the relationship with their friends.

Another important day that many participants commemorated was the anniversary of their friend's death. Isabella said that on the one-year anniversary of her friend's overdose, she and her friend's family "spread her ashes at the beach, and then we let balloons go." She discussed how they "talked to her before we let the balloons go," and that she read a poem aloud. In addition to maintaining continuing bonds with her friend, Isabella said that this remembrance activity helped her realize that she still hasn't come to terms with her friend's death. Jacob and his family, even all these years later, still make it a tradition to "go up the day that he died, we do like the hike that he did, every year." Following the trail of the fatal hike is another way for Jacob to continue the relationship with his friend.

There were other unique ways in which they each participated in continuing bond-related activities. For instance, Isabella described how she sometimes imagined what her friend would have said in certain situations and she then would say those things to those around her. Josh explained how he and his friend's mutual friends would "go off and we'd go do stuff, the type of stuff we would go do with [deceased friend]. It would just kind of help bring a, a peace to us." Sara worked to continue the bond with her friend through naming characters after him in a video game she played. A different means of continuing the bond is through special rituals. Nicholas spoke about how he memorialized his friend through a personal form of ritual speech:

One of the things she loved doing was, um, is she loved saying like positive things about herself and positive things about her friend. And I, I did that. I did it twice. The first time I did it very intentionally. She was amazing. She was a very beautiful, bright young woman. She was very talented. She was, she was a tough lady. She had an amazing head on her shoulders. And she knew, she knew how to be a friend to someone in need. And then I did it a second time and I remember when her and I first did it, we did it a little goofy. And I was like, she, she's a whipper-snapper. She's a, she's a monster from under the covers that you don't want to see come out of the closet because they're more monstrous looking than a monster. I, I did two of them. One for like a sincere, more intimate feeling of how I, how I see her as a human. And one more of a, how I saw her as a friend. Not like, not in a bad way of a monster, but more of like, oh she's a monster and she's, she's cool, she's pretty fun, she's pretty different. And that, that was the way I did out of remembrance of her. This is what she taught, you know, I'll do it in remembrance of her.

Beliefs. Several participants purported that the way they maintained continuing bonds with their lost friend was through their beliefs, both spiritual and practical. For instance, Matthew described how he "even see[s] his spirit. Like, when I go to certain places, I see him." Nicholas leans on his spiritual beliefs to maintain his relationship with his friend. He said, "I know that she's gone, I can't talk to her anymore, but I can. I can still feel her love, kindly friendship, and sister greetings on, saying hello." He discusses moving forward with his grief, rather than moving on from it. "[I] can learn to, not learn

to live without her, but learn to live around that." He recognized that her presence would continue to be important to his life, even though she was no longer alive. Sometimes continuing bond beliefs were less spiritual and more practical in nature. For Jacob, he explained how after his friend died, he had dreams where his friend was still alive, which could be considered to be a subliminal form of continuing bonds. Another non-conscious example of continuing bonds is that Josh often spoke of his friend and the time surrounding his friend's death in the present tense throughout our conversation, despite the fact that his friend had died approximately seven years prior to his interview. As can be seen, beliefs contributed to continuing bonds in a number of capacities.

Avoidance. Despite the many ways in which participants sought to maintain connections with their deceased friends, some participants purposefully avoided such connections. For example, Sara both covered up her tattoo of her friend's initials and discarded the meaningful items that she initially kept. The wording that she chose, such as "got rid of that," and "covered that up," insinuated an intentional turning away from the maintenance of that continuing bond. While Matthew kept the photo book with images of his friend, he also communicated an avoidance of contact with that significant object, presumably to prevent a resuscitation of negative emotions such as sorrow. He repeatedly mentioned the need to "move on." Josh also did not want to be reminded of his loss. He clearly stated, "I didn't want to have constant reminders of that." Additionally, he chose not to get a matching memorial tattoo when many of his deceased friend's friend group went to get a symbolic etching in their skin. Of this, he stated:

I'm glad I really didn't go get that. Um, cause then that would have been more of

a permanent reminder that, like, of the tragedy that occurred... I wasn't going to

let it be a defining, constant thing of, in the rest of my life.

Not only did Josh want to avoid reminders of the tragedy of his loss, but he also

expressed derision over other people's reactions and the continuing bond choices of

others. He spoke of his friend's ex-girlfriend:

She still posts stuff on his Facebook page, or on his Instagram page. Um, like 'Oh

my gosh! I love you. I miss you. I wish we could have had life together. Blah blah

blah blah.' And it was very, I mean seeing that every once in a while kind of, just

ingrains in the fact, like, I mean, you are letting this drag you down in life.

Though a body of research explores continuing bonds through social media usage, Josh

adamantly stated that he found this behavior to be "completely insane." This shows that

not only have several of the participants chose to avoid continuing bonds, but these

beliefs can sometimes extend to the grief and continuing bond actions of others. In

summary, there are many ways in which the participants exhibited continuing bonds with

their deceased friends, from objects of significance to memorial activities to beliefs,

though some participants actively aimed to avoid such continuations of their

relationships.

Realization of Mortality. One aspect of the meaning that participants ascribed to

their bereavement experience was a realization of mortality. Many of the individuals

explored how, prior to the death of their friend, they had not truly considered the

possibility of death. Upon losing someone who was young, they came to understand the reality of a finite life.

Brandon explained how this was his "first experience of mortality," and that it "reinforced we're really not promised tomorrow," which was a phrase he repeated throughout his interview. For Brandon, the reality of death occurred when he visited his dying friend in the hospital. His friend was "kept on life support for two days," despite him being "brain dead." When Brandon visited the hospital, he found the parents of his friend standing in the room, crying. That was "when I realized, like, wow, this is real." Another participant was also confronted with the reality of a dying human body. Sara was in the same house when her friend's overdose began to become fatal. She described "being woken up to see the person…convulse in front of you." When she woke up, she realized that he had "drank, like, this bong water, which was laced with methamphetamines. And, so he ended up having a seizure and everything." She "took a shower with him to try and get him to sweat it out," and he was later driven to the hospital by another friend who had a car, where he died from the overdose.

Despite not being present for his friend's hiking accident, Jacob also came to reckon with the reality that even young men are not invincible. He said that even though he grew up knowing that "death was a possibility," he would still "do stupid stuff and just kind of, like, not think anything of it." He described his mindset shift, stating:

After he passed away, it's now, like, always in the back of my mind, like, whatever I'm doing, like if I'm speeding on the highway or something, I'm always like, you know, what if something happens? What if my tire blew out and,

you know, I could die instantly and that'd be it. So I definitely, kind of like, think more about dangerous stuff that I do.

Like Jacob, Nicholas took this realization of mortality and extended it beyond his deceased friend to himself. He explained that "this is an eye opener that we're not going to live forever….within the next couple of hours, you may not even wake up anymore." This realization happened immediately for some, but for others, it took time. Jacob discussed how the reality of his friend's death did not set in for some time, but that his nighttime dreams gradually came to reflect that his friend was truly dead. Josh found the initial reckoning with the reality of death to be difficult, but it was something that he grappled with on the very day of his friend's death. He said that he had gathered with his other friends and "that was really when reality hit us that, like, I mean, he's, he's dead. Like, he is dead dead. That's not undoable." For these individuals, the death of their friend illuminated the reality that time is finite and that human lives do all end, a fact that prior to their losses, they may have conceptually known but not internalized.

Identity. As one question within the interview protocol queried, how, if at all, did the participants feel that losing their friend related to their identities as a teenager? Many of the participants answered with specific ways in which this loss during their adolescence impacted either the way that others viewed them or the way that they viewed themselves. This section explores the explanations of what these effects were and how these identity shifts, perceived or actual, may have impacted the broader lives of the grieving individuals.

The participants made many comments that looked at the external, rather than internal, ways in which their identities were altered by the deaths of their close friends. Though Matthew did not make specific comments on his perception of his own identity, he did point out that others, especially his siblings, "said I've changed." In our conversation, Alexis described how she felt about the way that others began to perceive her differently after the death of her friend. She said:

> It felt uncomfortable. Um, cause it, I felt like especially with the people who I didn't know or… like maybe knew him and that we were friends but, we were just acquaintances or just had a class together, it felt weird knowing that they were thinking about, like, me in that context, I guess? And just kind of uncomfortable.

She explained how her peers at school would often make comments under their breath when she walked by that related to her being the friend of the boy who had killed himself, which created an association with which she felt uncomfortable. Another way her identity was impacted by the death was that she became unable to date people who had known her friend. When alive, he had shared with his friends that he had romantic feelings for her, though the feelings had never developed into dating because of Alexis' age and her family's rules surrounding dating. Regardless:

> None of our friends really… like, wanted to [date Alexis], cause they were like, oh we can't because, like that's, that's the girl that [friend who died] likes. And it kind of stuck through for the rest of the high school years. So I was kind of always seen by people in the school as oh, like, that's the girl that, like, that [friend who died] likes and, so I, I struggled a lot because… like those are, like,

the times, like the time where I feel like you should be dating and having fun and going out with your friends and then it got to a point where I was like, I I don't want to.

She expanded by stating that guys "were like, we don't want to go on a date with her because that feels wrong." Alexis' internally perceived identity as someone who would date in high school morphed into an identity that included feeling undatable, largely due to the way that others began to perceive and treat her.

For Josh, the death of his friend also shifted the way that others perceived him. Though he made an effort to maintain his identity through participating in his regular academic and athletic activities, he found that boys who had previously bullied him started realizing that he was now grieving and backed off. He described it as perhaps a mix of empathy and fear from the boys who were bullying him as "they became more understanding," but also came to see that Josh was more outwardly "reactionary." His friend's loss created a tangible "presence, presence would be the word that comes to mind." This grief-shaped presence altered the way that others viewed and treated him. When asked if he felt that people saw him differently because he had a friend who had died, he answered that he "felt that it shifted a lot." Now, having had many years pass since the event, Josh used contradictory language, both recognizing that the experience was significant and defining, while also not wanting a tragic experience to be a defining moment in his life. He spoke to the fact that many of his friends acquired matching memorial tattoos for their lost friend, but that he shied away from the idea for himself, saying "I wasn't going to let it be a defining, constant thing of, in the rest of my life."

This speaks to the interplay between grief as something that can impact one's identity and how grieving individuals often experience a rejection of that identity shift.

The language used by Sara in her interview also draws attention to similar contradictory feelings about identity change. While she said that having experienced the death made her feel more "mature," and she had a tattoo of her friend's initials, she ended up covering up her memorial tattoo, arguably rejecting the permanent impact of the death on her identity. Through this action, she communicates that who she is as a person is no longer something that she wants defined by her experience of loss. However, to complicate her expressions on identity, she elucidated that she often shares the story of the night of her friend's death with new friends that she makes, further cementing the way her adolescent grief is interwoven with her current identity.

While a number of participants described the ways in which their identities were altered by either the grief itself or their newfound status as grieving teens, they communicated varying emotional reactions to these shifts, often using contradictory language that drew attention to their confusion and/or discomfort around the topic. As the subject of identity shifts in grieving adolescents was not the primary topic of this research, this topic was not fully explored. However, there is room for much investigation into the interplay between these two foci. To conclude, this segment of the results section discussed perceptions of loss including negative internal effects and the bereavement process through time, descriptions of relationships, and the meaning that individuals have ascribed to their experience of losing a close friend during adolescence; the following segment will explore the role of PTG in the lives of these individuals.

Post-Traumatic Growth

PTG formed the theoretical foundation for this research and was also utilized as a basis for one of the research sub-questions which asked: What is the experience of PTG in this population? In Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) work is explored the concept of how individuals who have underwent a traumatic event can take this negative experience and transmute it in such a way as to experience growth. This profound change was highlighted when Josh called the death of his friend an "awakening moment;" the loss was a catalyst for change in his life. PTG Theory posits that often, change that occurs after grieving a significant loss is evolutionary in an adaptive or positively oriented manner. This section will dig into the ways in which individuals who experienced grief during adolescence due to the sudden loss of a close friend later came to recognize the growth-based changes that this trauma allowed them to undergo.

