

2017

Young Adult Narratives of Sibling Loss and Bereavement during Adolescence

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Walden University

College of Social and Behavioral Sciences

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Kelly Collins-Colosi

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Young Adult Narratives of Sibling Loss and Bereavement during Adolescence

by

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MA, Marywood University, 2003

BS, Binghamton University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
Health Psychology

Walden University

December 2016

Abstract

Up to 90% of adolescents in the U.S. experience a loss of a family member or friend. However, prior research on loss of a family member has focused predominantly on the adult experience (e.g., loss of a spouse), parental bereavement (loss of a child), or grief counseling as an intervention for dealing with loss. Little is known about the sibling loss experience, particularly from the point of view of the surviving sibling who suffered the loss when they were young. Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the narratives of young adults who experienced the loss of a sibling during adolescence, and to understand the role of family, friends, and resources. This research utilized three theoretical models: Erik Erickson's theory of Psychosocial Development, Murray Bowen's theory of Family Systems, and Theresa Rando's 6 R's theory of loss. Eight participants (all female) between 18 and 30 years who lost a sibling between 13 and 18 years were invited through posting in 4 closed sibling loss groups on Facebook. Using Reissman's thematic analysis, data from semi-structured interviews revealed five themes: returning to school (refuge vs. struggle); being there (sources of support); emotional separation (family, friends, and the lost sibling); identification of self/moving forward (turning points following the loss); and family dynamics with departed and surviving (maintaining the lost connection). Future research should intentionally sample other demographics to broaden the understanding of sibling bereavement across age, gender, ethnicity, and religion. Positive social change implications include efforts to promote training and programs sensitive to the unique needs of bereaved young adults in secondary school and college settings.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to all those who have lost a sibling.

Especially, for my little sister Emily Elizabeth Collins. Truly the best sister one could ever ask for, 3/8/1982 to 11/11/2000.

Acknowledgments

For my daughters Emma and Abby Colosi, for the love and patience you shared, the encouragement you gave, and the time you gave away so that this dream could be accomplished. May you always reach for the stars!

For my husband Nick, for your patience, love and support to survive this journey. It would not have been possible without you.

For my parents Terry and Bob, for teaching me to always believe in myself and instilling the values to never, ever give up. Without you this would not have been possible.

To Dr. Susan Marcus, for your continued guidance, patience, and support. I truly would have never made it through his journey without you. Thank you for all you do, you are a true miracle worker!

Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study.....	1
Background.....	2
Problem Statement.....	5
Purpose of the Study.....	5
Research Questions.....	6
Theoretical Framework.....	6
Nature of the Study.....	9
Definitions.....	11
Assumptions.....	12
Scope and Delimitations.....	13
Limitations.....	13
Significance.....	14
Chapter Summary.....	15
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	16
Introduction.....	16
Literature Search Strategy.....	18
Theoretical Framework.....	19
Erikson’s Theory of Psycho-Social Development.....	19
Bowen’s Family Systems Theory.....	21
Rando’s 6-R Model of Loss.....	27
Sibling Bereavement Experience.....	29

Sibling Bereavement–Type of Loss Experienced.....	29
Sibling Bereavement–Effects on Behavior.....	30
Sibling Bereavement–School Performance	32
Sibling Bereavement-Interventions	33
Limitations of Current Research.....	35
Chapter Summary	36
Chapter 3: Research Method.....	37
Introduction.....	37
Research Design and Rationale	37
Role of the Researcher	39
Methodology.....	41
Participant Selection Logic.....	41
Sample and Sampling Strategy	41
Instrumentation and Materials	42
Procedures.....	45
Recruitment.....	45
Participation	46
Data Collection	46
Data Analysis Plan.....	47
Issues of Trustworthiness.....	47
Credibility	47
Transferability.....	48

Dependability	49
Ethical Procedures	49
Summary and Transition.....	51
Chapter 4: Results	52
Setting	53
Demographics of Participants	56
Data Collection	57
Interview Narratives.....	59
Data Analysis	72
Coding.....	72
Themes	74
Returning to School	74
Being There.....	76
Emotional Separation.....	79
Identification of Self/Moving Forward.....	82
Family Dynamics with Departed and Surviving.....	84
Discrepancies in Responses and Cases	88
Evidence of Trustworthiness.....	90
Credibility	90
Transferability.....	91
Dependability	92
Results.....	92

What is the narrative of bereavement for adults who experienced the death of a sibling while they were in their teens?.....	93
How does the narrative of bereavement begin?	93
What are the turning points?	97
What is the role of the family and friends in the bereavement process?	100
What is the Role of Other Resources?	101
Summary and Transition.....	102
Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations	104
Interpretation of Findings	105
Comparison to Published Research	105
Alignment with Theoretical Framework.....	109
Erikson’s Theory of Psycho-Social Development.....	109
Bowen’s Family Systems Theory	110
Rando’s 6-R Model of Loss.....	114
Limitations of the Study.....	116
Implications.....	118
Implications for Social Change.....	118
Methodological and Theoretical Implications	119
Recommendations for Practice	119
Conclusion	121
Appendix A: Participation Invitation A & B	131
Appendix B: Participant Screening Guide.....	133

Appendix C: Interview Guide.....	135
Appendix E: Codes Identified.....	137

Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

The death of a sibling can be one of the most difficult and devastating events that an adolescent can face. The number of adolescents who deal with the death of a loved one, specifically a brother or sister is more common than most realize. In 1994, Kandt reported that although bereavement during adolescence is not considered a normative life experience up to 90% of adolescents in the United States experience a loss associated with death of a family member or friend. Though dated, more recent statistics have not been reported. Nearly 60,000 children under the age of 20 die each year in the United States and Canada alone (Heron, 2007; Statistics Canada, 2007).

Numerous researchers have focused on bereavement and the experience of the loss of a child, a partner, parent or a coworker (McNess, 2007; Thompson, et al., 2010). However, very little research has examined the significance of bereavement following the loss of a sibling, specifically looking at what parents and surviving siblings find helpful (Abdelnoor, & Hollins, 2004; McNess, 2007; Kazak & Noll, 2004; Thompson et al., 2010). The death of a sibling marks the end of what was expected to be a lifelong and intimate relationship (Robinson & Mahon, 1997).

The results of this study offer to clinicians, school staff, and families the information and types of support and guidance that are necessary to assist a bereaved adolescent through this difficult journey. This information can be used by the clinician in the development of treatment plans, by school staff in terms of information and resources that families can be connected with for support, or the stories shared may be able to

provide hope to bereaved siblings that they can find a healthy way through this difficult loss.

Major sections in Chapter 1 address the background of the problem, the purpose of the study and research questions. The theoretical framework, nature of the study, definition of terms, assumptions, limitations, scope and delimitations, as well as the significance of the study and implications for social change are also reviewed.

Background

The concept of bereavement has been studied for a number of years (Arnold, Gemma, & Cushman, 2005; Bank & Kahn, 1982; Barerra, Alam, D'Agosito, Nicholas & Schneiderman, 2013), and considerable research has been done to understand the process of bereavement due to the loss of a child, partner, parent or coworker (Christ, 2006; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; McNess, 2007; Thompson et al., 2010). However, there is little research into the experience of bereavement following the loss of a sibling (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004; Kazak & Noll, 2004; McNess, 2007; Paris, Carter, & Day, 2009; Thompson et al., 2010), and how individuals find a way to move forward following this kind of loss.

Bereavement is defined as the universal reaction of the death of a loved one, a process in which one experiences grief and moves towards acceptance of loss (American Psychiatric Association, 2000; Birenbaum, 2000). This is distinguished from grief which is the emotional response a bereaved person experiences, including such reactions as crying, sadness, loss of appetite, disruption to sleep, lack of interest in regular activities, and difficulty concentrating (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

The death of a sibling has profound and lasting effects on the psychological and emotional functioning of the surviving siblings (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). According to Devita-Raeburn (2004), siblings are so closely connected that when one sibling dies it is as if the surviving sibling loses part of themselves. Though the death of a child is one of the most profound losses that a family can experience, little research has examined the effects of sibling loss in comparison to the experience of loss of by the parent (Christ, 2006; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; McNess, 2007; Paris et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2010). Numerous studies have focused on the experience of the loss of a child, as the parent-child relationship has been seen as more important than the sibling relationship (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Packman, Horsley, Davies, & Kramer, 2006). This has been due to the belief that bereaved parents are at a more significant risk to cause disruptions in the family system (Oliver, 1999; Rogers, Floyd, Seltzer, Greenburg, & Hong, 2008). It is also believed that bereaved parents are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, guilt, and post-traumatic stress symptoms which will also disrupt the family system (Rogers et al., 2008).

Researchers who studied sibling bereavement have found that bereaved siblings report struggles with sadness, guilt, anger, anxiety, loneliness, and isolation (Brody, 1998; Davies, 1999; Fanos, Little, & Edwards, 2009; McCowan & Davies, 1995; Weller, Weller, Fristad, & Bowes, 1991). Additionally, studies have observed the impact of death on a child's school experience, where bereaved children's academic levels were observed to be at least one grade level below their peers (Grollman, 1967). Abdelnoor

and Hollins' (2004) indicated that parentally bereaved children were at least a half a grade level below their nonbereaved peers in academics.

Research into interventions designed to help and support bereaved families and siblings has ranged from structured interventions immediately following the death, interventions months or years following a death, school-based interventions, and interventions specifically related to a modality such as music. They have identified strategies such as seeking support of family and friends, reliance on a personal belief systems or religion, and continuing bonds with the deceased child to be helpful (Barrera et al., 2009, Hogan & DeSantis, 1992; Martinson & Campos, 1991; Thompson et al, 2010).

What is missing in the literature is an understanding of the meaning of bereavement to young adults who experienced the death of a sibling while in their teens. Researchers have not extensively examined a young adult's experience with the loss of a sibling during their teen years and the personal process that they go through in coping with and managing the loss of a loved one (Paris et al., 2009). Understanding the experience of bereavement during the adolescent years contributed to positive social change at both the individual and societal level. The results contributed to the body of research on adolescent bereavement and ideally encouraged more qualitative and quantitative studies to take place. Additionally, this research also provided innovations in educational and therapeutic support for bereaved families and siblings. Exploring the narratives of young adults who have lost a sibling during their adolescent years may lead

to more effective approaches in the guidance, support, and treatment of bereaved adolescence.

Problem Statement

The literature provides numerous studies demonstrating effects of grief and bereavement on family systems, parents and children (Birenbaum, 2000; Christ, 2006; Davies, 1991; Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Horsley & Patterson, 2006; McNess, 2007; Thompson et al., 2010), but little research is available regarding the experience of sibling bereavement. Despite decades of research on the experience of loss, and the effectiveness of interventions designed to support families, more work needs to be done for bereaved adolescents (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Davies, 1991; Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Paris et al., 2009; Thompson et al., 2010). Specifically, what was missing was an exploration of the narratives of bereavement for young adults who experienced the death of a sibling during their own adolescence. This was accomplished through a qualitative study using narrative analysis. Narrative analysis examined the stories that individuals had to tell and, through telling stories, individuals were able to share an experience that has happened, put that experience into sequence, look at explanations of the experience and examined the series of events that shaped the individual (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of young adults who experienced the death of a sibling during their own adolescence. The intent was to better understand the meaning of the bereavement experience of sibling loss by examining the

narratives of the loss, and exploring the role of family, friends, and resources through their journey with loss. The phenomenon of interest is bereavement and sources of support (family, friends, and resources).

Research Questions

In this research I explored the following research questions and subquestions:

- What is the narrative of bereavement for adults who experienced the death of a sibling while they were in their teens?
 - How does the narrative of bereavement begin?
 - What are the “turning points”?

- 2. What is the role of the family and friends in the bereavement process?
 - What is the role of family relationships?
 - What is the role of friendships?
 - What is the role of other resources?

The intent was to better understand the meaning and process of sibling loss, the role of family and friends in navigating the grief process, and the resources that were helpful.

Theoretical Framework

Adolescence is a significantly challenging time of unique personal development. Often times these challenges are seen and played out within the context of the family unit. Therefore, I utilized three theoretical models as the basis for developing the contextual framework for this study: Erik Erickson’s theory of Psychosocial Development, Murray Bowen’s theory of Family Systems, and Rando’s 6-R Model of

Loss. Erickson (1963) theorized that personality is developed in a series of stages across the lifespan, and that these stages are impacted by social experiences. Adolescence occurs in stage five of Erickson's (1963) theory where the principal conflict is identity versus confusion. The developmental goal of adolescence is autonomy and independence, where adolescents are testing the limits of independence and working to identify a sense of self, including who they are, what they believe, how they experience society and how they manage those social interactions (Carver & Schier, 2000). During this developmental stage, adolescents who have strong family supports, receive encouragement and guidance, can emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self, a feeling of independence and an ability to control and pursue their future goals (Erickson, 1963). When an adolescent does not have these supports and experiences, they may emerge from this stage confused, insecure and unsure of themselves, their beliefs, desires and their future (Carver & Schier, 2000). The loss of a sibling during the adolescent developmental stage can result in struggles with isolation and personal, emotional, family and academic problems. The confusion and upheaval during the bereavement period can lead to turmoil during adolescence and later on in life as well (Thompson et al, 2010).

The second theory used as a framework in this research is Murray Bowen's Family Systems theory. Bowen's theory of family systems was one of the first comprehensive theories to look at family functioning as an emotional unit and then uses systems theory to describe the interactions among the members of the unit (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988). Bowen believes that the family, its structure, its functioning, the identified roles members take on are all important pieces of how a family system operates

and functions (Price, 2007). The foundation of family systems theory is Bowen's eight interlocking concepts: the nuclear family emotional system, the differentiation of self-scale, triangles, cutoff, family projection process, multigenerational transmission process, sibling position and the emotional process in society (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006). It is these concepts that define the struggles, work, and growth of the emotional family unit.

Family systems theory is a useful model for understanding how the death of a sibling is experienced. The death of a child has a significant impact on the entire family system, including the surviving sibling (Hindmarch, 2000). It can be said that when a child is lost there are actually three people lost, the child and both parents, due to the significant impact that loss has on a family (Devita-Raeburn, 2004). This impact has significant implications on the already delicate development of an adolescent and the support and guidance that they need from their family.

There is considerable theory and research on the nature of grief and loss dating back to the research of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), who identified what is now known as the five stages of grief. These include denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Later scholarly works on death and dying have revealed that the stages do not necessarily occur in the same order for all individuals or in the same way (Packman et al., 2006; Rando, 1996); and that the experiences and needs surrounding the grieving process of the loss of a child require unique theoretical considerations that would better inform therapy and support (Davies, 2004). In the beginning of grief theory, separation from the deceased was encouraged as a means to manage the loss (Davies, 2004). However, over time researchers have shown the benefit of continuing bonds (Packman et

al., 2006) or a means of keeping a connection with the deceased. This could be through recognizing birthdays, holidays, and special events that hold meaning to the deceased; or just through continuing to share stories, and to use the deceased names in everyday conversation. This is a significant shift in thinking from the original theories of loss. Rando (1996, 2012) and others have advocated other models to understand the grieving and bereavement that take into consideration that *unresolved* and *prolonged* grief were more common to the loss of a child; however most of these models focus on the process of parental bereavement (Rando, as cited in Humphrey & Zimplfer, 1996).

This research incorporated a more contemporary model of loss using Rando's (1996, 2012) six R's model. This model supports a developmental pattern of adjustment to bereavement to include recognize, react, recollect, relinquish, readjust, and reinvent as the processes that an individual survives loss through. Though it is important to consider what is known about grief and loss for the purpose of this study the theoretical lens will focus on issues of development and family.

Nature of the Study

The research was conducted using the qualitative method of narrative analysis. This qualitative method was chosen because of the depth of information that can be gained through examining individuals' personal stories of sibling loss and recovery. Additionally, because bereavement can affect an individual long after the actual event, the narrative approach was well suited to asking young adults to reflect back on their experience of losing a sibling when they themselves were adolescents.

The population of interest includes adults (persons 18 to 30 years of age) who survived the death of a sibling between the ages of 13 and 18 years. Current brain research shows that the adolescent brain continues to develop into the mid-20s, (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009), which is why this age group was selected. The sibling can be biological or nonbiological. Participants were recruited by posting an invitation to participate through the Facebook groups Sibling Loss, Loss of a Sibling, Grief the Unspoken Loss of a Sibling, and The Compassionate Friends Sounds of the Siblings and through this researcher's personal Facebook site. A homogenous sampling strategy was employed to identify and recruit participants (Patton, 2002). As Patton (2002) described the purpose of this kind of sampling is to describe a particular subgrouping in detail. The subgrouping here is young adults between the ages of 18 and 30 who experienced the loss of a sibling when they were between the ages of 13 and 18. This group is seen as homogeneous because all of the participants will fall within the same age range and still be able to be qualified as adolescents or young adults by current brain research (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009).

When an individual responded to the invitation to participate they were provided via e-mail the informed consent document (Appendix C). A phone call was also set up to complete the participant guide (Appendix B). During the phone call each participant was screened for basic information relevant to the study and any exclusionary criteria was identified. Once eligibility was confirmed, a phone interview was scheduled.

Data gathered during the interview process were coded using thematic analysis, which took the transcripts of each interview, and organized the narratives by patterns and

themes (Reissmann, 2008). This was then compared to the two theoretical frameworks, family systems theory and psychosocial development to see their relation to the data gathered.

Definitions

Adolescent: An individual between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

Bereavement: The universal reaction of the death of a loved one, a process in which one experiences grief and moves through towards acceptance of loss (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, Birenbaum, 2000).

Grief: Defined as the emotions one expresses due to the loss of a loved one such as crying, sadness, loss of appetite, disruption to sleep, lack of interest in regular activities, and difficulty concentrating (American Psychiatric Association, 2000).

Family system theory: A theory developed by Murray Bowen that examines family functioning as an emotional unit and describes the interactions among the members of the unit (Bowen, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Identity: As defined by Erik Erickson's (1963, 1968) identity is an individual's self and role images separate from their family of origin.

Narrative analysis: Narrative analysis examines the stories that individuals have to tell and, through telling stories, individuals are able to share an experience that has happened, try to put that experience into sequence, look for explanations of the experience and examine the series of events that shaped the individual (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000).

Role confusion: The definition of role confusion according to Erickson (1963, 1968) occurs during the fifth stage of psychosocial development as one works to solidify their identity separate from the family of origin. Personal struggles with ones identity in this stage lead to role confusion or upheaval as to the direction one is moving and to their beliefs, expectation and goals.

Sibling: A biological, adopted, half or step brother or sister who had regular and ongoing contact (Thompson et al., 2010).

Assumptions

It was assumed that participants in this study had a basic understanding of grief and bereavement and healthy and appropriate choices in managing grief and bereavement. It was further assumed that participants were able to recall relevant events from adolescence in regards to their experience with the loss of their sibling and provide details and insight into this time. Qualitative research places participants in the role of expert. It was the belief that the sharing of their experience about loss provided new and relevant information which can affect the support, guidance, treatment, and programming available to bereaved adolescents.

Based on experiences of working with adolescents and their families for the past 12 years it was assumed that participants who lost a sibling, have strong family supports as well as guidance and support from nonfamily members, and through their schooling experienced less isolation and academic and personal struggles than those who do not.

Furthermore, it was assumed that the resources utilized to access participants (Facebook) allowed for ease of access to participants who have experienced sibling loss, who were willing to participate in a study, and were able to clearly articulate their experiences.

Scope and Delimitations

The study was limited to individuals who lost a sibling between the ages of 13 and 18 and who were currently between the age of 18 and 30. Adolescents are an at-risk population and faced with the loss of a sibling can place them at even greater risk for emotional upheaval. Therefore, participants needed to be eighteen or older. Exclusion criteria for this study included any individual who self-identified that they were struggling with an addiction in any form (prescription, illegal drug, or alcohol), as well as any individual who was currently struggling with a mental illness.

Furthermore, this researcher's personal experience with losing a sibling posed some risk to research credibility as an empathic but neutral researcher. Several strategies were employed (as described in Chapter 3) to address this concern, such as the use of an outside panel to review interview questions, regular check-ins with this researcher's dissertation chair to address concerns and biases, and the use of member checking, where participants reviewed a summary of the transcript of their interview for accuracy.

Limitations

As with any research there are certain limitations that are present. One concern was the potential variations of the experience of the participants due to the time of interview, (that is, how long following the death does the interview occur), (Barrera,

Alam, D'Agostino, Nicholas, & Schneiderman, 2013). Sample size was another limitation, in that the researcher may not be able to achieve saturation of qualitative themes if not enough people are interviewed (Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Mohr, 2010).

An additional limitation that was considered was that the participating adults will be asked to recall their experiences, thoughts and feelings. For some this may be a very recent memory, while for others it may 10 or more years in the past. Therefore, reliability of memory was a limitation.

As the researcher, the challenge was to accurately reflect the shared meanings and differences that the participants describe in the interviews when analyzing the interview data. This was addressed through the use of member checking (i.e., having participants examine a summary of their interview for accuracy) and the use of field notes and audit trails during the data collection and analysis process (Shenton, 2004).