Gratitude

One facet of PTG that was experienced by this population was an increase in feelings of gratitude. This gratitude was expressed in a variety of forms, ranging from gratitude for large-scale life experiences to a focus on small happy moments, as well as gratitude for the impact that their friend had on their life. After experiencing the loss of his close friend at a young age, Brandon later was able to express his gratitude for life. He said:

> I feel fortunate because I'm still living…I say fortunate cause I am still here and I'm able to experience all this stuff. As as religious as I am, I can't say with 100% certainty that I know what goes on after life, you know. So I I have no idea. You

know, I as as far as what I know to be 100% true, I am fortunate because I'm able to do stuff that unfortunately [his friend] is not able to do right now. And never will be.

He discussed what triggered this feeling of gratitude for life in addition to the comparison between his ability to have experiences and the lack of ability of his deceased friend, stating:

I think of uh, just how fortunate I've been and all of the like, awesome stuff I've been able to do through college…and you know, anytime I have these big experiences or these cool moments, things I know I'm going to remember forever, I think, like, I could have been having these with him, but I'm not.

Though laced with sadness that his friend was not able to join him in these important life experiences, it is the loss itself that led to a recognition of how fortunate he is to even be alive and able to have these moments in the first place. Nicholas also experienced growth towards gratitude. He said that the experience was an "eye opener that we're not going to live forever and…to remember even the small happy things that have happened in your life." Nicholas discussed the importance of both enjoying the small things in the moment and also remembering to be grateful for them afterwards. He continued to explain that he "noticed I'm a lot happier" after having gone through this difficult experience and that he has "learned to be happy for the things we are given now and the things we can give to those who need them most." These two participants showed two sides of the gratitude coin: learning to find delight and gratitude in the small joys of life and recognizing how wonderful big life moments and adventures can be.

Isabella expressed her gratitude in a different way. In addition to several other

PTG benefits, she mentioned how she developed gratitude:

Gratefulness, being able to turn the memories that I did have with her into good

things and happy moments instead of, um, sad moments. [Sniffles], um, being

appreciative about the time that I did have her and uh, [sniffles], and how she

influenced me as a person and made my life better.

By way of increased feelings of gratitude during pivotal life events, gratefulness

for the daily joys of living, or appreciation for the ways in which lost friends have

positively shaped their lives, gratitude is one facet of PTG that some bereaved

adolescents come to experience during emerging adulthood.

Empathy, Perspective Taking, and Helping Others

Another PTG-related theme that was extracted from the interview data was a

long-term increase in empathy, perspective taking, and prosocial helping behaviors. Four

of the eight participants described this form of interpersonal growth in detail. It may be

worth noting that all four of those who explained this outcome were male; none of the

female participants discussed this topic. Within this section each of the four participant's

experiences with developing a deeper ability to express empathy, put themselves in the

proverbial shoes of others, and exhibit helpful actions are explored.

During his interview, Brandon discussed how the experience of losing his close

friend to suicide led to many situations in which he practiced perspective taking in a

meaningful and sobering way. When speaking about the church-based mission that he

went on several years after his loss, he described encountering a woman to whom he was able to connect. Of this, he said:

> She told us, you know, before she had met us, she was considering taking her own life…that was the first time on my mission that I ever shared that, my experience with suicide and, uh, we had a good moment and you know, I just told her that, you know, if if nothing else, I'm grateful she's still here. Um, and that just kind of reinforced in my mind, you know, that people react different to uh, to loss but suicide especially…Seeing his little siblings and his family and thinking about this family that I had seen on a number of occasions, I'd played with their kids and to think, you know, what this kid would think or feel if their mom had taken her own life. Or I think to myself even, at the moment and even now as I'm sitting here in this interview, you know, how I would feel if my mom killed herself…so as far as growth goes, you know, it uh, it also reinforces the 'you never know how somebody's day is going'…you don't know what people are going through.

There is a great deal to examine within the above excerpt, including how Brandon used his experience of grief to help a relative stranger, how his experience led him to consider many people's perspectives in regard to suicide of a loved one, and finally how he described a newfound reflection surrounding not being aware of the internal battles that others may be silently facing.

Jacob also felt as though his experience of adolescent bereavement allowed him to help others who were later struggling with their own losses. In fact, Jacob lost a second

friend several years after the death of his close friend. He explained that his previous experience:

> Did help when my buddy [friend's name] passed away when I was seventeen? Sixteen. Right before I turned seventeen. Um, it helped me deal with that, I would say. It kind of helped guide, um, my new friends through that grieving process. Cause a lot of them were new to it and didn't really understand how to feel and I felt like, kind of, not necessarily like a veteran in that field, but I knew more than all of them, I would say.

In terms of perspective taking, he described how his view on relationships matured and how he both came to accept others for who they are and recognize the value in these close relationships. Jacob stated:

> Relationships I had with people, like I had a lot of sibling rivalry with my brothers and then, um, with [friend's] little sister. I always kind of like, almost found her annoying…but um, after he passed away, it kind of like, almost seemed stupid to, to have those rivalries, I guess. And so like, like I would look at his sister and be like, you know, I I shouldn't be annoyed, you know, cause like, what happened to her brother could have happened to her or to anyone and. You know, this is who she is.

This showcases his learned ability to accept others for who they are; he also exhibited perspective taking through considering the tenuous strand of life and how easily it could have been taken away from others whom he loves. He explained how he finds it

important to "learn from [grief]," and "love each other." Jacob said that "go[ing] through the grieving process" taught him how vital it is to "be there for each other."

Throughout his interview, Josh repeatedly referenced how the loss of his close friend during adolescence revealed and/or created a deeper well of empathy within him. This empathy extended both to his deceased friend and to others in his life. Of his lost friend, he said that though he felt angry at first, "over time, it became more, it was just a deeper, it was just a deeper love that came out of it. Um, that would be the only way that I could explain it was just a deeper love and understanding." He continued to say that:

> I became a more loving and caring individual for others' feelings and what they're going through and trying to understand what they're going through. Cause like, I've had, I mean there, you know how it is in Alaska. Everybody's got problems… I definitely developed an empathy towards that, but at the same point, I mean I really started to understand more about suicide and, like, people when they're in that mentality.

He said that he was able to better identify when others were in need of emotional support and "[let] people know that, no matter what, that I would be there for them. To care, listen, whatever, kind of pull them out of whatever they're dealing with to give them some, some form of happiness." He continued to say that "I really started trying to understand more at that point." In this focus on the emotions of others, he was able to practice empathy, perspective taking, and helpfulness.

Nicholas' loss also catalyzed him to focus on helping others. In his interview, he stated that "I learned to be happy for the things we are given now and the things we can

give to those who need them most." The direction of his efforts was towards helping others find joy. He discussed how despite his grief, he still smiled most of the time, saying "I always want to be happy and I want to encourage others." Later, he explained that he:

> Wants to encourage others to [smile] and a, a world full of more smiles is a lot safer to be in, like, you know, a world full of people, like, smiling as an intent of their joyful or their loving or caring or approachable self.

He spoke about wanting the young people he is working with to see how "he may have lost someone dear to him…and he's still joyful and he's still, um, smiling no matter the challenges." Nicholas reiterated, saying, "I want to be that person to help people, not you know, clinically or anything, but be that helping little, as one of my good friends would say, a little ball of sunshine." A particular demographic of young people that Nicholas was able to help included those who were also undergoing a bereavement process. He explained:

> One of my good mentors were like, you, you're handling this a lot more than I thought you would. You're not, it's not that you're not asking for help. You just, with what you learned at boarding school, [Nic], you know how to handle your grief. You know how to, [Nic], can I just borrow? Can I just, can I use you as an example in stories of how people can handle grief in healthy, in a very healthy way? I was like: of course. I, I'd love you to do that. I'd want you to do that. To help encourage others, hey, you may have lost this person, but you don't have to go to, back to this addiction or you don't have to go back to this lifestyle because

they're gone. You can continue it, but you can grow and show that it will be okay. You just become stronger….one of my mentors learned and was able to take from me on how they feel, uh, youth going through grieving not *should* look, but how to encourage them on, I guess, how to react.

Ultimately, though these four young men demonstrated their increased ability to extend empathy through a variety of means, empathy was a shared aspect of their PTG experience. Not only was empathy felt more readily, but they grew their desire to reach out helping hands to those who were emotionally distressed. According to these participants, their ability to examine circumstances from the perspectives of others was amplified, a skill which lent itself both towards empathic responses and prosocial helping behavior. These interrelated long-term outcomes were one way that participants grew after the loss of their close friends during adolescence.

Living Fully and Future Planning

A number of the participants cited that one way they grew from their experience of loss was that they learned to care more about their futures and to live as fully as they could. Not only did Brandon pursue an education after his church mission, but he also set goals for his future. He stated that his "first experience of mortality taught me to, to care more." He focused on how he was "fortunate because I'm able to do stuff that unfortunately [friend's name] is not able to do right now. And never will be." Because he recognized his ability to fully participate in life, he aimed to do justice to that ability through adventures. He said, "I have these big experiences [and] these cool moments, things I know I'm going to remember forever." They are put into perspective because he

"think[s] like, I could have been having these with him." Several of the other participants, such as Isabella and Alexis, also have moved towards personally fulfilling jobs and future planning. At the time of his interview, Josh was experiencing success in school, work, and his personal life. He noted that he had made choices to move himself onto a healthier path in life because of the loss of his friend and began planning for his future to be brighter than it otherwise might have been. This focus on making plans for the future was shared by many of the participants.

Nicholas had a fulfilling job working in the education department of his Alaska Native tribe. He explained how losing his friend created a mindset shift where he began to recognize that "within the next couple of hours, you may not even wake up anymore." He discussed how death can act as a reminder to pursue happiness. He said, "do the things that make you happy." In terms of growth, he noted, "I feel that I'm like, I've noticed I'm a lot happier. Not accepting in a bad way, but accepting." He later stated that one important part of moving forward with grief is considering, "what are you going to do now? You know, kind of plan right after." He took his experience of loss as a catalyst to decide how he wanted his life to look and began to move in that direction. Though future planning looked slightly different from participant to participant, a focus on living more fully and considering how to make one's future bright was a throughline for many of these emerging adults.

Religious and Spiritual Contemplation

Another recurring PTG outcome for these young people was religious and spiritual contemplation. The way that religion and spirituality factored into their

bereavement processes was twofold: first was a focus on how religion or spirituality provided solace during their times of loss and second was a deepening of contemplation about religious and spiritual beliefs. This section will focus on the latter; in a later section on intangible bereavement support, religious and spiritual solace will be explored. Though these ideas are distinct enough that they warrant discussing separately, they are entwined to a degree. Both religion and spirituality are examined together, as their level of separateness is a largely individual decision; it was not within the purview of this research to attempt to disentangle this distinction for each participant.

Isabella described how her spiritual beliefs were impacted by the loss of her close friend:

> I feel like I have gained a closer, or, I I've gained like a closer relationship with spirituality. Cause, I was kind of confused, spirituality-wise, but like, cause, like, I didn't believe in that stuff, cause, like, in in my head it was like, oh, science. Science science science. Like if it's not science, it's not real, kind of thing. And, and then, like, when I lost her, it was kind of like, oh! Maybe I'm wrong. Like, maybe there is something else, and [sniffles]… how I, I guess deal with her death is I say she paints the sky. So, like, when there's a rainbow out, um that's her. Or there's this one time, it was look like, it was look, like these clouds were like, zigzags, like they were super cool and I was like, I can just imagine her running her fingers through the clouds.

This connection between spirituality and nature is not unique to Isabella. She later said, "I definitely gained a sense of spirituality, um, that I didn't have before." Now, she

has been "able to think of her as like, oh, like, she's happy. Like, she's still here, she's just watching over me."

Though Brandon grew up in a religious home environment, he said that the death of his friend "was the first time ever where I was, you know, actually considering the religion I was going to, or attending, and you know, being a part of." Similarly, Josh's loss instigated a period of spiritual questioning and eventual resolution. He said that of his church leaders, he "had a couple of questions. Uh, r-spiritually… and those got resolved." The experience as a whole helped him to develop "a deeper understanding of my personal own spirituality and beliefs." These individuals found that having a close friend die while they were teenagers led to a reexamination and deepening of their spirituality and/or religious beliefs.

Self-Reflection and the Acceptance of the Authentic Self

For some young people who have experienced the sudden loss of a close friend during adolescence, the event leads to self-reflection and an acceptance of who they authentically are. This self-reflection came at different times for the various participants. For Alexis, it happened many years after her loss, when she finally felt ready to process her grief. She reported:

> It wasn't really until that last year that I could understand, like, I did what I could and, like, I, I was a good friend. I was there. Um, I just can't fix everything. And I can't be everything that I, like, wanna be, so it's it's understanding that, you know, there are limitations and it's not my fault that something happened.