Significance

It was hoped that the results of this study can contribute to positive social change at the individual and societal level. The results of this study can contribute to the body of research on adolescent bereavement, and ideally encouraged more studies (both quantitative and qualitative) in regards to the experiences of this age group. It was also hoped that some of the findings contributed to innovations in educational and therapeutic support to bereaved adolescents and their families. The researcher will present these findings at professional conferences as well as with local providers and social support groups.

Chapter Summary

While the loss of a sibling creates many difficulties and struggles throughout an individual's life, loss that occurs during adolescence may add to developmental struggles with independence and autonomy that adolescents typically experience. This loss may put the surviving sibling at greater risk for personal, emotional, and academic struggles. Exploring the narratives of individuals who have lost a sibling during their adolescent years has led to more effective approaches in the guidance, support, and treatment of bereaved adolescence. The purpose of this qualitative, narrative study was to explore the bereavement experiences of individuals who have lost a sibling during their adolescent years. The intent was to better understand the meaning of their experience of sibling loss and grief, and the role of family, friends, and resources in navigating through this journey.

In Chapter 2 I provide an in depth look at the current literature on bereavement and grief. This includes an examination of parental loss of a child, loss of parent or bereavement and loss in general. Research specifically on sibling bereavement will be examined in detail. A discussion of the theoretical frameworks guiding this study will be presented, highlighting concepts relevant to the development of the research questions, interview guide, and strategy for data analysis.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Though literature in the field of bereavement has grown in the last decade, little is known about the bereavement experiences following the loss of a sibling. The sibling relationship is a significant relationship, it impacts the development of one's personality and how limits and boundaries are set. It also affects family experiences and overall social adjustment (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). The sibling relationship is so deep and profound that when one sibling dies the surviving sibling feels as if they have literally lost part of themselves (Devita-Raeburn, 2004). This being said, very little research has examined the significance of bereavement following the loss of a sibling, specifically looking at what surviving siblings find helpful in navigating this bereavement journey (Abdelnoor, & Hollins, 2004; McNess, 2007; Kazak & Noll, 2004; Thompson et al., 2010). The death of a sibling marks the end of what is expected to be a lifelong and intimate relationship (Robinson, & Mahon, 1997). It can place bereaved siblings at risk for maladaptive behaviors and personal and social struggles. (Davies, 1991; Fanos & Nickerson, 1991; Hogan and Greenfield, 1991; Martinson & Campos, 1991). Quantitative research of parents and teachers assessing student behaviors and cognitive abilities following a death have indicated that bereaved siblings have lower social competence, increased social withdrawal, and increased social aggression than their peers (Birenbaum, Robinson, Phillips, Stewart, & McCown, 1989; Hutton & Bradley, 1994; McCown & Davies, 1995; Silverman, Baker, Cait, & Boerner, 2003).

There are a few qualitative studies examining parent and sibling experiences following the loss of a sibling. A study of parental adjustment following the loss of a child found that it was important for families to maintain a relationship with their deceased child (this can be seen through acknowledgement of the deceased child's birthday or other special occasions, including memories of the deceased child in daily family life etc.), access support from family and friends for stability, and maintain structure with old and new routines (Barrera et al., 2007, Barrera et al., 2009). Hogan and DeSantis (1994) conducted a qualitative study and found common themes of coping, including stress-reducing activities, personal belief systems/religion, parental support, extended family and friends, peer support groups and professional support as the most helpful mechanisms in coping with the loss of sibling. Martinson and Campos (1991) interviewed adolescents who lost a sibling to cancer within the past seven to nine years and found that sharing the death experience with others, sharing memories of their sibling, and using family for emotional support were necessary supports during the bereavement process. Thompson et al. (2010) explored the experiences of 40 families, 65 parents and 39 siblings, who had lost a child to cancer in the last 6 to 19 months. This study's results were consistent with results of previous studies in regards to coping strategies that were beneficial following the loss of a sibling (Barrera et al., 2009; Hogan & DeSantis, 1992; Martinson & Campos, 1991).

What is missing from the literature is an understanding of the meaning of loss and bereavement in the young adult sibling. Bereavement is a process that unfolds over time, and insights into the grief and bereavement experience from young adults who can reflect

back on their experience may add to the body of literature and inform methods for dealing with sibling loss. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to explore the bereavement experience of young adults who lost a sibling during their adolescent years. The intent was to better understand the meaning of sibling loss and grief, and the role of family, friends and institutions in navigating bereavement. This literature review will examine Erickson's theory of psychosocial development, and Bowen's family system theory in relation to the sibling experience with bereavement.

Literature Search Strategy

The research of literature related to bereavement is extensive, with some of the first published studies dating back as far as the 1960s; the majority of research came from the mid-1980s to the present. This research tends to focus on parental loss of a child, bereavement and loss in general. In contrast, the study of sibling bereavement represents a relatively new and growing field. While efforts to explore this area have expanded over the last decade, more research specifically examining sibling bereavement is needed to better understand this phenomenon.

The Walden University library was used to access numerous electronic databases including Thoreau, Ebscohost, PSYCArticles, PSYCInfo, Psychology: A Sage Full Text Citation, SocIndex, and Google Scholar. Search terms that were used were family systems, family systems and loss, family systems and crisis, grief, bereavement, sibling bereavement, adolescence, adolescent bereavement, loss, death, child, children, parental loss, death of a child, crisis, grief experiences of children/adolescent, and sibling loss.

Additionally, other journal articles and books were acquired through the reference lists of journals that were reviewed.

Theoretical Framework

Adolescence is a significantly challenging time of unique personal development. Often times these challenges are seen and played out within the context of the family unit. Therefore, this research utilized three theoretical models as the basis for developing the contextual framework for this study, Erik Erickson's theory of Psychosocial Development, Murray Bowen's theory of Family Systems and Rando's 6-R Theory of Loss.

Erikson's Theory of Psycho-Social Development

Erickson (1963) theorized that personality is developed in a series of stages across the lifespan, and that these stages are impacted by social experiences. These social experiences shape an individual's ego identity, including the beliefs, morals and ethics that guide behavior.

Ego identity supports feelings of competence and control (Erickson, 1963). The ego identity changes and grows during each stage of development depending on the conflict that is experienced. Erickson theorized that the experienced conflict is the turning point in each stage of development, and that successful management of the developmental conflict results in developing a healthy, adaptive psychological quality. Unsuccessful management of developmental conflict results in significant struggles to manage that developmental stage, and the adoption of maladaptive behaviors (Carver &

Schier, 2000). It is during the conflict of each developmental stage that the potential for personal success and growth is high, but it is equally met by the potential for failure.

Adolescence occurs in stage five of Erickson's (1963) theory where the principal conflict is identity versus confusion. The developmental goal of adolescence is autonomy and independence, where adolescents are testing the limits of independence and working to identify a sense of self (i.e., who they are, what they believe, how they experience society and how they manage those social interactions) (Carver & Schier, 2000). It is during this stage that an adolescent is laying the foundation to leave home, by first becoming more autonomous emotionally. Adolescents become less family-oriented and more peer-oriented during this stage (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). During this developmental stage adolescents who have strong family supports receive encouragement and guidance and thus emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self, a feeling of independence and ability to control and pursue their future goals (Erickson, 1963). When an adolescent does not have this experience they emerge from this stage confused, insecure and unsure of themselves, their beliefs, desires and their future (Carver & Schier, 2000).

It is during this period that the death of a sibling makes the surviving sibling especially vulnerable to emotional problems (Lord, 2000). DeVita-Raeburn (2004) has described these adolescents as the forgotten grievers, as their needs are often pushed aside in order to support their grieving parents. The combination of lack of parental support in the bereavement process combined with a struggle for autonomy can often

result in profound and lasting effects on the psychological and emotional functioning of the surviving siblings (Horsley & Patterson, 2006).

Thus, Erikson's model was useful in the development of interview questions and identification of concepts or themes in the data analysis of the proposed study in understanding how the loss of a sibling was experienced at the time of adolescence and what the loss has meant in the context of the ensuing developmental stage.

Bowen's Family Systems Theory

The distinct connection between adolescent and family is clearly observed in the second theoretical premise of this research, Murray Bowen's Family Systems theory. Bowen's theory of family systems was one of the first comprehensive theories to look at family functioning as an emotional unit and then using systems theory to describe the interactions among the members of the unit (Bowen, 1966, 1978; Kerr & Bowen, 1988).

Bowen believed that the family, its structure, its functioning, and the identified roles members take on are all important pieces of how a family system operates and functions (Price, 2007). The foundation of family systems theory is Bowen's eight interlocking concepts: (a) the nuclear family emotional system, (b) the differentiation of self-scale, (c) triangles, (d) cutoff, (e) family projection process, (f) multigenerational transmission process, (g) sibling position, and (h) the emotional process in society (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006). It was these concepts that defined the struggles, work and growth of the emotional family unit.

Nuclear family emotional system (1). The nuclear family emotional system identifies four relationship areas where conflict can develop and in turn affect a family

system (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006). These areas are marital conflict, dysfunctional spouse, emotional distance, and child impairment. In marital conflict, anxiety and tension arise between the marital units, and this in turn increases family tension. The dysfunctional spouse is where one member of a marital unit attempts to control and change the other member, creating anxiety and tension that may affect each member's mental and physical health. Emotional distance refers to how members of a family unit may distance themselves from one another to reduce tension and anxiety and this in turn can result in isolation. Finally, the impairment of one or more children is when parents or guardians in a family unit focus their stress and anxiety on one or more children which in turn promotes a negative view of that child. This makes the child more reactive and likely to act out or to internalize family tensions (Gilbert, 2006).

Differentiation of self-scale (2). The differentiation of self-scale examines the degree of individuality each person has and its connection to how fused individuals are in their family unit (Charles, 2001; Gilbert, 2006). At the lower end of the scale there is more emotional fusion, which can lead to anxiety, struggles with decision making, and relationship troubles. At the higher end there is less relationship fusion, this often times leads to fewer relationship struggles, stronger decision making abilities, and better abilities to separate thinking and feeling to make healthier long term decisions. However, it is important to note that individuals can function well anywhere on this scale depending on the other skills, abilities and strategies that they use. This is the only of Bowen's eight interlocking concepts that looks at just the depth of the individual, the other seven concepts all examine characteristics of the family (Gilbert, 2006).

Triangles (3). The triangle refers to a three-person relationship system considered to be the building block of the larger emotional family unit (Bowen, 1966). The triangle is seen as the smaller unit in the emotional family unit. Tensions center on the dynamic of the three interlocking relationships. The tension can be spread around the triangle which may stabilize it, but often times the tension results in one person in the dynamic feeling as the odd one out, so they in turn will push for change in the triangle to avoid this position (Charles, 2001; Gilbert, 2006). An outside person (i.e., an extended family member, friend, minister, and therapist) may be pulled in to support and attempt to decrease the tension (Gilbert, 2006).

Emotional cutoff (4). Emotional cutoff refers to the way in which individuals manage their unresolved issues within the family unit (Gilbert, 2006); i.e., reducing or cutting off completely the emotional contact with the person of interest. The “cutoff” can happen by means of physically placing space between individuals, such as not living near one another; or it can be done by creating psychological “separation” such as avoiding specific issues when in contact with that family member. (Gilbert, 2006).

Family projection (5). Bowen’s fifth concept examines the way a parent projects emotional problem or issue onto their children (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006). This projection occurs in three steps: (a) focusing attention on the child for fear that there is something wrong, (b) examining the child’s behavior and through the interpretation of *there is something wrong* to confirm the projected problem, and (c) treating the child as if something is in fact wrong.

Multigenerational transmission (6). This refers to a process by which parents transmit familiar rules, behaviors, and communication styles to their offspring through both direct teaching and unconscious *programming* (Bowen, 1978). As parents raise their children, and they in turn respond to their parent's moods, attitudes, and behaviors, this gives rise to both differentiation and self-similar development relative to their parent's identity and behaviors (Gilbert, 2006). This pattern can repeat itself from parent to child and across the generations in a family.

Sibling position (7). Sibling position in a family is a sub-theory that was originally introduced by Walter Toman in his book *Family Constellations* in 1961 and adapted by Bowen (1966), it examined the position that a sibling was born into and the impact that this has on their functioning, behavior, and decision making. Bowen examined the significant impact that sibling position had on family functioning, this aspect of the theory suggests that birth position in the family influences future social, occupation, and relationship choices (1978). Gilbert (2006) pointed out that sibling positions in a family allow for a wealth of information about an individual in a family system, and the characteristics that they may develop as a result of their sibling positions. However they are not unchangeable and true in all sibling groupings, they are a starting point.

Emotional process (8). The final component is the emotional process relative to how the family system interacts with the greater societal system (Bowman, 1978). This component was added at a later point as family system theory evolved overtime. This part of the theory suggests that the "triangles" within a family move and interact with

societal forces the family uses to function and evolve (Gilbert, 2006). This includes, for example, the involvement of an outside agency, therapist, institution, friendship or employment which causes change with anyone within the family system (Gilbert, 2006).

Relevance of Bowen' system to the current research. These eight concepts have been empirically tested throughout the past decades. For example, Bowen's family system theory has been used to study young people's decision making abilities about their career (Larson & Wilson, 1998), the influence of relationship enhancement training on differentiation of self (Griffin & Apostol, 1993), nurse manager job stress responses (Hanson, 1998), the relationship between parents of schizophrenics (Wichstrom & Holte, 1995), and the effects of need fulfillment and differentiation of self on married men's psychological well-being (Bohlander, 1999). The strengths of Bowen's family system theory lie in (a) the identification of testable constructs, (b) the research evidence of the effectiveness of the theory as a model of prediction, and (c) in the development of two valid and reliable instruments; the Family Systems Assessment tool and the Differentiation of Self-Inventory (Charles, 2001). These instruments were created to assess constructs; constructs that are reliable and validated and can be applied to the study of families and crisis. However, more research is needed with larger and more diverse samples (Charles, 2001).

Findings from case study and family therapy research also point to the value of using family systems theory as a conceptual framework for the current research (Hindmarch, 2000). This area of literature provides many descriptions of how an adolescent may be affected during the bereavement process by the individuals around

them. For example, Walsh and McGoldrick (1991) stated, “Of all life experiences, death poses the most painful adaptational challenges for the family as a system and for every surviving member” (p.3). Because of the fragile nature of adolescents, they need to know that they are being looked after and cared for. Following the death of a child is when surviving siblings most need stability and security, yet this is often when parents are not able to provide that (Davies, 1995). Within the family systems construct, the difficulty lies in that parents play an essential role in helping their surviving children cope and adapt with death (McCown & Pratt, 1985) and when this support is not available the family systems begins to crack and break.

Parents may be so involved in their own grief that their ability to provide for and assist their surviving children is significantly limited; they often do not have the ability to emotionally connect and support them (Packman et al., 2006). Using the family systems concept of cutoff, one can understand the consequences of pain and fragmentation that may be experienced between parents and the surviving siblings. When a family system and society (school, peers, community) fail to validate an adolescents needs for emotional support, the risk of affective problems (depression, anxiety) and/or behavioral acting out (risk taking) may occur (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). The concept of family projection process may also be relevant to understand what happens when parents are unable to handle their own grief; they may project their fears and emotions onto the surviving siblings.

The concept of triangulation may also be relevant in understanding a surviving adolescent’s ability to process through their grief. Outside forces may be pulled in to

help stabilize that triangle (the three person family sub-grouping that is struggling), including peers, or adults outside of the family who can help them to manage this difficult time (Gilbert, 2006). The support of an adult in the grieving process can provide emotional support, ease stress, and lessen the long term, negative effects of grief for the adolescent (DeMinco, 1995).

The emotional process component may also have value in providing a framework for understanding the need for acceptance by a peer group in navigating the bereavement process (Christ, 2000; Christ, 2002; Packman et al., 2006). The adolescent may run away from home, begin using drugs and alcohol, or take risks (Lord, 2000). Society then views this adolescent as bad and making poor choices and thus sanctions can be imposed (Bank & Kahn, 1982; Christ, 2000; Christ, Siegel, & Christ, 2002; McClelland, 2000).

In sum, both Erikson's developmental model and Bowen's systems theory contributed to the shaping of the methodological approach, research questions, interview guide and analysis for this study. Both models provided identifiable concepts and processes that informed and illuminated participants' narratives.

Rando's 6-R Model of Loss

There is considerable theory and research on the nature of grief and loss dating back to the ground breaking research of Elisabeth Kubler-Ross (1969), who identified what is now known as the five stages of grief which include denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. From Kubler-Ross's groundbreaking work, scholarly works on bereavement have shown that individuals do not necessarily experience bereavement in the same order for all individuals or in the same way (Packman, Horsley, Davies, &

Kramer, 2006; Rando, 1996). Rando (1996; 2012) and others have advocated other models to understand the grieving and bereavement that take into consideration that “unresolved” and “prolonged” grief were more common to the loss of a child; however most of these models focus on the process of parental bereavement (as cited in Humphrey & Zimplfer, 1996).

The proposed research will incorporate a more contemporary model of loss. Using Rando’s (1996, 2012) six R’s model. This model supports a developmental pattern of adjustment to bereavement to include recognize, react, recollect, relinquish, readjust and reinvent as the processes that one survives loss through.

Recognize the loss. Rando (1996) identified this as acknowledging that death has occurred and then working to understand the death.

Reacting to the separation. This is a process that involves identifying and experiencing the grief that surrounds death and loss as well as working to identify secondary losses that occur (Rando, 1996). Secondary losses are losses that occur after the death, the changes in friendships, losing a connection with your child’s school following their death etc.

Recollecting and re-experiencing the deceased and the relationship. This requires realistically reviewing and remembering the deceased, also called continuing bonds (Packman et al., 2006) where those who survive keep a connection with the deceased.

Relinquishing old attachments. This phase is identified as a time of letting go, understanding the need to let go to the expectations of how life was like before the death

occurred, letting go of the expectation of what life would be like if the death had not occurred, basically letting go the deceased (Rando, 1996).

Readjusting to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old world. Rando (1996) identifies that this process occurs through developing a new relationship to the deceased, adopting new ways of being or existing with loss and moving forward to establishing a new identity in light of this loss.

Reinvesting: This final process is moving forward and finding a way to invest energy into hopes, wishes, dreams, goals and new people again (Rando, 1996).

It is important to consider what is known about grief and loss for the purpose of this study however a greater emphasis will be placed on the theoretical lens of psychosocial development and family systems.

Sibling Bereavement Experience

Sibling Bereavement–Type of Loss Experienced

Research on sibling bereavement has examined the relationship between the type of death and the type and length of surviving sibling grief. Paris et al., (2009) used the Hogan Inventory of Bereavement, and the Impact of Events-to analyze self-report data from 26 children ages nine to eighteen who lost a sibling in the last fifteen months. The variables included type of death, (anticipated or unexpected), and gender of the deceased and gender of the bereaved (Paris et al., 2009). Although the sample size was small there was some correlation between the type of death, the trauma and or grief experienced and

gender. While both boys and girls seemed to experience similar levels of trauma, girls reported greater experience of grief following loss than boys did (Paris, et al., 2009).

McNess (2007) examined type of death (suicide versus terminal illness) and peer isolation in a study of 25 bereaved young siblings. McNess found that adolescents whose sibling experienced a suicide-caused death had greater periods of peer isolation and social difficulties than those whose sibling died from a terminal illness.

Sibling Bereavement–Effects on Behavior

Previous researchers have identified multiple responses from grieving adolescents ranging from emotional (i.e., sadness, depression, excessive crying, anxiety and feelings of guilt) to behavioral (acting out, sleep disturbances) and finally social (including loneliness, withdrawal) (Brody, 1998; Davies, 1999; Fanos, Little, & Edwards, 2009; McCowan & Davies, 1995; Weller, Weller, Fristad, & Bowes, 1991). For example, Davies (1991) conducted a series of semi-structured interviews with twelve adults (ages twenty-five to seventy-five) who experienced the loss of a sibling prior to the age of seventeen. The results identified participants' struggles with psychological growth. For example, bereaved adolescents reported feeling different from peers. They felt more mature than their peers and were unable to tolerate the immaturity of their peers. Bereaved adolescents withdrew from peers and were accompanied by feelings of sadness and loneliness. These feelings were present for years following the loss of a sibling (Davies, 1991).

Fanos and Nickerson (1991) explored the long term consequences of sibling bereavement. Seventy-five adults who had lost a sibling to cystic fibrosis in the 1960's

and 1970's were interviewed. Twenty-five of these adults were surviving siblings and were nineteen years old or younger at the time of sibling loss. Anxiety and depression scales and a three point scale for guilt were used. Fanos and Nickerson (1991) found that the age of the surviving sibling at the time of death was the most statistically significant. Those between the ages of thirteen and seventeen at the time of the death expressed the most symptoms with sense of guilt (guilt related to how the sibling's illness was handled as well as survivor's guilt), anxiety, feelings of vulnerability, fear of intimacy, excessive concern for others, somatic complaints and sleeping difficulties (Fanos & Nickerson, 1991). Erickson's theory of psychosocial development suggests that loss during the developmental stage of adolescence can leave the surviving sibling with significant social and emotional difficulties.