She also has embraced authenticity through opening up to her family. Alexis discussed how she used to "just pretend" to be okay, but that:

In the last couple of years now that I've kind of started to …open up a lot more to people in my life. My relationship now, at least with my family, is also starting to actually become a little bit more real.

Nicholas' loss helped him to feel more like his authentic self. The time he spent in self-reflection after the death of his friend helped him to better understand himself so that he could move forward in a way that felt true to his unique self. He said that the loss "made me feel more like myself." Throughout his interview, he explored many of the thoughts and revelations that he had while contemplating what loss meant to him. For instance, Nicholas said, "that's kind of what I've been trying to figure out about myself. Like, what are some things that cause me not to be me?" He felt that after his loss, "it's a little clearer." He has done a lot of "learning about [him]self on how [he] really want[s] to view life." Now, "I'm very knowledgeable at the person I want to be." For Nicholas, this is a smiling, happy person who constantly encourages others to also find their own internal sense of joy.

In Jacob's experience, self-reflection led him to behave in a more mature manner. He said that processing the experience "made [he and his siblings] grow up a little bit." Josh also found that the death of his friend led to both contemplation and changes in himself. First, he reflected on the experience: "I kind of just took more time to absorb it, think about it, and understand it. And as time went on, I understood it more." He then considered his current behaviors and life choices and pivoted in a new direction, which

will be discussed in detail in the section on moving away from unhealthy behaviors. Now, he has a positive self-evaluation, believing himself to be an outdoorsman, "creative, outgoing…self-sufficient…[and] independent." Josh's self-perception is that he became more successful, empathic, and emotionally open due to the self-reflection he did after his loss. He reiterated throughout his interview that people have the power to choose their mentalities about loss, which ultimately dictates whether their lives then move in a positive or negative direction. During their bereavement processes, each of these young people engaged in self-reflection, which yielded a shift towards living lives that were individually authentic and true.

Re-Evaluation of Relationships

Another PTG effect that the participants found to be meaningful was that their loss catalyzed a re-evaluation of their relationships. In many cases, this meant that relationships with family members and friends grew closer. In others, it meant that certain relationships withered and fell away. An overall recognition of the vital nature of cherishing one's loved ones was expressed by many of the emerging adults in this study. This section explores each of these concepts in turn.

Many of the participants described how their relationships with their parents, and often in particular their mothers, deepened after the loss of their close friend. Isabella stated that "having my mom, like, as a support during that time was just very, I guess, like, it was how she cared for me and how she supported me during that time that brought me closer to her." She explained that the experience as a whole "brought me closer to my family. Like, it brought me closer to my mom." For several, this strengthening of the

bond they shared with their mothers was a pendulum which swung first to interpersonal conflict and then to closeness. Sara claimed that after the death of her friend, her mom would "blame me for it, and she'd be like, 'this is your fault, like, you're a horrible person.'" This led at first to "anger with each other," but eventually, they repaired their relationship and Sara said that "we're actually really close now." Brandon also experienced conflict with his mother, who he initially distanced himself from because he found many of her reactions to his grief to be "annoying." Overall, he said that the experience of losing his friend during adolescence "brought me closer, um, with my mom," and that "it's definitely brought me closer to my parents over time."

At first, Alexis drew away from her family because she didn't want her pain to cause them pain. But at the time of her interview, she felt that being more open and honest about her grief has helped her be "able to develop a better, like connection," with her family. In particular, she "feel[s] a lot closer to [her siblings]." Jacob also developed deeper bonds with his siblings after their shared loss. He explained:

> I think it kind of made us grow up a little bit cause being, I mean, I was fifteen. I had a brother who was seventeen and then another one who was like, nineteen. It made us, like, come together a little bit more and kind of, like, grow up cause we did that kind of childhood kind of, uh, how siblings are, where they kind of like each other but they don't really like each other. I'd say that kind of went away and we kind of, like, became closer, after the fact.

In addition to deepening ties with one's own family, the death of a close friend also sometimes leads to creating bonds with the family of one's dead friend. In addition

to developing greater empathy for his deceased friend's sister, Jacob increased the amount of time he spent with his friend's family as a whole. He said:

> We just kind of, like, stuck together a lot. We started doing, like, meal trains to [friend's] family's house. Um, I think every day for about two months, that was probably at their house, cause it was still summer, so school hadn't stated yet, so we were just constantly over there for, like, the whole day. Sometimes we'd spend the night and stuff.

Isabella also began spending more time with her deceased friend's family. She said, "I still talk to [her friend's] family and, like, her little sister and check on her too." In addition to spending days that were significant to her friend with her friend's family, she also started spending time with her friend's younger sister:

> I feel like it also, in some ways, brought me closer to her family. Like her her little sister. Um, yeah, like, I would hang out with her sister. Cause I would I would see her, like, when I was over to her house and stuff or, like, at family events and stuff, but I never, like, I don't know, I guess, hung out with her or, like, I don't, I you know. But, I got a lot closer with her sister, like, I was, I started taking her sister out. Um, I would ask her, like, how she's doing or, like, how she was coping. Um, and her mom.

Another type of relationship that was often deepened after the death of a close friend was friendships. Though prior to the death of his friend, Josh had "kind of separated [him]self from [his] friend group," after the suicide, they all came back together to share in their grief. Josh said, "we all kind of met up and everything that was

going on at the time, uh, seemed to just, fade away." The arguments that they had been having were put into perspective by this loss and his relationship with them grew closer again. He spent much of his time with his friends, and he said "they were pretty supportive. They were really, um, they were fairly understanding as well and we kinda just, leaned on each other, in those moments." Nicholas also referenced how his loss helped him recognize the importance of making and leaning on friends, as did Sara. Of the friends who were present for her friend's fatal overdose, she said, "I feel like it brought us all really close. I'm still friends with all of those people that were there…but yeah, we're all still super close. I still talk to all of them on a regular basis." Not only did it strengthen their friendship in the moment, but friendship longevity can also be seen in her narrative. Similarly, Brandon explained:

> It definitely tightened, uh, my relationship with two other friends in particular. I was actually, I was actually just in a video call with those two friends when uh, before I joined this. Um and to this day, we're both, all three of us are still very close. Um, I I was close to them at the time, I was very close to them at the time, but that definitely locked me in with them. Um and again I I don't know if that's the same for them but, I definitely latched onto those two. Um, so as far as my friends go, it brought me closer.

However, dealing with adolescent grief was also shown to cause a re-evaluation of relationships that led to growing apart from people. Isabella said, "me and my other friends kinda stopped, like, we haven't really talked to each other since it happened." While she did not explicitly explain her perceived reason for this separation, she did

mention that the types of relationships that she is currently able to maintain are those that do not require much effort. She said:

> It's not like I'm putting effort into the relationship[s]. Yeah, I, yeah, I haven't hung out with, I mean like, I have, I do have, um, a couple other close friends. I haven't talked to them in awhile though. Um, yeah. I kinda stopped. Trying.

Matthew also lost his relationship with his other friends after his loss. Of the death of his friend and the loss of his other friendships, he stated, "I think it changed my life…it was a lot quieter. Um, nobody really hangs out anymore these days. Keep in touch and all that stuff. Everything just changed." Purporting that losing a close friend during adolescence leads to a deepening of relationships would be an incomplete claim without the commonly experienced flipside of the proverbial coin: loss of other friendships.

Additionally, many of the emerging adults in the study discussed more ideological shifts of perspective around the importance of safeguarding and cherishing their relationships. For example, Sara began to be both "more open with people I am close with" and "more active with the people I'm with." She also discussed how she now feels compelled to keep those she loves safe. For Nicholas, a similar effect was experienced; he said, an "effect it would have given me completely is, I, I want to love and cherish my family, even if I'm far away from them because I never know when I'll see them again." Jacob's loss also inspired him to re-evaluate the role of close relationships in his life. He discussed how important it is to "be there for each other" and "love each other." In our conversation, he claimed that the loss not only allowed him to develop a more mature

view of relationships, but also to accept and value people for their authentic selves.

Whether summarily or throughout their bereavement processes, emerging adults who

experience the loss of a close friend during adolescence often undergo a re-evaluation of

their relationships through deepening ties, loss of friendships, or an ideological shift

towards cherishing those they care for most. These are the ways in which the theme of re-

evaluation of relationships was demonstrated in the data.

Resilience

One form of PTG that participants experienced was an increased belief in their

own resilience. As was discussed in Chapter 1, resilience is one piece of the conceptual

framework for this research. However, specific questions about resilience were not asked

of the participants. The inclusion of resilience herein was therefore naturally introduced

by the participants themselves. While some mentioned it by name, others described the

concept in some detail.

One participant who spoke in depth about developing resilience was Brandon. His

explanation was related to a video he watched at church during his period of

bereavement. Of it, he said:

> The message was was perfect because it talks about uh, like a, like a forge and the
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> refiner's fire. How you got this piece of metal and you put it in the forge and this
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> piece of metal is unformed. It's beat up. It's heated up, seared, bent out of shape,
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> but by the time it's done in this video, this guy makes this really pretty uh, like
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> iron rose. Entirely made out of iron, it's really really pretty. The idea is, you
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> know, we go through the refiner's fire to become more than what we are right

now. And that's one of the hardest things about life, is recognizing that some of

the worst experiences create the best versions of ourself.

This explanation of becoming stronger and more beautiful because of our

hardships is intimately tied to that of resilience. Nicholas also spoke to how hardships can

allow one to become strengthened. About loss, he said, "you just become stronger." For

him, "there was no really negative effects, I would say. More of like, I guess a lot more

learning about myself on how I really want to view life." Through the loss of his close

friend as a teenager, Nicholas "learned to cope better," and came to understand the

impermanence of hardships. He said, "I don't want those hardships to hold onto for a

long time to destroy me," and also that he has come to "[know] that things aren't going to

last forever." By coming to this conclusion that deep challenges do not last indefinitely

and that life will "eventually get better," he "not learn[ed] to live without her, but

learn[ed] to live around that and learn[ed] to understand how to cope." He described how

he could now help others to meet challenges with joy. One belief that has helped him to

develop resilience is to realize that "you have that mentality and strength to make it better

or…you have the option to make it even worse." This form of mental empowerment has

increased his level of resilience and his ability to share this strength with others.

Part of Jacob's beliefs surrounding loss is that you "learn from it." When he lost

another friend about a year later, he felt better able to move through the bereavement

process. He said:

How I took, um, my other friend's death compared to how the rest of my friends

reacted. I feel like I was, I don't want to say more mature about it, cause it's I

mean it's someone passing away, you're obviously going to be consumed by grief, but I was more, kind of aware about the process, I guess. Like I knew, you know, this, what happens when you grieve. Like all the, like where the road takes you, I guess.

He said that losing his first friend at fifteen "did help when my buddy…passed away when I was…sixteen." This ability to be stronger and more prepared for future hardships is an integral part of resilience.

Isabella also discussed how the death of her close friend helped to equip her for any coming losses. She said, "I feel like, now I, I'll be prepared for next time…like I know that I'll get through it, and I know that I will be okay." She confirmed that this feeling was one of resilience and that it was one of the ways that she was able to grow through her grief. For Matthew, this sentiment is one that he has mixed feelings about. He said that though grief "only makes us stronger, it's still a loss." Josh's feelings on resilience are heavily tied to his belief about personal attitudes. He said, "you can either let it be a positive experience, like a positive in the long-run or you can remember it forever, flogging yourself." This view matches that of Nicholas, who also discussed the relationship between loss, attitude, and resilience. As can be seen, many adolescents and emerging adults develop a stronger sense of their own resilience through loss, which they believe may help to buttress them against future hardship.

Breaking Away from Unhealthy Behaviors and Situations

For several of the participants, the death of their close friend acted as a proverbial wake up call to the dangers of unhealthy behaviors and situations. In their interviews,

multiple participants discussed how prior to the death, they were partaking in unhealthy and/or dangerous substances. After their friend died, they grew to recognize the hazards of using these substances. Alternately, several participants discussed reducing dangerous activities to focus on safety. In this brief section, the alterations in these behaviors will be explored.

Sara, who prior to the overdose-related death of her close friend, was regularly using methamphetamines. She claimed, "I don't romanticize drugs or any of that lifestyle anymore," and confidently stated, "I definitely would not go back to what I was." In order to further cement these changes, Sara chose to leave a geographic area rife with substance abuse that she called "a pit." Similarly, Josh said that without this experience of loss, "I probably would have gone on a completely different path in life." He further continued:

> It was kind of a very, well it was a very awakening moment for me at that point. Um, I would, I could see where my friends and everybody were going. Um, and it was that kind of, I need to make drastic changes to my life…if you want to go out and drink and have fun. If you want to go do drugs, like, it's fine, but there are limits to, there are, there are some very hard limits that nobody, there's no guide to and you don't know when you're gonna hit them. And that's, I guess, I was going down a very different path and that was the snap back to reality and… I need to make better life decisions if I want to have a better life outcome.

Nicholas, while according to him not a drug or alcohol user, found that the experience clarified that he did not want to use substances to cope with his grief. He

discussed how several of his family members were addicted to substances and that during his time of loss, he knew the importance of avoiding going down the same path of addiction as these family members. Of this, he said, "I've learned to not really use any kind of addictions. Seeing my past experience in my life from family members, I was like, if I use that as a coping, I'm going to get further down the hole."

In addition to moving away from unhealthy substance use, some participants mentioned the reduction of dangerous activities after losing their friend. Jacob noted:

> After he passed away, it's now like, always in the back of my mind, like whatever I'm doing, like if I'm speeding on the highway or something, I'm always like, you know, what if something happens? What if my tire blew out and, you know, I could die instantly and that'd be it. So I definitely, kind of like think more about dangerous stuff that I do. I still do dangerous stuff, but I definitely consider it a lot more than I used to.

Sara also developed a newfound focus on personal safety after her loss. She described how "I feel like there is like, this little hole that closed in my head that, like, kinda, like, keeps me from doing, or putting myself in dangerous situations." This extends to those she cares for:

> If we are in a situation where it's like, a little bit sketchy…I'll freak out more. I just, like want the people that I'm close to to be safe because I don't really feel like dealing with another close death.

It has also led her to be more careful to surround herself with people who will be safe. She said that she is now "hyper-vigilant with the people I am surrounded with."

Overall, the data shows that losing a close friend during adolescence can carry with it the PTG effect of breaking away from unhealthy behaviors and removing oneself from dangerous situations.

Emotional Openness

The final PTG outcome that was displayed by multiple participants was an increase in emotional openness. For Josh, this effect was stated plainly; he said that after his friend's death he became "definitely more open about my emotions." He discussed how he became more comfortable showing others how he felt and that he found people to be more understanding than anticipated. Sara also found herself shifting towards being someone who was better able to express her emotions. She explained "the growth would be me being more open with people I am close with." In her interview, Sara discussed how she used to avoid talking about hard things, but "now I'll actually like, bring stuff like that up." She initially wanted to avoid talking to a therapist, saying "it took me awhile to cry to her about it, but then eventually we, it was just, like, really easy to do and it was really easy to talk about." In fact, she said that opening up about her grief was part of her bereavement process. To this day, she continues to feel more emotionally open than she was before the loss, "I just, like, talk about it. If I ever, like, get an intrusive thought about it, then I'll, like, kind of bring it up or like, I'll tell, like, a little story about it." Though Jacob did not describe how his emotional openness extends to other areas of his life in the way that the former participants did, he felt that he gradually become more emotionally open in regard to the topic of his friend. Jacob explained, "I do remember it being kind of touchy… to talk about him, but now we uh, we talk about him all the time,

you know. And it's not as much of a touchy subject." When asked about growth, Nicholas said that "it's about knowing who the adults in their lives they can talk to and that it's okay to cry and it's okay to you know, weep and feel grief and to have that heavy heart." As was demonstrated in the data, emerging adults can become more emotionally open as a result of their loss during adolescence.

Throughout this section, the PTG-related outcomes of losing a close friend during adolescence have been explored. The themes that emerged from the data included loss acting as a catalyst for change and leading to greater levels of gratitude, empathy, perspective taking, and prosocial behaviors. This form of loss can also increase one's desire to live fully and plan for the future and is related to religious and spiritual contemplation, self-reflection and the acceptance of the authentic self, and a re-evaluation of existing relationships. Additionally, participants experienced an increase in feelings of resilience, a breaking away from unhealthy behaviors and situations, and an increase in emotional openness. Ultimately, emerging adults who underwent the loss of a close friend during their adolescent years often experience a host of positive long-term outcomes, as has been examined in this section.

Bereavement Support and Resources

The third research sub-question explores the topic of bereavement resources and support. My intention with this question was to better understand not only what resources participants were given and what forms of support they received, but also what support they felt may have been missing. Through this exploration, both researchers and those close to grieving teenagers can gain a more well-rounded understanding of what sources

of support participants found to be helpful and what they wish those around them would have provided. In this section, I will discuss participants' experiences with resources, intangible support, school sponsored responses to the death, and ambivalence surrounding the acceptance of grief support.

Resources

Therapy. Throughout the sample, several patterns emerged in terms of bereavement resources. The first is therapy as a proffered resource, often suggested by participants' parents. Despite their initial hesitations, several participants consented to attend therapy sessions. Isabella was already attending individual psychotherapy and psychiatry appointments, where she "was able to process [the grief]," directly after the death of her friend. Alexis and Sara both described their respective parents placing them in therapy after their losses occurred. Alexis said that she was "sat down one time by [her] parents and they were like, 'I think we should put, take you to therapy.'" She shared that while she did attend the individual therapy sessions, she would often doodle and sit in silence. Alexis' therapist talked to her about coping mechanisms, though Alexis did not feel that they were useful, an experience which will be elaborated on in a later section of the results. Regardless of the "moderate" start to her experience with therapy, Alexis felt that the therapy started to become more helpful as she opened herself up to it.

Sara described her therapy experience as something that was forced upon her by her mother. She said that her mom "made [her] go to therapy," and that her mom "told me I would get arrested if I didn't like, go through with this therapy." This therapy took place in a small group setting, was conducted at her school, and lasted for six months.

Though, like Alexis, Sara initially eschewed therapy, over time she came to feel that the therapy was beneficial and allowed her to both open up emotionally and develop a close therapeutic relationship with her therapist. She described how she eventually was able to openly cry during the sessions and that when she did, "it was just like, really easy to do and it was really easy to talk about." Ultimately, she said that the "therapy did really help" and that she would consider returning to therapy in the future.

However, not all participants who were offered therapy chose to go. Josh noted that even though there were "offers to go to therapy…[he] didn't really feel like [he] needed to go." He continued to explain that "I didn't want to go to therapy either…I felt like therapy wasn't going to make everything completely better." He spoke of several reasons why he did not want to attend individual therapy, including that it could not bring his friend back to life and that he didn't want constant reminders of the loss. Additionally, when Josh was placed in a single day group therapy session at his school with his friends and others who knew the deceased, Josh became belligerent and angry with the school: "I started to get, like, almost physically violent with people cause it was aggravating." Attitudes towards therapy will be discussed in greater depth in a following section on ambivalent attitudes towards bereavement support. A discussion of school-based support can be found below.

Religion. For several participants, another tangible resource came in the form of religion. Though Josh did not attend the psychotherapy that was offered to him, he did accept counsel from church leaders. This took place both immediately upon finding out that his friend had ended his life and several months later. On the day of the death, the

police department sent a chaplain to speak to the deceased's closest friends, a resource which was accepted by Josh. He also stated that "obviously, I had counseling from church leaders," a resource which helped him to resolve some spiritual questions and make "pretty big decisions" for his future. Brandon grew up in a religious household and religion was "the only thing that anyone ever directed [him] to." He found it to be a resource that spurred contemplation as it was "the first time ever where I was, you know, actually considering the religion I was going to." Though arguably an intangible form of support rather than a direct resource, spirituality and praying were also repeatedly referred to as a resource by Nicholas. Intangible forms of religious and spiritual solace are discussed in a later section.

Perceived Lack of Resources. After reviewing the resources that were mentioned by participants, it is important to note that many participants felt that they were not given or directed to tangible bereavement resources. As Brandon stated, "there was no like, official resources that I was directed to." He went on to specify that:

 Nobody was like: here's the suicide prevention hotline, here's somebody you can call and talk to or here's a class you can attend that might help. Uh, I don't know that anyone ever even like, suggested like a therapist or therapy.

Any resources that he utilized, he "sought out for [himself]." Jacob expressed a similar experience, stating, "I didn't really get any resources…I didn't get like, any like, you know, 'oh your friend died, you know, read this book and it will make you feel better' or anything like that." Unlike Brandon and Jacob, Alexis was offered individual therapy; however, like both others, she claimed that she "wasn't given any resources or

directed in any way." This distinction showcases that some participants operationalized the term 'resources' to include individual therapy, while others did not. Isabella was able to process her grief with her previously established therapist, but she made it clear that she only had access to the "resources that [she] already had," as opposed to being directed to grief specific resources. When asked about resources, Matthew stated "basically I just depended on my friends," implying that he was not directed to any bereavement related resources.

Several suggestions were made by participants regarding resources that would have been helpful. Alexis would have liked to have had access to either group therapy or a support group with other teenagers undergoing a similar experience of loss. She didn't want to continue to feel as though she was "going through it by [her]self." In a group therapeutic setting, she could have listened to others' experiences without having to always be the one to speak. Sara experienced bullying at school related to the death and wished that the adults in her life had given her the ability to safely remove herself from that situation. Isabella was also impacted by school, less in a social manner but rather in the way of academic responsibilities; she stated:

> Something that kinda hindered was I still, like, I still had work and school and I still had, like, a schedule and it was like I had to pull myself together even though, like, I wasn't, to go do those things.

Time to process and grieve without the eyes of other and without typical responsibilities that come with academics and work seemed to be missing from the

bereavement experience of several of these individuals and may be a consideration for those looking to help young grieving people.

Intangible Support

Family Presence. Time and time again, the vital nature of familial support was revealed. Though not all participants received support from their parents, the majority did discuss this as one of the most important forms of support. The way that family members supported the bereaved teenagers varied, but their presence was repeatedly mentioned as something that made a demonstrable positive impact on the participants as they grieved. Jacob's family members, including his parents and siblings "were very supportive of each other" after the death, as all of them knew the boy who had died. Similarly, in the aftermath of his friend's death, Brandon's "parents got pretty caring. Very, very supportive." He clearly stated that "they were the biggest help." This included giving him physical comfort, such as hugs, and being available with their time and presence. Nicholas' family "were very loving and caring and very, very…heartwarming and 'if you want someone to be around or if you want to be alone, let us know and we'll, we'll do our best to accommodate how you're feeling.'"

Isabella cited her mom as a source of support time and time again. She noted that on the day she found out about her friend's death, her mom came to pick her up from school and talked to her about death and the inevitability of loss. She said that throughout her grieving process, her mom "was very um, nurturing, very loving…she kind of just guided me through it." This helped Isabella to feel like she "was very supported," both

initially and even a year later. The experience "brought [her] closer to [her] family," especially her mother. She said:

> I guess like coping, like my mom, I don't know, just, like, having my mom, like, as a support during that time was just very, I guess, like, it was how she cared for me and how she supported me during that time that brought me closer to her and, like, helped me navigate through it.

As was offered by Nicholas' family, another way that parents can be supportive is by offering to give their grieving teen time alone to grieve. While this could mistakenly be considered the opposite of presence, the participants claimed that it was one of the best forms of support. Though Brandon felt as though his parents "didn't know what to say," they made sure to be available to him while giving him space when he wanted it. Nicholas' mom specifically asked him if he wanted space to grieve on his own in their apartment and Josh's parents loosened their control over his time. He mentioned that they would allow him to do things on his own, like spend the day watching television or go spend time with friends, without demanding information about where he was going and with whom. Allowing bereaved adolescents more space to work through the experience appears to be an emotionally buttressing action that can be taken by parents of grieving teens. It is important to differentiate between allowing bereaved adolescents space to process their experience of loss and altogether ignoring them or failing to provide support at all.