McCown and Davies (1995) conducted a study of ninety children ages four to sixteen in the two years following the death of a sibling. They found that twenty-five percent of bereaved siblings demonstrated behavioral problems significant enough for a referral to a mental health clinic as compared to ten percent of non-bereaved siblings.

Birenbaum (2000) examined quantitative data on sixty-one children who had a sibling in the terminal phase of cancer, using the parental form of Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist behavioral problems. The results were sorted into age appropriate categories. Of the 34 reported psychosocial bereavement items which include; argues a lot, stubborn, sullen and irritable, disobedient at home, impulsive, hyperactive, shy or timid, showing off, demands attention, self-conscious, likes to be alone, secretive, teases a lot, needs to be perfect, can't concentrate, moody, worrying, prefers older children,

unhappy, sad or depressed, daydreams, acts too young, bragging, talks too much, poor eater, refused to talk, feels unloved, gets teased, too loud, too dependent, cries a lot, nightmares, lonely, withdrawn, trouble sleeping, and nervous (Birenbaum, 2000). The three to five year olds demonstrated sixteen of these psychosocial items, and these were reported more frequently than in the normative sample. Six to eleven year olds demonstrated twenty items outside the expected range, and twelve to eighteen year olds had twenty-eight items fall outside the expected range. This study highlights the point that adolescents developmentally may be more at risk than other age groupings for behavioral difficulties following the loss of a sibling (Birenbaum, 2000). With behavioral issues with impulsivity, hyperactivity, demanding attention, moody, worrying, feeling unhappy, sad or depressed, daydreaming, being a poor eater, refusing to talk, feeling unloved, too loud, nightmare, and trouble sleeping as the items that adolescents struggled with following this experience of a death (Birnbaum, 2000).

In addition to these quantitative studies, Martinson and Campos (1991) found in their qualitative study of thirty-one adolescent siblings interviewed seven to nine years following the sibling death, that the majority of adolescents had the experience of death that led to their personal or family growth. This was connected to a strong family communication, ability to share their experience with death, and reliance on their family for support (Martinson & Campos, 1991).

Sibling Bereavement–School Performance

It has long been observed that children's experiences with death will impact their academic success, dating back to Grollman's (1967) study of 49 children one year

following parental bereavement. The results indicated that two-thirds of the group were still performing below the academic level they were at pre-death. Bedell (1972), through his research on widowers with children, identified a subgrouping of female adolescents whose school grades were most affected by the loss of their mother.

Birenbaum, Robinson, Phillips, Stewart and McCown (1989) used Achenbach's Child Behavior Checklist to examine sixty-one children ranging in age from four to sixteen, and they found changes in behavior and a decrease in social competence both of which were connected to struggles with schooling. Abdelnoor and Hollins (2004) in a study of ninety-seven children who had either lost a parent or a sibling looked at the long term impact of death on school performance, levels of anxiety and self-esteem and attendance. This study found a significant difference between the parentally bereaved group and the control group with parentally bereaved children scoring nearly a half a grade level below the control group. The finding for the bereaved sibling group found that sibling bereaved girls scored nearly a full grade level below the control group, which was more significant than the boys grouping. When anxiety was examined, there was a three to four point difference between parentally bereaved children and their controls, and sibling bereaved children and their controls with the bereaved groups all scoring as more anxious, there was no marked difference between bereaved groups and control groups and self-esteem (Abdelnoor & Hollins, 2004).

Sibling Bereavement-Interventions

Numerous interventions to help and support families and sibling following a death have been examined (Larson & Hoyt, 2007; Neimeyer, 2000). These include structured

interventions immediately following a death, in the months or years following a death, school based interventions, or interventions specific to one modality such as music.

Thompson et al (2011) explored advice from forty families of children who died from cancer within the previous six to nineteen months in a qualitative study. Content analysis of grief advice revealed three categories: before the death, soon after the death, and long-term (Thompson et al., 2011). Consistent with other studies (Barrera et al., 2009, Hogan & DeSantis, 1992, & Martinson & Campos, 1991) these results identified coping strategies such as seeking support of family and friends, the reliance on a personal belief system or religion, and continuing bonds with the deceased child. This study added to the growing body of research indicating that family support varies according to where they are in the grieving process as well as according to each individual's needs at each point of the grieving process (Arnold, Gemma & Cushman, 2005; Thompson et al, 2011). Additionally, this study provided concrete strategies to provide siblings in the immediacy following the death of a sibling.

Horsley and Patterson (2006) observed the effects of an intensive parent guidance intervention with a sample of five adolescents, all of whom lost a sibling in the previous twelve to twenty-four months. Their findings supported that a structured intensive intervention that increased communication between the surviving adolescent and their families decreased feelings of isolation, withdrawal and helped with managing psychological, and personal needs. This single ability, to be able to communicate in times of crisis, is directly related to personal and family growth and a positive outlook emerging from loss (Martinson & Campos, 1991).

Music, known to “tame the soul,” has also been found significantly improve bereavement symptoms as observed by family (Hilliard, 2001). Eighteen children and adolescents were divided into two groups and either participated in an eight week music therapy based intervention or were in a control group. Through this study, Hilliard found a significant difference between the two groups on the behavior rating index for children in the home environment, and the bereavement questionnaire for parents/guardians (Hilliard, 2001). Hilliard (2001) did not identify any significant differences in the scores for the depression self-rating index and the behavior rating index for children in the school environment. It was found though that the music therapy based bereavement group was shown to decrease grief symptoms (Hilliard, 2001).

Limitations of Current Research

Despite the growing body of research into sibling bereavement, there is still very little known about what surviving siblings find helpful for themselves as well as their grieving family (Kazak & Noll, 2004). This is in part due to the methodological differences in regards to time of assessment (how long following the death it occurred), age of siblings at the time research was completed, informants (self-report, parent report, or assessments (Barrera, Alam, D'Agostino, Nicholas & Schneiderman, 2013). Furthermore, research has been limited by convenience samples, the ability to apply findings to different types of deaths (i.e. loss of a sibling to cancer vs. loss of a sibling to homicide or suicide), single site designs, and retrospective reporting (Thompson et al., 2011). More research is still needed in order to better understand the experience of adolescent bereavement following the loss of a sibling.

Chapter Summary

Research studies examining parental bereavement and the loss of a child are abundant, however studies specific to adolescent sibling bereavement is notably lacking. Adolescence is a time of significant development in regards to establishing one's independence, and participating in the developmental tasks of outside relationship-building and separation from the family as was addressed in the discussion of Erik Erickson's (1963) theory of Psychosocial Development. Sibling loss during this time presents additional challenges (Bank & Kahn, 1982). The unique nature of this loss can have potential negative effects on school performance, family and social interactions and work behaviors of the surviving adolescent as identified by the Family Systems Theory. Chapter two presented the literature on these two theories as well as the current and historical literature available related to bereavement and loss. Chapter Three describes the research design and methodology that was be used in this study to examine the research questions.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to explore the narratives of young adults who experienced the death of a sibling during adolescence. The following sections describe the research design and rationale, the role of the researcher, sample selection, instrumentation, data analysis, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

A narrative study is proposed in order to explore the research questions; explored:

1. What is the narrative of bereavement for young adults who experienced the death of a sibling while they were in their teens?
 - How does the narrative of bereavement begin?
 - What are the “turning points”?
2. What is the role of the family and friends in the bereavement process?
 - What is the role of family relationships?
 - What is the role of friendships?
 - What is the role of other resources?

The intent was to better understand the meaning of sibling loss, the role of family and friends in navigating this process, and the resources helpful during the process of bereavement.

The primary phenomenon of interest was bereavement, commonly defined as the universal reaction of the death of a loved one, a process in which one experiences grief

and moves through towards acceptance of loss (American Psychiatric Association, 2000, Birenbaum, 2000). However, research indicates that bereavement is more than the feelings of sadness that change over time. Further, the theoretical frameworks of Psychosocial Development (Erikson, 1963, 1968) and Bowen's theory of Family Systems (1978) also offer insights regarding the effects of sibling loss during different developmental stages, as well as the effects of death on the entire family system. Therefore, the phenomena of family relationships, friendships, and resources were explored.

The researcher used narrative analysis as the research approach which addressed the research question (Reissman, 2008). This approach allowed the researcher the ability to analyze stories of life experiences and to collect data to explain the lives of individuals, their experiences, and meaning of those experiences (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Reissman (2008) stated that in a narrative study attention is focused on the details and the context of the experience as it unfolds from the subjective perspective. Thus, both the participant and researcher become story-tellers in shaping and reporting of the narrative. The goal of qualitative research is to understand and explain themes, phenomenon and experiences. In a narrative analysis the participant and the researcher are telling a story, the researcher as the narrator and the participant as the storyteller. The participant in a narrative analysis, through an interview, is sharing knowledge, experience and memories; the researcher is listening, guiding, clarifying, supporting and probing this stream of information or helping to narrate the story (Reissman, 2008). The use of a narrative approach – i.e., telling stories about the deceased -- may be experienced in a sensitive,

supportive way for exploring bereavement while feeling safe in sharing their experience. Many individuals want to talk about a loved one who has died; they want to hear their loved ones name, see their pictures on the wall, continue their connection with them even though they are gone (Packman, Horsley, Davies, & Kramer, 2006). But at the same time it can also elicit difficult feelings to manage, therefore great sensitivity in this research was used.

Role of the Researcher

The strength of qualitative research is in the interaction between the researcher and the participant (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). In qualitative studies the role of the researcher is to be in a sustained and intense experience with the participants (Creswell, 2007). My role in this research was to identify and interview participants who have experienced the loss of a sibling during adolescence. Therefore, I considered myself a “participant-observer.” This involved the disclosure of personal background. In this area, I shared a common story with all of the participants since I too have experienced the death of a sibling. The disclosure of this personal background may serve to strengthen the experience, depth and details of the story that the participants shared, as it facilitated an atmosphere of ease and comfort with the participants. This was shared as part of the interview process, and it was noted in the interview guide.

There was always a risk of bias, either through the inexperience of the researcher or as a result of the researcher’s personal relationship to the experience (Clanindin, 2007). I recognized that my own biases, beliefs and experiences can surface in this research. I used two methods recognized in qualitative research as procedures for

enhancing trustworthiness (Creswell, 2007; Reissman, 2008; Shenton, 2004). First, I engaged in a reflexive process prior to, during and after the interviews. Prior to, I documented my own “story of loss” using my interview questions as a guideline (Reissman, 2008). During the interviews I kept a diary (audit trail) of “ongoing reflexivity” (Reissmann, 2008, p. 191) to document the process and methodological decisions made along the way. During the analysis, I continued documenting using a process Shenton (2004) refers to as a “reflexive commentary” (p. 68). This allowed me to record my impressions during the construction of findings from the data.