Those who did not receive parental support deemed it important enough to the conversation to specifically mention. While Sara lived with her mother at the time of the

loss, her mother "didn't know how to deal with grief like that," which put a strain on their

relationship. Matthew's parents were not involved in his life at the time, which is why he

did not receive support from his family and had to look to other sources for emotional

care. The combined experiences of the participants make it clear that the presence of

family members is essential and that it is this presence, rather than specific actions or

words, that seemed to be the source of comfort and healing.

Presence of Friends. Just as familial presence was deemed important, the support

of friends was mentioned as an essential part of the bereavement process by nearly all of

the participants. It was specifically *time* with friends that was repeatedly discussed. Some

participants discussed how this time together with friends was a good distraction, while

others felt the time with their friends allowed their grief to be better understood. Brandon

shared that not only were "friends a big help," and "pillars," but that "spending time with

friends was great because I always had a good time. Despite how awful the situation was,

I still had fun…with my friends." After the death, Josh also spent more time than usual

with his friends. He said that "we kind of just get together and do stuff and, take our

minds off of it and just try and enjoy the, the little things that we would enjoy together."

Josh linguistically slipped back into present tense when discussing these interactions with

his friends. Overall, they were able to "[lean] on each other, in those moments." In

addition to spending more time with his main friend group, he also noticed that other

friends were understanding and supportive.

Another participant who took solace in time with her friends was Sara: "They

were super supportive, like they would, would come and visit me." She spoke of one

friend in particular who "was just there to like, support me." Isabella leaned on the

support of her girlfriend, who could empathize with her loss. Matthew relied heavily on

his friends in his family's absence. He stated that he "depended" on them, and that "quite

a few friends kept checking on [him]," though they often encouraged him to move on

before he felt ready to let go of his deceased friend. According to Matthew, he "just

couldn't let go. I talk a lot about it to my other friends and they said, 'you really have to

let him go.'" While this may have been unwelcome advice for Matthew, other

participants appreciated friends encouraging positive mindset shifts. For instance,

Nicholas found his friends use of prayer and advice to intentionally move towards

positive thoughts and feelings to be a form of helpful support. Through the examination

of these experiences, it becomes clear that while no single action or type of conversation

aids all grieving teens, spending time with friends often helps them feel supported

throughout the bereavement process.

  Shared Grief: Memories and Significant Days. Another form of intangible

support comes in the form of the sharing of grief. Alexis brought up how for several

years, she and her friends would hold a birthday party for their deceased friend, which

could be considered a form of continuing bonds as well as a way of recognition of a

significant day. Similarly, Jacob and several others continued to go on a commemorative

hike every year on the day that his friend died. However, the sharing of memories did not

exclusively take place on days of significance. Alexis spoke to the benefits of

surrounding herself with others that knew her friend. In a similar vein, Josh grew closer

to others in the friend group of his lost friend; he discussed how spending time doing

activities that their friend would have done would "bring a…peace to us." Isabella also commemorated her lost friend's birthday with ritual memorial activities, which was further explored in the section on continuing bonds.

Spiritual Support and Solace. In addition to the more tangible religious resources, several participants also mentioned spiritual-based support and how they came to find solace in religious or spiritual beliefs. Nicholas' family offered him spiritual comfort in the form of prayers. His friends also let him know that they would pray for him. Outside of his family and close friends, Jacob felt this spiritual support from his church community. He also found comfort in Catholicism, the religion that he and his family ascribed to. Likewise, Brandon said that turning towards his religion during his bereavement process "was helpful" and that it "gave [him] comfort in some areas." Similarly, Isabella took comfort in her belief system, which allowed her to believe that her friend was now happy. Of this, she said that she found it "fulfilling…to be able to think of her as like, oh like she's happy. Like, she's still here, she's just watching over me." She confirmed that her spiritual beliefs were one way that she coped with her loss that that "spirituality was pretty big for me." Josh felt similarly, stating that "this spiritual aspect of my life definitely helped me overcome those things…and that helped me get through a lot of stuff." Nicholas found solace in his spiritual beliefs regarding his deceased friend, stating:

> I can still feel her love, kindly friendship, and sister greetings on, saying hello. And I was like, but I know that she'll, I know, I pray she's in a better place and I, all I know is she's not suffering, at least here on Earth anymore.

He continued to explain that he "was also a little, little enlightened knowing that she wouldn't be suffering anymore." Throughout his interview, Nicholas repeatedly discussed how he found solace in his spiritual beliefs and that faith was a resource during his time of grief. In terms of spirituality as an intangible resource, he said:

I know the resources I need to use and, I'm not trying to, for me I've grown up being, being a person of faith and belief. Um, that there's a God. And I um, for me I use prayer. That's how I, that was, for me that was not just my resource and guide but also a, a hey, I'm going through this. Is there, is there any way to make it easier?

As has been seen throughout the results portion of Chapter Four, religion and spirituality can act as a form of tangible support or intangible support and can also be experienced as a PTG effect.

School Responses

The findings on school-based responses to the death of a student showed that participants' experiences with these were largely negative. Three of the participants (Brandon, Sara, and Josh) discussed their school's reaction to the death of their friend. All three had negative reactions to their school sanctioned grief resources and responses. Sara experienced bullying at school after her loss and felt that the teachers supported other students but failed to support her. She stated that "the teachers at my school kind of took, like, the other kids' side because no one knew the actual story from it" and that "the teachers definitely talked about it, and there was support for his ex-girlfriend." She added, "I wish I, like, homeschooled or something." However, as mentioned in the

resource section above, the school did host group grief therapy sessions, which Sara grew

to appreciate.

Brandon and Josh both felt anger regarding their schools' reactions to their

friends' deaths. Brandon's explained:

> They had a silent walk on Friday, um. That was really frustrating. Um, mostly
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> cause it, in my mind it pulled all those kids together that were using it as a, as a
>
> social, uh soapbox I guess. You know? And then uh, the school had like a
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> Facebook group with a bunch of different faculty members and they were trying
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> to, for the next like three weeks they were like, this Wednesday we're going to
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> wear red for [his] bravery and then next week, we're going to wear red for, you
>
> know, or blue or whatever for [his] uh, I don't know, uh… his inclusiveness or
>
> whatever, you know. They they did these little events like that. Those are the only
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> two that I can actually think of, so really they didn't do that much, but, those two
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> items alone were enough to kind of put me off. So.

This feeling of anger appeared to stem from a desire for recognition of a closeness

hierarchy. He described how the school created an environment that allowed for people

who were less close with his deceased friend to post social displays of grief:

> I spent a lot of time feeling really jealous cause there were a lot of kids that were
>
> like, I I had never seen a lot of these kids spend time at his house, at these events,
>
> with him. Uh, saying things like, "Oh, he was my closest friend," and that would
>
> always drive me nuts, cause I felt like that degraded my relationship with him.
>
> And, it just, I mean, to be transparent, it made me really jealous and upset. Um,

because I was not saying those things at the time. And that's what was making me really mad.

Overall, Brandon felt that "school [administration] was annoying," and "the way the school was treating it, I didn't like. Um, it just, it made me really upset." Josh explained that "when the school got involved, is really when I started to get, like, almost physically violent with people cause it was aggravating. It was very aggravating." When asked what the school's response was, Josh stated:

So, um, the school, they knew that we were all very close with [his friend who died]. It was, it was good that they were aware of that. Um, we were all over at his girlfriend's house and…when they sent a school bus to the house to come pick us up, and basically just kind of put us in a room with counselors. And they wanted us to like, kinda start, they opened this room up to everybody, which I thought was a very dumb idea, cause like, I mean they announced it at school that like, 'I'm sure you're aware this happened. We're providing grief counseling for anybody that needs to like, come in and talk about what's going on with this situation.' That in and of itself was not a bad idea…but…they knew that we were very close friends with [him], like we spent every day after school, weekends, all of our time together as friends and there wasn't like, a special, I, it's not like I want anything super special anyway in that moment, but they just kinda put us in a room with these grief counselors and opened it up to everybody and you're seeing all these people that you know did not spend a lot of time with him and were just, like, maybe casual acquaintances and friends with them, and they're

comin' in, cryin', wailin', and like, 'Oh my God! He was my best friend' and I'm just like… 'I am three seconds from ripping your head off if you are making this about you right now, cause this is horrible.' It was, it was very aggravating. It was more aggravating than anything. And I'm just like, 'I need to get the hell out of here,' like, I don't, I can't stay here anymore cause this is, this is not productive and if the next person walks through the door and says something like that, I'm gonna punch somebody.

Again, we see the desire for the school and others to recognize how close the bereaved adolescent was to their deceased friend. Because the schools offered the same grief services to everyone, participants expressed that they felt this closeness was not properly recognized and that in turn, those who were less close were able to create disproportionate social displays of grief. Whether or not participants' perceptions of their deceased friends' closeness to others are accurate is not relevant; their personal experiences included rage towards schools choosing to create these environments, which makes it an important aspect of school-based responses to further explore.

While other participants did not mention school-based support, it is worth noting that several participants did choose to stay home from school directly after the death of their friend and may then have missed witnessing their school's responses to a student's death. Alternately, they may not have remembered or felt that the school-based support was essential enough to mention.

Ambivalent Attitudes Towards Support

Though experiences with bereavement resources and support varied, one throughline connected almost all of the participants: the connection was an ambivalent attitude towards receiving grief support. Sometimes this ambivalence was acknowledged by the participants, as they would note that there was no correct gesture that others could make and that intentions may have differed from how the support was received. Often however, participants would out-right contradict themselves when speaking of one form of support: in one breath saying they found it annoying or unhelpful and in the next claiming it to be a beneficial form of support. Participants also spoke of how they rejected support for a myriad of reasons, whether because they wanted to process alone, did not want to burden friends and family members, thought they could handle their loss without support, thought that it was meaningless if it could not revive their friend, or because they did not feel comfortable discussing their grief. Ultimately, these back and forth, indecisive attitudes spoke volumes. They show us that when grappling with an irreversible loss, young people are seeking for something to make the situation right when ultimately, the situation will never be right. The death of a person in the spring of life will forever remain a tragedy, unresolved and unsolvable.

In our conversation, Brandon talked about how upon hearing of his friend's death, his parents "probably didn't know what to say. Uh, which, in hindsight was probably for the best because I don't know how I would have reacted to anything in that moment anyways." He went on to say that his parents "got pretty annoying," despite and perhaps

because of their support. In particular, he seemed to be annoyed by his mother's words

not being right:

> Uh, but the reason my parents were annoying me at the time anyways, um, was
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> because my mom, I shouldn't even say my parents, mostly my mom, uh, she she
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> kept asking me if I was okay and she kept asking me, you know, like, or she kept
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> telling me she's like, 'You're not really reacting to this.' Cause… I don't discredit
>
> her for that, now. But as a kid, it was really annoying because I was dealing with
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> it in my own way and having my mom day after day, even for the next month, ask
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> me like, 'Are you okay, you're not really crying, like you're not really grieving,
>
> like, are, you know like, is something wrong?' It just got, like, overbearing.

However, Brandon also reflected on his reaction to this and said:

I can't say that I know of anything in my mind where I'm like, 'Oh man I wish I

would have had this,' cause I, I think initially I had everything I needed. I did

have a family that cared and they were very supportive and, you know, even

though they expressed that and they annoyed me, you know, I I I'm glad that they

did cause as an adult now, you know, it's it's I mean, what kind of, what do you

do? Like what kind of gesture do you give and hope that it's received in the way

that, like the way it was gestured or set, whatever? So, I mean family was the

biggest thing. Um, contradicting the saying I wanted to be at school and away

from home, but I mean, they were, they were the biggest help.

In general, Brandon expressed a dislike of what he felt were trite platitudes. He

said, "I feel like a lot of people who have experienced loss can agree that this statement,

you know: 'I understand what you're going through,' doesn't carry a lot of weight." At the same time, he communicated that he understood that intentions for such platitudes and questions might be pure. He explained:

It's a very annoying question when some would say 'Are you okay?' Like, clearly I'm not. Uh, but I, and I don't know how to say that to people when I'm in a state like that without sounding disregarding of what their true intention is.