As an additional strategy, I formed an expert panel to review my interview guide questions. This panel consisted of two qualitative methodologist. This also enhanced trustworthiness, as well as attuned the questions to the potential meaning and transferability for providers and researchers.

Though there was no prior personal or professional relationships between the participants and myself, the nature of this research and my own story makes it highly likely that there was shared experiences. To be able to easily distinguish and understand the “storied” experience I employed an audio recording to be able to study verbatim transcripts, and used member checking after the data had been transcribed and summarized. Shenton (2004) described member checking as the one of the single most important steps that can be taken to solidify the credibility in a qualitative study. A narrative analysis involves interpretation, member checking allows a way for the participant to validate that the words they used actually match the intention they had. In this study participants participated in on the spot member checking, which was during the

interview to seek to confirm or clarify information. In addition, participants were be provided with a summary of their transcript to confirm what was transcribed is the actual intention they had, they reviewed this summary and provided feedback to increase the accuracy and trustworthiness of the interpretation.

Concerns regarding ethical issues were also addressed throughout this study in order to address the well-being of each of the participants. One ethical concern addressed is the participant sharing their story not only with this researcher but also upon acceptance and publication of this study. Therefore, issues of confidentiality of the participant's stories were addressed through the use of informed consent to describe to the participants exactly how the results will be presented.

Methodology

Participant Selection Logic

Population

The population of interest for this study was individuals who experienced the death of a sibling when they were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old. They were currently between the ages of eighteen and thirty. Cultural heritage, religion, race, gender and type of death experienced by the sibling did not eliminate individuals from consideration for this study.

Sample and Sampling Strategy

Homogeneous sampling was proposed, with the criteria for inclusion as individuals who are between the ages of eighteen and thirty who experienced the death of

a sibling when they were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. The age range selected for participants was directly related to current brain research that shows that the adolescent brain continues to develop into the mid-twenties (Johnson, Blum, & Giedd, 2009). Participants were asked to decline or withdraw their participation if they identified any current substance abuse or addiction, or current mental illness. Twelve to sixteen participants were used to complete this study. Participants were accessed through the use of postings through Facebook on four grief related groups, Sibling Loss and Loss of a Sibling, Grief the Unspoken Loss of Sibling, and The Compassionate Friends Sounds of the Sibling and through this researchers personal Facebook page. Individuals participated who lived in various parts of the U.S., so interviews took place by phone.

The determination of how many participants to include is referred to in qualitative research as “saturation.” This is the point in which enough data is collected that no new data would add to, or change the understanding of that data (Guest et al, 2006; Mohr, 2010). This definition describes an emergent process that the researcher implemented as interviews were conducted, transcribed and analyzed. Therefore, for the purpose of this study a sample size of twelve to sixteen participants was proposed, and efforts to analyze the data with an intent to identifying when and if certain concepts were “saturated”.

Instrumentation and Materials

When an individual responded to the invitation to participate they were provided via e-mail the informed consent document (Appendix C). A phone call was also set up to complete the participant guide (Appendix B). During the phone call they were screened for basic information relevant to the study and any exclusionary criteria was identified.

Once eligibility was confirmed, a ninety minutes phone interview was scheduled. A semi-structured interview with open ended questions was used to explore the narratives of young adults who experienced the loss of a sibling as an adolescent. The interview questions were developed as a result of identifying gaps in the literature, and included important concepts identified in the two theoretical frameworks.

An informal, semistructured format was used to begin the interview. However, the researcher will use the interview guide to ensure consistency across interviews (Appendix D).

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about the loss of your sibling. Before we begin, I want you to know that this is not only research to me, but it is also a personal journey. I too lost a sibling, my only sister Emily when she was eighteen years old in a tragic car accident. Not a day goes by that I do not think of her. Because of my loss I have spent a great deal of my personal, professional and academic life addressing issues of death and loss. I truly appreciate the personal stories that you are willing to share with me.

So we're here to talk about your experience of loss of a sibling. Where would you like to start?

There are some parts of your experience that I want to make sure that we cover, so I may be asking you some questions along the way.

1. What was life like before your sibling died?

- a. What was happening in your life?
 - b. Tell me about your relationship with your sibling.
 - c. Tell me about your relationships with other members of your family.
 - d. Tell me about your relationships with your closest friends.
2. Tell me how your sibling died. (Circumstances of his/her death).
- a. What do you remember about that moment when you found out your sibling had died?
 - i. What was happening in your life?
 - ii. How would you describe your grief? Your feelings?
 - b. Tell me about your relationships with other members of your family.
 - i. What changed?
 - ii. What stayed the same?
 - c. Tell me about your relationships with your closest friends.
 - i. What changed?
 - ii. What stayed the same?
 - d. What was your greatest sense of support?
 - e. Can you describe the experience of loss that you felt?
3. And finally, let's talk about where you are now. What has your life like with your sibling gone?
- a. Probe: What is happening in your life now?

- b. How has your experience of loss changed?
 - c. Tell me about your relationships with other members of your family.
 - d. Tell me about your relationships with your closest friends.
4. How did you integrate the loss of your sibling in the meaning of your life?
5. Is there anything else you'd like to share that would help me understand your experience?
6. Do you know of any other individuals who lost a sibling between the ages of thirteen and eighteen who are currently between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who might be willing to participate in this research?

Procedures

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through Facebook postings online through four grief related groups in Facebook and the researcher's personal Facebook page. The closed groups of Sibling Loss, and Loss of a Sibling, Grief the Unspoken Loss of a Sibling, and The Compassionate Friends Sounds of the Sibling will be accessed through postings on Facebook. These four groups are considered closed because membership is only granted if you have experienced the loss of a sibling. The researcher has been a longstanding member of all groups for two or more years. A brief invitational statement (Appendix A) was posted on each of these sites. Additionally, the invitation will be posted to the researcher's private Facebook site.

Participation

Individuals interested in participating contacted this researcher via e-mail. Once an individual had expressed interest in participating, the researcher contacted them to provide a thorough explanation of the purpose and procedures of the current study, along with the informed consent document. In addition to basic demographic information (participants' name, city and state of residence, phone and email address), age at the time of loss was also collected. The researcher also asked if potential participants were currently struggling with abuse or addiction, or mental illness as these participants were discouraged from participating. For those who agreed to participate, the researcher confirmed an interview time and date.

Data Collection

As each qualified participant responded, phone interviews were set up and conducted. Ninety minute interviews were conducted using the interview guide (Appendix D). If more time was needed for the participants to tell their stories, additional time was scheduled. If less time was required, then the interview ended. Audio taping was used to allow for precise transcription of the participants' interviews, also providing the opportunity for supervisor review of any of the interviews, and to cross check the data against the analysis process.

Participants had the opportunity to review the accuracy of the data in follow-up contact through the process of member checking. Participants were e- mailed a summary of their interview with the opportunity to revise their ideas or the summary for improved accuracy in representation of their story. If there were significant changes made during

the review of the summary, a follow-up interview was scheduled to document the revision and verify accuracy of the information recorded in the interview.

Data Analysis Plan

Reissmann (2008) stated that there is no one set protocol for the analysis of qualitative data. However, using the theoretical framework of family systems theory and psychosocial development each transcript was hand coded using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis takes the raw data that is gathered through the transcripts of each interview, and organizes the narratives by patterns and themes (Reissmann, 2008). Codes, which may be words or phrases, became labels for sections of data (Reissmann, 2008). The codes emerged from the content analysis of the narratives themselves. Thematic analysis provides a way for the researcher to get closer to their data and to develop a deeper understanding of the content that is revealed. In order to assure that each narrative is clearly recalled and that data analysis is the most accurate, each narrative was transcribed within three days following each interview to prevent any confusion, and also to allow for member checking to occur within a reasonable time frame.

Issues of Trustworthiness

Credibility

Through the use of well-established qualitative research strategies credibility was preserved. (Shenton, 2004). First, a minimum of two e-mail and two phone contacts was made with each participant which helped establish trustworthiness and credibility, otherwise known as prolonged engagement (Shenton, 2004). Researcher/participant

interactions occurred at the initial contact from the online postings, during the phone screening, during the semi-structured interview and any additional follow up to the interview that is necessary and through the use of member checking. To further protect credibility, there was also the promotion of openness and honesty among the participants, with the knowledge that they could remove themselves from this research at any time. This was to ensure that those who were participating in the data collection process were doing so freely and openly which further protects the credibility of the study (Shenton, 2004). Additionally, throughout the data collection process the researcher did participate in regular debriefings with their dissertation chair and other professional peers. This process of regularly checking in and debriefing allowed the researcher to air any risk of bias and reflect on the data gathering process as it occurred. Finally, the background, qualifications and experience of the investigator helped to enhance the credibility in this study. The credibility of the researcher is especially important in narrative studies as the researcher is a major player in the data collection and analysis (Shenton, 2004). As a social worker who had provided therapeutic support to adolescent and young adults for the past twelve years, this researcher is very familiar with working with this population.

Transferability

Transferability allows readers to take the information gained from this study and make associations between this research and their own research or personal experiences (Reissmann, 2008; Shenton, 2004). A detailed description of the data collection procedures and rich descriptions of the thematic elements of the narratives allowed

potential readers the ability to fully understand and relate to this experience, and then if necessary compare it with other research.

Dependability

Dependability is the means by which the information gained in research is accurate and consistent (Reissman, 2008). Dependability was assured through a detailed description of each step of the process used to carry out this research (Shenton, 2004). The researcher used audit trails, including journaling from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of findings, it included such information as preparation for interviews, observed themes, process of data gathering, methods of analysis, and outcomes (Reissmann, 2008).

Ethical Procedures

Individuals between the ages of eighteen and thirty, who lost a sibling when they were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen were all invited to voluntarily participate in this study. Individuals were invited to participate regardless of their gender, race, religious beliefs, cultural practices, age or the type of death their sibling experienced. The informed consent form (Appendix C) which included a statement of confidentiality, risks and benefits to the study as well as consent to audiotape was also provided to participants.