Alexis' ambivalence towards support came in the form of both therapy and her mixed feelings about processing her grief alone versus with others. She said, "I wanted to work through it by myself," and she didn't want her siblings to worry. However, she also stated that "being around people or surrounding myself by people who are like, the type of people who will probe you, and, like, ask those questions…has been incredibly beneficial." She mentioned how she didn't want to talk about the death or be identified as the grieving girl, but that she would have appreciated being around others who talked about loss. In terms of therapy, Alexis claimed:

The coping mechanisms that [her therapist] brought up, I just, it didn't feel right or. So I, I, the therapy was just kind of… it might have done something but I, I feel like it, it didn't really, especially cause at that point in time when I wasn't, I didn't want to talk about a lot of things.

For Sara, she was able to clearly acknowledge that the responses of others were likely to be ineffectual at alleviating her grief, no matter what they were. She said, "how do you make someone feel better with all of that?" As elaborated on in the therapy

section above, Sara experienced reluctance to attend therapy sessions, though eventually came to appreciate it.

Nicholas did not feel that traditional grief resources were necessary for him, so though he accepted intangible support from family and friends, he claimed that "I have learned about some of the resources, but those aren't really the resources that I need to use." While he did not speak of rejecting grief resources in a way that communicated animosity, his reluctance adds another layer to this pattern of ambivalence and negative reactions towards receiving grief resources.

Another participant who expressed disdain towards support was Josh. In addition to his ambivalent attitude towards his school's reaction where he felt both rage and understanding towards the school response, as discussed above, he also rejected offers to attend therapy. Like Nicholas, he seemed to take an identity stance that he was not the kind of person who needed therapy. "I didn't really feel like I needed to go to therapy." Josh commented he didn't want counseling because:

> I didn't…want to have constant reminders of that, like, bringing it up and just having it drag me beh…like have, you're always going to remember that for the rest of your life, right? Like it's always going to be something that you are never going to forget. And… you can either let it be a positive experience, like a positive in the long-run or you can…remember it forever, flogging yourself, just going 'Oh my gosh! My friend killed himself!'

Josh seemed to associate attending therapy with self-flagellation through what he perceived to be unhealthy amounts of rumination. He also pointed out that "therapy

wasn't going to make everything completely better" and that "if I'm just gonna go and talk about how sad I am because my friend died, that's not going to bring my friend back." These are poignant comments, as people around a grieving teen are likely aware that their words, resources, and actions are not able to reverse the death, but grieving teens themselves are viscerally dissatisfied with anything short of resurrection.

Matthew was ambivalent towards both the support he received from his friends, as discussed above, and towards grief support in general. He stated "nothing really helped me. I mean, nothing really can help me, at this point." This aligns with the sense that others had that if their friend cannot be brought back to life, there is no point in receiving grief support. Though this is a bleak sentiment, each of these experiences can help to inform adolescent focused bereavement care, both by practicing professionals and by the families of grieving teens. Through recognizing that young people experiencing loss will not necessarily feel that support or resources are helpful when they are in the thick of their grief, but often recognize the importance of this support upon later reflection, providers and those who love grieving teenagers can offer their presence as well as access to resources without expecting an initially positive response from the bereaved. The knowledge of this natural ambivalence may help to put the minds of those who love grieving teens at ease when their offers of support are met with rejection or contradiction.

Juxtapositions

Throughout the results section, it was determined that a superordinate theme of juxtapositions emerged. This theme is superordinate in the fact that it cuts across many of the sub-themes and is interwoven betwixt the narratives of the participants. In the

following four sections, the juxtapositions of continuing bonds and avoidance, a desire

for space and a desire for closeness, deepening of relationships and loss of relationships,

and ambivalent attitudes toward support will each be touched upon. As many of the

components of each juxtaposition were previously discussed in detail, this section will

serve more as a wide-lens overview of how these topics contradict one another and will

conclude with an exploration of a suspected underlying reason for the appearance of

these concurrent, yet contradictory grief responses.

Continuing Bonds and Avoidance

The first of the juxtapositions encompasses the conflicted relationship dynamic

that often occurs between a living adolescent and their deceased friend. As was seen in

the theme of meaning ascribed to experience, many bereaved adolescents who have lost a

close friend practice various activities to maintain a relationship with the friend who has

died, acts which are called continuing bond practices. These can include keeping

meaningful artifacts of the friendship or significant items that belonged to the individual

who died, or activities such as annual celebrations on the deceased friend's birthday,

memorializing the friend on the anniversary of their death, or even continuing to speak to

the deceased friend. Sometimes, personal, religious, or spiritual beliefs come into play

when individuals seek to maintain a post-death relationship with the person they have

lost. However, many of the same participants who practiced continuing bond activities

also sought to break off the relationship with their deceased friend. This could be

accomplished through various means, such as ridding one's life of meaningful friendship-

related objects, covering up memorial tattoos, or intentionally avoiding any reminders of

the deceased friend. This back and forth between not wanting to let go of their dead friend and alternately trying to distance themselves from the pain of their loss creates a relational tension. While it is not the intention of this research to pass judgement on the relative healthiness of continuing bonds versus avoidance behaviors, it is important to this research to note the contradiction in the actions and beliefs of many participants surrounding continuing bonds.

A Desire for Space and a Desire for Closeness

Another juxtaposition that was seen throughout the interviews was that of participants seeking space away from their loved ones while also craving comfort through closeness. It is in this gray area that the loved ones of grieving teenagers may find it difficult to comfort in a way that is well received by the bereaved adolescents. Many of the participants described in turn wanting to be alone and then wanting the companionship of their family or friends. For instance, Brandon initially "didn't really like being at home" and "wanted to grieve away from my home," and yet he explained that his family "cared and they were very supportive…I'm glad that they did." He concluded that the presence of family was what was most supportive to him during his bereavement process. Brandon also explained the contradiction within himself regarding feelings about space versus closeness and how the reactions of others may be perceived by grieving youth, saying:

> I mean, what kind of, what do you do? Like what kind of gesture do you give and
> hope that it's received in the way that, like, the way it was gestured or set,
> whatever? So, I mean family was the biggest thing. Um, contradicting the saying I

wanted to be at school and away from home, but I mean, they were, they were the

biggest help.

It was by no means just Brandon who brought up the internal conflict between

wanting to process their feelings alone and wanting to have the presence of those closest

to them. Many of the other participants also described this form of tension. This

contradiction between a desire for space and a desire for closeness is yet another way in

which grieving adolescents demonstrate uncertainty and instability.

Deepening of Relationships and Loss of Relationships

As was explored in the theme of re-evaluation of relationships, another

juxtaposition that occurs for bereaved adolescents is the death of their close friend acting

as a catalyst for relationship change, both through deepening of bonds and through

relational withering. While losing a close friend led to teenagers growing closer to certain

people in their lives, it also led to the loss of close relationships. This upheaval of other

relationships in the lives of bereaved adolescents adds to the instability of the

bereavement period. Though it is not the purpose of this research to claim that this

relational re-evaluation is a net positive or negative occurrence, it is vital to recognize

that in this important area of a teenager's life, a death can lead to contradictory behaviors

and outcomes.

Ambivalent Attitudes Toward Support

Of supporting grieving teenagers, Brandon succinctly asked "What do you do?"

Similarly to grieving adolescents' conflicting desires for both space and closeness, the

participants often expressed feeling like they did not receive sufficient bereavement

support while also eschewing much of the support that they were offered. This phenomenon was explored in further depth in a previous section of the same title. However, it is pertinent to mention here while considering juxtapositions and contradictions in the desires and behaviors of teenagers grieving the death of a close friend. It was directly expressed by some participants that there was no right action or way to support them. This ambivalence was subtly incorporated into the narratives of other participants. Whether recognized and candidly stated or not, many grieving adolescents experience an internal conflict between seeking support and pushing it away.

To conclude this section on the superordinate theme of juxtapositions, I as the researcher will put forth a possible interpretation of these contradictions. The data from this study indicates that when a teenager has developed a deep bond with someone who is close to them in age and that person suddenly dies, what is truly desired is a reversal of fate. However, nothing can make a death un-happen; therefore, nothing that is done directly after the death can fulfill this subconscious wish for its undoing. Consequently, a grieving youth may wish for space and find that this space is unfulfilling or wish for closeness and find that it does not fill the void of their eternally lost friend. The same can be said of trying to find a comfortable continuing bond dynamic, other relationships in their lives, and support or resources they may receive. It is the simultaneous sheer impossibility of a return of their friend's life and the seeming impossibility of accepting that one's beloved companion is truly and irretrievably lost that creates the tension of these juxtapositions.

Summary

This IPA aimed to answer the primary research question: what is the essence of the lived bereavement experience of emerging adults in the United States who have experienced the sudden death of a close peer during adolescence? Each of the three sub-questions, perceptions of loss, PTG, and bereavement support and resources, were expressly investigated. The results of this research indicate that perceptions of loss include negative internal effects (shock, surrealism, and denial; sorrow and devastation; anger; guilt; loss of control and fear; numbness, emotional shut-down, and social withdrawal; a pretense of being okay; delayed reactions and complicated grief; relationship development retardation) and a process of bereavement that morphs over time, the way in which grief impacts many other types of relationships, and how emerging adults come to ascribe meaning to their experiences through assigning meaning, continuing bonds, a realization of mortality, and alterations to one's identity. PTG outcomes over a longer course of time included: gratitude; empathy, perspective taking, and helping others; living fully and future planning; religious and spiritual contemplation; self-reflection and the acceptance of the authentic self; re-evaluation of relationships; resilience; a breaking away from unhealthy behaviors and situations; and an increase in emotional openness. The research also describes bereavement support and resources in terms of specific resources, intangible support, school responses, and ambivalent attitudes toward support. The superordinate theme of juxtapositions was discovered, wherein bereaved adolescents exhibit contradictory beliefs and behaviors in unsuccessful subconscious efforts to reverse the death of their close friends. In the

subsequent chapter, an interpretation of the findings is placed in the context of the

existing body of literature, limitations of the study are explored, recommendations for

future research are put forth, and implications of the findings will be made using the

framework of positive social change.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Introduction

This IPA was conducted with the purpose of describing the essence and meaning of the lived experience of bereaved emerging adults in the United States who have undergone the sudden death of a close friend during adolescence. Using the qualitative methodological framework of IPA allowed the focus of the study to narrow in on how individuals make sense of and attribute meaning to a particular experience (Smith et al., 2019). This methodology incorporates a hermeneutic approach which encourages the researcher to make interpretative decisions (Smith et al., 2019). The in-depth semi-structured interviews allow for an idiographic view of the data, which assists in interpreting the meaning making processes of participants (Smith et al., 2019). The study was conducted to address the problem of the lack of resources and support for adolescents who experience grief over the sudden death of a close friend. The study found that perceptions of loss in this demographic includes negative internal effects and a shifting of the bereavement experience throughout time, that this form of grief has impacts on many types of relationships, and that young people ascribe meaning to their loss through a variety of means. Additionally, the research found that long-term PTG outcomes were commonplace and included increases in many positive and prosocial behaviors and mental perspectives. The research also revealed that formal resources were rare and inadequate, intangible supports were ambivalently received, and school responses often induced anger. A superordinate theme of juxtapositions was discovered; this theme uncovered the many ways in which emerging adults who had lost a close

friend during adolescence exhibited contradictory beliefs and behaviors in regard to their relationship with their deceased friend, their relationships with others in their lives, and the form and intensity of support they would like to have received during their period of bereavement. In this chapter, an interpretation of the findings is explored, the limitations of the study are reiterated, recommendations for future research are made, and social change implications are considered.

Interpretation of the Findings

Within the literature review that was conducted at the start of this research project, four themes emerged. These themes were found to appear throughout the current body of knowledge on the topics of adolescent bereavement, sudden loss, and death of a close friend. These emergent themes were sudden death and road fatalities, negative effects of loss, support resources and coping strategies, and PTG in bereaved individuals. These four themes were mirrored in the results of this study. This section explores the ways in which these four themes and the results from this research converge; the fourth theme, PTG, will be discussed within the theoretical foundation portion, as this section additionally examines how the theoretical and conceptual framework relate to the data.

Participants' Experience and Prior Research

Sudden Death and Road Fatalities

This research chose to focus on sudden death versus anticipated loss because of the high incidence rate of unexpected death in the adolescent population (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). However, more participants in this study lost their close friends to suicide than was anticipated. Though in 2016, more than 60% of

deaths for children and adolescents were due to injury-related accidents, more than half of the participants' close friends in this research died from suicide (Cunningham et al., 2018). None of the participants' friends were killed in automobile accidents, though a portion of this emergent theme focused on motor vehicle crashes. It was anticipated during the proposal stage that several participants' close friends would have suddenly died in car crashes. However, even with the specific inclusion criteria, this was not the case; this is discussed further in the section below on future research recommendations.