Participants were provided an informed consent form (Appendix C) inviting them to participate in a study about individuals who experienced the death of a sibling during their adolescent years upon responding to the Facebook messages. The consent form identified that this is a voluntary study, and that participants could withdraw from the

study at any time. The consent form identified that an interview of up to ninety minutes was to be scheduled, with the interview occurring as a telephone interview. It was further explained that each participant would be asked to review data summary of the interview for accuracy. Participants were made aware on this consent form that all information gathered will be for the purpose of this study will be kept confidential with no identifying information used in the study. Issues of confidentiality of the participant's stories were addressed through the use of an alpha numeric combination to create a pseudonym for each participant. All recording of the participants interview were labeled with the participant's pseudonym and be kept locked in a file cabinet. All transcriptions of the recording were kept electronically, which was also labeled by the participant's pseudonym and remained in a password protected electronic file. Participants were made aware that all data gathered through this research process would be kept in a locked file for a minimum of five years. All references to participants in the final write up of this study was done only using the participant's pseudonym. Since sharing stories of loss and grief can be a deeply difficult and painful experience, participants were informed of all risks prior to their participation in this study, as well as a de-briefing time was allotted during each interview. Participants also had the option at any point to end their involvement in the research. Additionally, as a trained mental health professional, if any concerns arose during the interview process as to the well-being of the participants, national resources to assist the individual were made available.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 3 included a description of the narrative approach that was used in this research to better understand the experience of participants who experienced the loss of a sibling during their adolescent years. The study design and rationale, the role of the researcher along with the potential for biases due to the researcher's personal experience with losing a sibling were all addressed. Participant selections, sampling strategy, instrumentation, methodology, data analysis issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns were all reviewed.

Chapter 4 will consist of a descriptive report of the data gathered through the interview process, reviewing consistent themes among the narratives as well as differences in each of the participant's stories. Participant demographics, a review of the data collection process and content analysis will all be presented with a clear explanation of all results.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the narratives of young adults who experienced the death of a sibling during their adolescence. The intent was to better understand the meaning of the bereavement experience of sibling loss by examining the narratives of the loss, and exploring the role of family, friends, and resources through their journey with loss. The phenomenon of interest is bereavement and sources of support (family, friends, and resources). A narrative analysis was conducted to examine the stories of bereavement each participant had, as well as to examine the differences in their experiences. The following research questions and subquestions were explored:

1. What is the narrative of bereavement for adults who experienced the death of a sibling while they were in their teens?
 - How does the narrative of bereavement begin?
 - What are the “turning points”?
2. What is the role of the family and friends in the bereavement process?
 - What is the role of family relationships?
 - What is the role of friendships?
 - What is the role of other resources?

Chapter 4 presents the results of the data collection process, the analysis and interpretation of themes from the participant’s interviews and transcripts, as well as a through description of the demographics of each participant and the differences in their experiences and shared stories. Processes to support trustworthiness are covered.

Finally, themes relevant to the experience of adolescent sibling bereavement are explored through the data analysis process.

Setting

All interviews were conducted via phone, at a time identified by the participant. All interviews were recorded through the use of an outside company NoNotes which recorded and transcribed each interview.

Participant 1's interview took place by phone, she had just dropped her mother off at the airport after an extended visit at her home. Her interview took place during the hour drive that she had back to her home. It is evidenced by breaks in the interview as she speaks to the parking attendant or is listening for directions. This participant resided on the West Coast. As this was the first interview conducted, the interview seemed to lose direction at points while the interview questions were referred to or a new direction was identified. The participant was very comfortable talking and sharing her experience which lead to a very friendly, familiar exchange.

Participant 2's interview took place while she was at her home. This is evidenced by her mentioning of baking a pie. This interview was scheduled and rescheduled twice in order to accommodate the participants other commitments as she identifies that she is a college student. This interview proceeded before the first interview was able to be reviewed for changes in the interview process to be made due to the participant's finals schedule that was coming up. The participant was very agreeable to participate in this study as she reached out to participate, but due to numerous time commitments the interview can seemed hurried or lack clarity in some areas.

The interview for participant 3 took place at her parents' home while she was home on a college break. The transcript has a few brief inaudible areas in it as the participant moved from room to room in her home. This participant followed up after her interview with an e-mail thanking me for interviewing her and hoping that she had answered all of my questions as sometimes it was hard for her to answer as she was moving from room to room as to avoid her other family members overhearing the conversation. This information added to the hesitation that was sometimes experienced in the interview where there were long pauses following questions, which initially I thought was due to her hesitation with the questions.

Participant 4 reached out to me through a Facebook post, this interview took place over a holiday break at the participant's home. This is evidenced by her mention of her children and that one was sleeping at the time of the interview. This participant seemed very comfortable to share her story, the participants comfort level may have been increased in that the participant knew of me as we were both employed through the same school district. As she had moved to the area and had lost her sibling before her move here I had no background knowledge of her loss until she reached out to participate.

The fifth participant was referred to me by a family member, she had expressed her interest in this study. I had a familiar awareness of her as she is from the same home town that I am, I was aware that she had lost a sibling, however we had not had any contact with one another in a decade. My Facebook post had been shared with her and through a family member she had reached out to participate. The first time we attempted an interview, the participant had double-booked herself accidentally. Therefore, we

conducted the interview the next day however this lead to me having to conduct the interview while sitting in my car as I was out of town with family. The interview and recording were able to take place however there is some background noise as it took place in the middle of a storm. The participant was very comfortable and relaxed in sharing her story which I correlate to how she was referred to me as well as that we had some knowledge of one another.

Participant 6 was referred to me by participant 5, they are sisters. Participant 6 is the older sister, I had assumed that she was out of my age range of the study until participant 5 recommended her. Participant 6 was aware that her sister had recommended her which may have increased the familiarity of the interview.

Participant 7 lived on the West Coast, due to the time difference this interview took place when the participant was out of work which was very late in the evening. Due to timing, or other commitments of the participant this was the shortest interview and the participant is heard talking to someone else at her home letting them know she will be done with this interview soon. The participant was comfortable answering questions however she struggled to provide details and elaborate often. In addition, reception was sometimes an issue leading to the participant being asked to repeat herself.

The final interview took place with participant 8 at her home on a weekend afternoon. This participant reached out to participate through a Facebook post on my personal page. She resided locally and had been made aware of my research because of our shared experience; we had no knowledge of one another prior to this interview.

There were not personal or organizational conditions that influenced the participants or their experience at the time of the study that would influence this researcher's interpretation of the study results, such as changes in personnel, budget cuts, or other trauma. Participants and this researcher did not share any organizational affiliations with the exception of Participant 4, both the researcher and participant worked for the same school district but in different buildings with very minimal contact. As far as personal affiliations, I had some knowledge of Participant 5 and 6 due to both being originally from the same small community, however there had not been contact within the last decade. Participants 5 and 6 were affiliated via family relationship; all other participants identified their interest in participation through membership in Facebook or one of four Facebook groups dedicated to sibling loss. These affiliations did not create any financial or other potential trauma.

Demographics of Participants

Homogeneous sampling was used, with the criteria for inclusion as individuals who were between the ages of eighteen and thirty who experienced the death of a sibling when they were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen. Participants were asked to decline or withdraw their participation if they identified any current substance abuse or addiction, or current mental illness. Participants were accessed through the use of postings through Facebook on four grief related groups, Sibling Loss and Loss of a Sibling, Grief the Unspoken Loss of Sibling, and The Compassionate Friends Sounds of the Sibling and through this researchers personal Facebook page. Additionally, at the end

of each interview each participant was asked if they knew of anyone else who could participate, snowball sampling was employed.

There were eight participants in this study ranging in age from eighteen to thirty years old (18, 19, 23, 25, 29, 29, 30, and 30). All eight participants were female. Two of the participants were based on the West Coast, the remaining six were all based on the East Coast. Two participants (5 & 6) were from the same family, they were siblings, one of which was identified through snowball sampling. During the course of sharing their stories all participants identified that they either were currently in college or had completed a college education and were currently employed.

Data Collection

Eight individuals consented to and participated to interviews. All interviews regardless of participant location took place via phone, using an audio recording company, NoNotes, who recorded and transcribed all interviews.

As each qualified participant responded via e-mail or through Facebook Messenger a phone interview was set up. As identified in chapter 3, participants were to send an e-mail to express their interest in participating to the researchers Walden University e-mail address. This eventually did take place with all participants, however participants 1, 2, and 8 did reach out first to express interest through Facebook Messenger, a messaging service embedded in Facebook. Each participant was kindly asked to e-mail the researcher through the Walden University e-mail as identified in the participation invitation.

Ninety minute interviews were scheduled and planned for each participant. If less time was required, then the interview ended. In order from participant 1 to 8 the interviews took; seventy-one minutes, fifty-four minutes, fifty-three minutes, sixty-seven minutes, sixty-eight minutes, seventy-four minutes, thirty-four minutes, and forty-seven minutes. No interview went more than the scheduled ninety minutes time frame, and no participant needed a follow up interview scheduled. Audio taping was used through NoNotes, this allowed for transcription of all interviews. Two interviews, participant 5 and participant 8's had to be transcribed a second time and the first transcription was not accurate to the audio recording that was reviewed.

In order to assure that each narrative was clearly recalled and that data analysis was the most accurate, each narrative was transcribed within three days following each interview to prevent any confusion, the transcription was completed by NoNotes. Following transcription, participants had the opportunity to review the accuracy of the data in follow-up contact through the process of member checking. Participants were e-mailed a summary of their interview with the opportunity to revise their ideas or the summary for improved accuracy in representation of their story. Only five participants took part in the member checking process, all eight participants were e-mailed their interview summary only participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7 responded with follow-up confirmation that the document they received was accurate to their interview and personal story. Participants 3, 6, and 8 had a second follow-up e-mail sent with their interview summary attached a second time. After waiting ten days following the second e-mail, it was identified that the participants would not be responding to the member

checking process. As a result of the member checking process, there were no significant changes made by the participants during the review of their interview summary, there were no follow-up interviews scheduled to document the revision and verify accuracy of the interviews. The results of the member checking process produced no significant changes made to the interview summaries. This data collection method was consistent with the plan presented in Chapter 3.

Interview Narratives

Participant 1 (P1). P1 was a twenty-three year old female who lives on the West Coast. The participant lost her brother when she was seventeen years old and her brother was twenty years old, she identified that he had an issue with substance abuse prior to his death. She grew up in the East Coast where she lived with her mother and father and her brother lived nearby with this girlfriend and his young daughter. On the night that her brother died, P1 reported that her father had gone out to find her brother and bring him back to his home. She identified he was associating with someone that they (her parents and herself) did not like him to be around. Her father was able to locate her brother and bring him to his home where he stayed that night alone. When they had not heard from her brother the next morning and were unable to contact him, the participant's father went back the house and found her brother deceased.

The participant identified that she and her brother got along well, he was her only sibling. She stated that in middle and high school her brother could be mean to her, but they really got along very well and were very close prior to his passing.

P1 identified that her biggest support following the loss of her brother were her friends and the support she had in school. She stated that she desperately wanted to go back to school, she was a junior in high school she just wanted to get back to her “normal life” as soon as she could following her loss. Her friends also played a major role in supporting her, P1 identified that “when you lose someone you find out who your real friends are, who will be there for you.” She identified that her friends protected her from other people and their failed attempts at being nice to her, or they kept those who were just curious and who wanted to know what was going on away from her. She identified that there are still three friends that she is close to even though she has moved cross country and her brother death was six years ago.