As was found in the current body of literature on sudden death, suddenness of loss contributes to a variety of negative outcomes and is often purported to be more traumatizing than losing loved ones in a more gradual or expected manner (Camacho et al., 2018; Lohan et al., 2002; Scott et al., 2020; Stewart, 1999). Participants in this study reflected how shocking this sudden loss can be. Brandon stated that after finding out about his friend's suicide, he said, "I had just seen him the night before." This made him ask, "Is this actually real?" Isabella similarly was shocked by the death, saying that when she was told the news by a friend, "I didn't believe her." As would have been expected from the literature review, half of the participants experienced symptoms of complicated grief, with their negative effects lasting for a year or more beyond the death. Alexis explained how she initially shut down her emotions: "I'm kind of going through it now, years later." Some of the effects experienced by participants for a year or more were a lack of ability to develop new relationships, withdrawal and isolation, depression, and numbness. Though this study was not comparative in nature between sudden and

anticipated losses in adolescence, the results do align with prior research on the traumatizing effects of sudden loss.

Negative Effects of Loss

A plethora of negative effects of loss have been described within the current body of adolescent bereavement literature. The literature review examined first mental health and negative coping. Complicated grief has already been discussed above as one facet of mental health challenges found to be associated with adolescent bereavement after the sudden loss of a close friend within the study's population parameters. Additionally, depression and suicidal ideation were mentioned within this research, both of which are forms of mental distress that have been discussed within the literature among other diagnosable conditions such as PTSD and anxiety as well as general emotional malaise experiences such as trouble with emotional regulation, guilt, anger, and withdrawal, many of which were described by the study participants (Camacho et al., 2018; Djelantik et al., 2021; Hardt et al., 2020; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Khang et al., 2020; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; McClatchy et al., 2009; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Scott et al., 2020; Sequin et al., 1995; Spooren et al., 2001; Stewart, 1999; Williams et al., 2018). Both depression and suicidal ideation were discussed by Matthew. He said that even now, years after the death, "I'm just so depressed." Though this research did not aim to prove that his depression was caused by his loss, depression has been documented as a reaction associated with adolescent bereavement by many researchers (Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Herberman-Mash et al., 2013; Johnson et al., 2017; Thurman et al., 2017). When Matthew had dreams of his deceased friend asking him to join him in death, he said, "I

almost did join him." Sandler et al. (2016) described how adolescent bereavement due to the death of a parent can lead to an increased risk of suicidal ideation.

Anger was another notable form of emotional distress that recurred throughout both the literature review and this study's data. Brandon, Josh, and Sara all discussed how their grief led to intense feelings and expressions of rage. For Josh, this led him to be "a lot more reactionary," which aligns with the research on emotional reactivity and behavioral alterations (Birenbaum, 1999; Boelen & Lenferink, 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Oosterhoff et al., 2018; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2019). Withdrawal was another negative reaction shown in the literature that several of the participants described (del Carpio et al., 2021). Alexis, Sara, and Isabella all discussed their social withdrawal, which for several participants lasted over a year. Sara called it a long period of "hermit[ing]," where she "hid in [her] room," and of this, Isabella said, "I've been kind of isolating." For Alexis, her grief led to an avoidance of creating new social connections. She said, "I think because, like, that numb feeling that I have or that I had, I wasn't fully able to develop, like, long term relationships." Physiological responses, such as headaches, were also documented within the literature and experienced by Jacob (Johnson et al., 2017).

Another negative effect of loss during adolescence that recurred throughout the current body of knowledge was a shift in familial functioning (Birenbaum, 1999; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Mead, 2020; Øvstedal et al., 2017; Weber et al., 2021). This was shown within this study's data, as many of the participants experienced changes in their relationships with their parents and siblings. For instance, Brandon became more readily

annoyed with his parents, Josh spent less time with his family, Alexis stopped being open with her parents and siblings, and Sara's relationship with her mother quickly deteriorated. Prior research normalizes these experiences, stating that communication troubles between caregivers and their grieving teens often arise and familial roles tend to shift in the wake of loss (Birenbaum, 1999; Liu et al., 2019; Lohan & Murphy, 2006; Øvstedal et al., 2017). Ultimately, many of the negative effects that were discussed within the current body of academic knowledge on the topic of adolescent bereavement were corroborated by the experiences of the participants within this study.

Support, Resources, and Coping Strategies

One of the primary sub-findings within the literature regarding adolescent bereavement support was the vital nature of interpersonal connection (Kennedy et al., 2020; Liu et al., 2019; McFerran et al., 2010; Palmer et al., 2016; Pangborn, 2019; Richardson et al., 2017; Thai & Moore, 2018). The importance of presence, whether from family or friends, was mirrored in this research. Many of the emerging adults participating in this study described how the support of their family members was essential for their healing. For instance, Brandon claimed that his "parents got pretty caring. Very, very supportive," and that "they were the biggest help." Isabella agreed, stating that her mom was "nurturing [and] very loving," which helped her feel "very supported." Similarly, Jacob's parents and siblings were all "very supportive of each other." However, the importance of other friendships ought not be overlooked. Brandon claimed that his "friends [were] a big help" and that they were the "pillars" in his life that held him up at that time. Josh and Sara also spoke to the helpfulness of having the

presence of friends during their time of loss. Ultimately, the presence of loved ones was found by many of the participants to be one of, if not the most, essential forms of grief support.

Institutional support, such as group-based interventions and counseling were discussed within the academic literature (Jensen de Lopez et al., 2020; McFerran et al., 2010; Morris et al., 2020; Perschy, 2004; Ridley & Frache, 2020; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). While group-based interventions can be therapeutic or non-therapeutic, the participants in this study only mentioned counseling-based group support. Sara and Josh both had group counseling experiences thrust upon them without their consent. While Sara found this experience to be ultimately rewarding, Josh felt anger about this situation; it is worth noting that Sara attended for upwards of 6 months, while Josh only attended a single session. The majority of participants in this study were not given access to group-based grief interventions, despite their demonstrated efficacy (McFerran et al., 2010; Ridley & Frache, 2020; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017; Williams et al., 2018). Bereavement camps were similarly not attended by the participants in this study. However, therapy was offered to a number of these youth, including Sara and Alexis, who both found it beneficial. School-based support has been mentioned in the literature in a variety of capacities, however most individuals in this study did not find school-based support to be helpful (Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Kennedy et al., 2020; Thai & Moore, 2018; Thurman et al., 2017). None of the participants mentioned teacher engagement as a contributing factor to their bereavement support system.

Many forms of personal coping were undertaken by the participants in this study. According to Morris et al. (2020), coping can be operationalized as "cognitive and behavioral processes to manage internal or external demands that challenge one's personal resources" (p. 74). Continuing bonds has been mentioned in a great deal of bereavement literature (Collins-Colosi, 2017; Djelantik et al., 2021; Kennedy et al., 2020; Stein et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2019; Thai & Moore, 2018; Williams & Merten, 2009). In this research, continuing bonds were demonstrated through several means, one of which was keeping meaningful objects. For instance, Brandon kept a small ceramic heart that the hospital gave to him in gratitude for his friend's organ donation. Of this, he said, "It's transferred from spot to spot, but regardless, it's always been with me wherever I'm at." Seven of the eight participants practiced continuing bonds in this way.

Additionally, many of the young people described participating in a variety of continuing bond activities, such as celebrating their deceased friend's death, going on a commemorative hike, or practicing a memorial activity on the anniversary of their friend's death. Gathering with others to exchange memories and share in memorial activities was a common form of continuing bonds, which help grieving adolescents to maintain connections to their lost loved ones (Collins-Colosi, 2017; Williams & Merten, 2009). Döveling (2017) stated that digitally mediated bereavement is often conducted on social media platforms. Only one of the participants, Sara, discussed utilizing social media as a form of bereavement support; she practiced online journaling to aid in her healing journey. Mourning rituals can often provide comfort to the bereaved (Clark & Franzmann, 2006; Djelantik et al., 2021; Thai & Moore, 2018). Memorial services were

attended by many of the participants. Other personal practices, such as Isabella releasing the ashes of her friend, were described. Overall, while some forms of support and coping were experienced by those participating in this study, many of the resources (such as access to group-based bereavement support, bereavements camps, creative therapy options, or storytelling/narrative therapeutic techniques) were not extended to these bereaved adolescents as options to support their healing.

Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations as They Relate to the Data

Post-Traumatic Growth

The current body of knowledge showcases how the majority of adolescents who have lost a loved one come to experience a period of subsequence growth known as PTG (Asgari & Naghavi, 2020; Howard Sharp et al., 2018; Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; McClatchey, 2020; Morris et al., 2020; Papadatou et al., 2018; Simsek Arsland et al., 2022; Stein et al., 2018). Post-traumatic growth theory was originally conceived by Tedeschi and Calhoun (1996), who created a PTGI. Though much prior research has focused on adolescents who have lost a parent or sibling, Johnsen and Afgun (2021) demonstrated that there was no significant difference in PTG scores between those who had experienced the death of a sibling and those who had experienced the death of a friend. Other studies have also confirmed that PTG can be experienced by adolescents who have lost close friends, making it an ideal theoretical foundation for this research (Johnsen & Afgun, 2021; Papadatou et al., 2018; Stein et al., 2018).

The present study confirms prior findings on PTG in this demographic. One way in which PTG effects were experienced by the participants in this study was gratitude. As

Brandon stated, "I am fortunate because I am still living…I am still here and I'm able to experience all this stuff." Another set of related PTG outcomes were empathy, perspective taking, and helping others. Of this, Josh said, "I became a more loving and caring individual for others' feelings and what they're going through and trying to understand what they're going through." Similarly, Nicholas described how losing his friend helped him "lear[n] to be happy for the things we are given now and the things we can give to those who need them most." Other PTG effects that the participants described were living fully and future planning, religious and spiritual contemplation, self-reflection and the acceptance of the authentic self, re-evaluation of relationships, breaking away from unhealthy behaviors and situations, emotional openness, and resilience. Resilience will be discussed in the following section. Many of these outcomes mirror Tedeschi and Calhoun's (1996) PTGI factors of new possibilities, relating to others, personal strength, spiritual change, appreciation of life, and continuing bonds. Ultimately, the findings of this study justify its inclusion of PTG as a theoretical foundation, as each of the participants shared ways in which their traumatic experiences of loss catalyzed long-term positive changes in their lives. This is not to say that the losses themselves were positive, but rather that the experiences led to opportunities for personal growth.

Resilience and Positive Psychology

For the current study, two concepts were incorporated into the conceptual framework. These two concepts were resilience and positive psychology. One concept intertwined into the conceptual framework of this study was positive psychology, which

was first conceptualized by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) who emphasized the importance of focusing on constructive experiences, strength-related traits, and institutions that contribute to the wellbeing and happiness of individuals rather than on mental health pathology. Positive psychology was interwoven into the fabric of this research where possible. For instance, many of the questions in the interview schedule ask after these three sub-sections of positive psychology.

Resilience, while first studied in children by Garmezy (1991), was both a part of the conceptual framework and found to be one of the PTG effects experienced by several participants. In the past, researchers such as Pangborn (2019) have examined the role of resiliency in adolescent bereavement processes. In addition to being laced into the interview schedule questions, resilience was found to be an outcome for Brandon, Nicholas, Jacob, and Isabella. About loss, Nicholas simply stated "You just become stronger." Brandon extrapolated on this concept, comparing loss to a refiner's fire:

> Like a forge and the refiner's fire. How you got this piece of metal and you put it in the forge and this piece of metal is unformed. It's beat up. It's heated up, seared, bent out of shape, but by the time it's done… [it] makes this really pretty uh, like iron rose. Entirely made out of iron, it's really really pretty. The idea is, you know, we go through the refiner's fire to become more than what we are right now. And that's one of the hardest things about life, is recognizing that some of the worst experiences create the best versions of oursel[ves].

This metaphor is a beautiful representation of how one participant viewed growing from his loss to be an act of resilience.

Overall, the findings of this study largely confirm the results of the initial literature review and in some respects extend the current knowledge of the discipline. Additionally, the theoretical foundation of PTG and the conceptual framework of positive psychology and resilience were all warranted, as was shown through the findings of the present study. Though this research does fulfill the role of filling in a gap in the adolescent bereavement literature, it also serves to corroborate the results of many prior studies, thereby strengthening the current body of academic knowledge related to teenage grief.

Limitations of the Study

As was described in Chapter 1, several limitations to trustworthiness were present in this study. Phenomenological research studies, and IPA studies in particular, include a small number of participants. While this allows for an ideographic exploration of a particular phenomenon that occurs within a niche demographic, it also requires one to be wary of claiming larger generalizability. This proves to be a limit to transferability. The impacts of this limitation were mitigated through thick description of the data, allowing for generalization to be inferred to others who fit the specific demographic requirements (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Additionally, even recruiting eight participants, the point at which data saturation was reached, proved to be a challenge. This was due to both the fact that the inclusion criteria for participation in the study were narrow and also the innately sensitive subject matter that potential participants were asked to recall in detail. To mirror quantitative reliability, steps were taken to produce dependable research, which

consisted of peer examination, reflexivity through a research journal, and a traceable audit trail.

Content based limitations can also be considered. For instance, the study did not seek to examine gender or cultural differences of lived experience, thereby reducing specificity of gender-related grieving responses and generalization to those outside of the United States. A potential for gender differences was discussed throughout several sections of Chapter 4, though examining these differences was not built into this study prior to data collection. The lack of these distinctions could be considered a limitation.

Other potential limitations could be connected to personal, professional, and academic biases. In terms of personal bias, I as the sole researcher do have individual experience with the sudden death of a close friend during adolescence, which if not carefully bracketed, could have caused a clouding of the data during analysis and interpretation. Professional bias and relational power disparities could have been a limitation; in order to avoid this, participants were not related to me in any professional capacity and steps were taken to reduce the amount of perceived power disparity between the interviewer and interviewees. This was discussed in further detail in Chapter 3. Due to my familiarity with the current body of scholarly literature on adolescent bereavement, academic bias could have proved to be another limitation. Throughout the course of data analysis, this potential bias was kept at the forefront of my mind, so as not to allow my previous academic knowledge to color the course of the analysis. Ultimately, though several forms of limitation could have impacted the results of this study, intentional and actionable strategies were employed to reduce the impacts of these limitations.

Recommendations

When researchers conduct studies, the results are limited by nature, which allows for recommendations of further exploration through future research to be presented. The present study by no means fills all the gaps in adolescent bereavement literature, even in regard to sudden loss. One clear omission is sudden loss from violent means. Therefore, future research could focus on exploring the experience of adolescents' sudden loss of a close friend to homicide. Additionally, an assumption made prior to data collection was that one or more participants would have lost a friend from a motor vehicle accident, as this is the leading cause of death for adolescents (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). However, none of the participants happened to have lost a friend to an automobile accident, meaning that there is still room in the literature to explore adolescent bereavement after the sudden loss of a close friend to a motor vehicle crash.

Though not necessarily an omission but rather a gap that was revealed was gender discrepancy in the reactions of adolescents to the death of a close friend. In several of the results sub-themes, differences appeared between the male and female participants (no participants self-identified as non-binary or transgender). One negative internal effect that was explored was the retardation of relationship development. All three female participants had included this as part of their perception of loss and their bereavement experience, while none of the male participants mentioned it. This points towards a possible route of academic exploration. Additionally, three of the four participants who described complicated grief outcomes were female. This means that all three of the female participants experienced complicated/prolonged grief symptoms while only one

fifth of the male participants experienced complicated grief. Again, this may be worth further exploration. Similarly, only male participants discussed the PTG outcome of increased empathy and helping behaviors. An additional area that could be further examined is the way in which specific types of other relationships, such as other friendships, peer relationships, acquaintanceships, and relationships with family members of the deceased friend could be impacted by loss during the teenage years. Though these relationship changes were discussed within the confines of the scope of this study, there is room for fixed research attention to be placed on the ways in which various relationship types are impacted by adolescent grief.

Other recommendations for future research can be made based on the strengths of the current study. For instance, another recommendation is to delve into the role that anger plays in adolescent bereavement processes. Anger, jealousy, and irritation were all present within this study's data, though they were not explored to their full depth. An exploration of the ways in which school responses to student death catalyze anger in the bereaved could also be investigated. Along this same line of investigation is how adolescents may create social comparisons of public grief displays based upon a hierarchy of closeness to the deceased. In the PTG section of this study's results, self-reflection and the acceptance of the authentic self were explored. There is the possibility of focusing on adolescent identity development and how grief may specifically impact longer-term identity and authenticity. While the body of knowledge on adolescent bereavement is robust, there is space within this domain of psychology for a multitude of additional research endeavors.

Implications: Positive Social Change and Recommendations for Practice

After conducting research with participants who as adolescents experienced the sudden death of a close friend, it becomes clear that this study has positive social change implications at the individual, family, and organizational levels. In terms of theoretical implications, the results of the study indicate the applicability of PTG theory to adolescent bereavement following the death of a close friend. Sudden death of a close friend is an unfortunately common occurrence during adolescence, as the leading cause of adolescent death is accidents/unintentional injuries (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2021). One aspiration of the research was to provide information to friends and family members of bereaved adolescents about not only how adolescents' periods of loss and bereavement were perceived, but also on which forms of support and resources were beneficial and most likely to encourage PTG-related outcomes over several years.

The study revealed many aspects of the sense-making process of individuals who lost close friends to a sudden death as a teenager, which could serve to help normalize the period of negative internal effects post-loss. Additionally, the study explored the ways in which resources and support are received; often, adolescents are not offered formal grief resources at all. Intangible support, such as the loving presence of family and time with friends, was found to be vital to long-term healing and growth. However, this support was often initially eschewed by the grieving teenagers. The research emphasizes the importance of presence despite a grieving teen's attempt to push it away. Additionally, many grieving young people are not offered access to group-based grief services, despite

prior research showcasing their efficacy. This information could assist with positive social change at both the individual and family levels.

At an organizational level, the study revealed the often anger-based reactions that teenagers have towards school responses to a death. The research indicates the importance of considering the emotional closeness of various students to the deceased adolescent when offering grief support and avoiding responses that would encourage social displays of grief from those who were distantly acquainted with the deceased. This study also indicates the helpfulness of longer-term school-based therapeutic interventions versus single day counseling events. The research has the potential to help inform school policies surrounding responses to signs of adolescent grief and may help schools consider how to provide further access to bereavement support and resources. Though this study is not intended to provide recommendations for mental health practice, the results would indicate that therapeutic grief counseling is a resource that aids some bereaved adolescents. Overall, this study provides information to individuals looking to assist their grieving teenager in ways that would support long-term PTG outcomes as well as organizations, such as schools or grief counseling agencies, that seek to do the same. Changes made on the individual, family, and organizational levels that positively impact grieving youth each have the capacity to create long-term positive social change for bereaved individuals and therefore for their future communities.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to describe the essence and meaning of the lived experience of bereaved emerging adults who, as adolescents, lost a close friend to sudden death. This subject matter held personal weight for me; as an adolescent, I experienced the sudden death of my dearest friend. At the time, I was fortunate to be surrounded by family members who exemplified the quality of presence, a quality demonstrated through this research to be of the utmost import. My family grieved with me and for me, holding space for my anguish. This was the greatest gift they could give. However, I also felt an acute lack of access to tangible resources. I yearned for books, counseling, or group-based bereavement support, but did not have the opportunity to partake in these forms of healing. It was from the memory of this personal experience that the recognition of this study's social problem first developed. After the research was conducted, the results showcased the many negative internal effects of the sudden loss of a close friend during adolescence, the way in which the bereavement process morphs throughout time, how many young people come to experience positive long-term outcomes as a result of their trauma, the widespread lack of access to tangible bereavement resources, and how intangible supports can make a positive difference in the lives of grieving teenagers. Some notable results of this research that address the social problem are the confirmation that many grieving young people do not have access to tangible bereavement resources and the importance of the presence of loved ones during the bereavement process. The superordinate theme of juxtapositions illuminated the tension and ambivalence that grieving teenagers oft feel about many people and topics after loss, as they search for a

reversal of fate and find that no panacea can completely ameliorate their wounds. Nothing, after all, can bring back that which is irrevocably lost. Connecting with these young people through the stories they told of their losses was not only illuminating in an academic capacity but was profoundly touching on an emotional level. Their narratives of grief and love reinforced the vital nature of human connection after loss as well as the possibility of taking an experience of trauma and allowing it to transmute you into a kinder, more compassionate, and stronger human being, not only for oneself, but also for one's community.

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Appendix: Interview Protocol

Introductory Statement

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. I would like to quickly go over the informed consent form and ensure that you understand the implications of agreeing to participate [read over informed consent; ensure they have signed the form]. I also want to make sure that you know that all of your identifying information will be kept in confidence and that you are free to withdraw from this interview at any time without suffering any consequences. This interview will be recorded and you can have access to the recording and/or transcript of the interview at your request. In regard to the content of the interview, we will be discussing the death of your friend when you were a teenager and how that may have impacted various aspects of your life. I know that different people have different preferences when it comes to the language surrounding grief. Throughout the interview, would you prefer that I use the term 'died' or 'passed away?' [Circle to help remember]. Can you please tell me your friend's name, so I can make sure to include it when asking questions? During the interview, I will ask some specific questions, but there is always room for you to take the interview in different directions when you feel it is relevant; please feel free to let me know if you want to talk about something related to the subject, even if I don't have a specific question about it.

I do want to let you know before we start that I have personal experience of this topic; when I was sixteen, my best friend was killed in a car crash. I wanted to briefly let you know that I will do my best to listen to your story without overlaying the lens of my own experience, but it is possible that I will have some unintentional bias.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

Interview Questions

1. Let's start with getting to know each other a little bit. Can you tell me about yourself?

2. How about your friend ___[insert deceased's name]___? Could you please tell me about them?

3. How would you describe your feelings and relationship with ___[insert deceased's name]___ when you were teenagers?

4. Can you tell me a bit about the circumstances around your friend's death [prompt with ages, if not given]?

5. After [friend's name] died [or passed away, depending on the interviewee's preference], what was your experience of your initial grief?

6. During this initial [open-ended, I will continue to use each individual participant's description of 'initial' in the following questions] time of loss, what kinds of immediate reactions to your grief did you receive from your friends and family?

7. Can you tell me more about any support you received or resources to which you may have been directed for your grief in this initial period as well as types of support or resources that may have been absent, or that you feel would have helped you had you had access to them?

8. How would you describe the way those initial reactions to your grief seemed to change or stay the same after a longer period of time had elapsed?

9. How do you feel losing [name] may have related to your identity as a teenager?

10. Now that a great deal more time has elapsed, how would you describe your bereavement process throughout the subsequent years?

11. Can you tell me about some of the effects that your bereavement had on other areas of your life or other relationships with friends and family?

12. Can you describe the times when these effects may have been more or less profound?

13. You mentioned [insert negative effect here]; can you tell me a bit more about how that impacted you?

14. You also talked about [insert post-traumatic growth effect here]; can you go into more detail about why you think this may have occurred?

15. What is your perspective on ways you may have grown, if at all, during your period of grief and bereavement?

16. How do you view the way aspects of your personality as well as external support may have impacted your longer-term bereavement process (making it easier or harder)?

17. Can you also tell me about support/resources that either helped or hindered you throughout the process?

18. [If they have mentioned growth]: Please describe how you believe you were able to take this experience of trauma and in some regard, experience growth?

19. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about either your experience of grief, or your bereavement process?

Closing Statement

- Thank you so much for participating in this interview; I appreciate your openness and willingness to speak about such a sensitive subject. It truly means a great deal that you would take the time to help with this research.

- Again, I want to remind you that this interview was recorded and you have the option of being sent a copy of the recording/transcript of the interview if you would like. I may check in with you via email as I transcribe and analyze the interview if I have any clarification questions and then I will send you a copy of the dissertation once it is complete.

- Before we go, I want to acknowledge that this interview may have brought up any emotions of distress or other negative feelings. I know it is sometimes difficult for me to remember my own loss. We can take a few minutes to talk about that if you would like. I also have a list of support resources to give you if you feel that this list would be helpful.

- Remember that you can contact me at any time if you have any questions or remember something else that you want to add.