In terms of family, P1 saw her mother and father as significant supports to her now, identifying her mother as her best friend. However, in the year following her brother’s death they went through a separation themselves and in that time she struggled in seeing them as supports to her. She felt as if so many people worried about her parents and how they were doing that no one really paid attention to her and her needs.

Participant 2 (P2). Participant 2 is an eighteen year old female, she lost her sister when she was sixteen years old and her sister was nineteen years old. The participant is the youngest of three siblings, it was her middle sister who was killed in a car accident. Her sister was a passenger in a car that went through a stop sign and hit a tree.

P2 identifies that she and her sister were at a point in their relationship where they were ok with one another, where they could actually have normal, mature conversations.

She identified her sister as the trouble maker, who had been in and out of jail a couple of times. Regardless, she identifies that she was closer to this sister than her oldest one. She identifies that she and her oldest sister still struggled in their relationship, she felt as if her oldest sister tried to mother her and that put distance between them.

The biggest supports that P2 identifies were a teacher at the private school she attended and friends. She called this teacher for support shortly after learning about her sister's death and her friends. Because she and her sister who died were close in age they shared a similar group of friends who continued to be a support to her. Her best friend was staying at her house and was with her when she found out that her sister had died, her best friend continued to stay by her side throughout the services and following weeks. P2 identifies that she is still very close to this friend and she has been her biggest support since she lost her sister. She states that "I needed at that time was the distractions, you know just helping me, we would play a game or we would go for a walk or even If I wanted to we would just sit talk about everything and cry it was really just what I wanted to do, they were very good, telling my mood and telling what I wanted to do, What I did not want to do. They were very good that I cannot make anything or do anything that was uncomfortable or it was always pretty much my thing that they were very good in knowing where to go, how to help."

In examining her family, P2 felt that they were very distant and continued to be that way, that they are unable to help and support her in the grieving process. She felt that both her mother and father were pushing themselves further and further away and isolating themselves. She stated that she does not blame her mother for not being able to

help her because she realized she was so devastated herself, but she recognizes that she needed more from her parents than they are able to provide for her emotionally.

Participant 3 (P3). Participant 3 is a nineteen year old female, her brother was eighteen years old when he was killed in a car accident. P3 was seventeen years old when he died. P3 shared that the night her brother died it was her birthday, so her brother and their shared group of friends were all at their house at a bonfire. A few of the people there decided to run to a nearby convenience store to pick up drinks (non-alcoholic she shared), her brother jumped into the front seat of the car and they took off, P3 shared that the driver was speeding on wet roads and went around a corner and slid hitting into a tree, her brother was the only one killed in the accident.

P3 identified that she and her brother were very close, they shared all the same friends. She states “We were really, really close and he was kind of a trouble maker and so, I would always just have his back in that sense. So, that made us really close and then we moved as a family a lot and so, we always just were with each other and I’ve really didn’t – I didn’t really make friends easily so, I would just always tag along with him.”

P3 identified that her brother's death was only a year and a half ago, she feels that things are still very hard and difficult and her supports are changing every day. This is especially true as since her brother's death she has left and gone a significant distance from home to attend college. Therefore, the people who were a support to her at home are not as available to her when she is at college. The one support she consistently identifies is there for her is a female best friend, who was there at her birthday bonfire that night and continues to look out for and support her.

P3 says that she and her family (her mother and father) were very close before her brother's death and continue to be very close since his death. She attributes this to the many moves they made as a family and how they have always counted on one another to support and adjust to the new places they have lived. She identifies that they are definitely things now that it's just harder to do. P3 said that it is still really hard to talk to each other about how they are feeling or what is going on with each person individually, that they all recognize her brother is gone but they struggle in being able to talk about him or share about him in any way. She feels that she has had to put her feelings aside often to help her mother, this resulted in her feeling like she grieved her brother's death at a later point.

Participant 4 (P4). Participant 4 is a thirty year old female, she was eighteen years old when her sister died, her sibling was seventeen years old. Her sister died suddenly and unexpectedly, to this day the participant and her family have never had a clear answer as to what caused her death. It was ruled that it was heart failure, however this was caused by the extended time she received CPR. The participant, her sister and her sister's three friends were all at their families' lake house for the weekend, the participant's sister wanted to know what it was like to have a drink and to learn a couple card games before she went to college in a few months. So the participant taught them the game pitch and they had a very mild mixed drink (so mild that the toxicology report did not even register alcohol in her system), following this her sister started to feel warm and unwell – which ended with her becoming sick in the bathroom and then becoming unconscious and needing CPR.

The participant states that she is the middle child of three girls, it was her youngest sister who passed away. She states that she and her youngest sister were very close, they did a lot together. P4 shares that her older sister was always very different than the two of them that she was and still is more difficult to connect with and get along with. She states that if it is around their mutual passion for animals than they can connect but outside of that they really struggle in their relationship.

P4 states that when her sister died, she had just moved away from home to accept her first job, so she was living in a new place, surrounded by people who did not know her or her family well. She said that support came for her in the most unexpected places, from other people at work who she did not know well, to the very close relationships she developed with the people she rented from, P4 states she was adopted into their family. P4 also states that her father was her biggest sense of support through this loss, that because of this loss it opened up communication even more between them.

When looking at her family, P4 shared that prior to her sister's death her dad was always the quiet person, the one who at soccer games would always stand to the side not talking to anyone. P4 states that her sister's death totally changed him, he talked to everyone, and he managed his grief by talking, and didn't stop. Whereas she felt that her mom was the social everything, and following her sister's death she shut out the world. She stopped going to church, she didn't want to talk to anybody, because she was afraid that people would make her cry. She feels that everyone sort of used tip gloves with my mom for a while, she never got back to her full self. She just avoided every situation where that would happen. And it took her about maybe a year and a half before she

would consider going to church, and she used to go every day and she won't go to church at all.

Participant 5 (P5). Participant 5 is a twenty-nine year old female, she is the middle child of three siblings. She was seventeen years old when she lost her younger brother who was sixteen at the time. He was killed in a car accident, he and his three other friends were out driving on some back roads. They were driving fast trying to get that feeling you get when you drive over hills and your stomach drops, the car they were in was going too fast and when they landed the driver could not control the car and they landed upside down in a ditch. The other three in the car were able to get out, but P5's brother was unconscious and ended up passing at the hospital due to a head injury.

P5 stated that she and her brother were only a year and a half apart in age, so they were really close, the best of friends. She states that they grew up together, they shared similar friends, they were partners in crime they shared everything. P5 states that she and her older sister were/are not as close, they have a love/hate relationship. P5 feels that they often are just on the opposite ends of the spectrum, she is sad and worried and P5 would be happy and it would lead to a divide that could result in them not talking for months.

At the time when P5's brother was killed, P5's parents were also in the middle of a separation. This added another layer to the stressors that were on the family at the time of her brother's death. Due to all of this, P5 made the decision to change the college she would attend in the fall to be closer to her family and sister to have more support. She

states that her father was her biggest sense of support that he was there for her even when she was ignoring him and pushing people away. He was the constant who would pick her up from college and check in on her.

P5 states that she had friends who were there for her, but really for the most part no one knew what to say or what to do. Her brother's friends were her friends too, they were around, they would talk about her brother, and they remembered his birthday and the day he died. P5 identified that one real sense of friends and support came when she moved away even after college and reconnected with a high school friend who had also lost his sister, she said it was just unspeakable, they knew what the other was experiencing or what they were thinking. They were just there for each other and could understand that void that was there. On anniversaries of their siblings passing they would go for hikes, not to talk about their siblings but just to recognize what the day was.

P5 shared that her family has gone through their ups and downs. Following her brother's death, her father moved back into their family home for a while. P5 feels he changed significantly from her brother's death, he stopped drinking, he found religion, he became more open, less angry and reserved. Her father only stayed in their family home a short time, and her parents did eventually divorce. P5 feels a lot changed with her mom, where she feels that her and her sister and dad turned inward to one another for support her mother turned outward. She needed the support of the community of others, P5 feels she wanted others to know and see her grief. She made it so people knew that they were the family who had a son/brother who died.

Participant 6 (P6). Participant 6 is a thirty year old female, she was eighteen years old when her sixteen year old brother was killed in a car accident. P6 is the oldest of three siblings, and she is the older sister of P5. As described above her brother was killed in a car accident due to a head injury. He had been in a car with three of his friends, and due to speed and driver error the car flipped and ended up in a ditch.

P6 identifies that she was in college when her brother was killed, she shared that her sister (P5) and her brother she felt were closer than she and her brother were. It's not that the two of them did not get along, it's just that her sister and brother were closer. They shared more in common, they did more together.

P6 identifies that her husband, who was her boyfriend at the time of her brother's death has been her biggest support through this loss. As P6 identifies he has been her rock, her anchor. The two of them did not attend the same college, it was by some chance that he was visiting her at college when she got that call that she needed to come home and he was able to be there with her. P6 shared that there has been no one more supportive and understanding than he has been.

When looking at P6's relationship with friends, she identifies that even though she was in college it was her high school friends who were there for her following her brother's death. They all came home to be there for his calling hours, they were all very tight, they just got it as she put it. She could talk openly and honestly with them, she could mention her brother and was comfortable to do it. She felt that her friends at

college were there, but they didn't know her the same, they really didn't get it as others did.

P6 shared the biggest struggles within her family, prior to her brothers passing she was very close with her mother. As her sister P5 had identified at the time of their brothers passing their parents were separated. P6 felt that all three of her sibling had a lot of anger at their father because of this separation. Following her brother's death she felt that they all became codependent on one another, just very intertwined with one another because they each understood what was going on and shared this experience. P6 felt for a time she stayed very close with her mother, but as their coping styles changed so did their relationship. P6 felt that her mother needed to bask in the support that she received following the loss of her son, the "adoration" as P6 called it. She created a shrine to her brother, P6 felt she was always looking for attention due to her loss. A similarity that both P5 and P6 identified. P6 felt that her father became very private in his grief, he found religion which was a support to him. Her sister (P5) she feels still struggles as well, she knows that she reached out and has had some counseling at points, but she identifies that she still struggles and their relationship still struggles because of this loss.

Participant 7 (P7). Participant 7 is a twenty-nine year old female, she was fifteen years old when she lost her eighteen year old sister in a car accident. Her sister was a college student, she was away her freshman year of college when she and her two other friends were all killed by a drunk driver on a college campus. They had all been walking back to campus, when they accepted a ride from a driver who passed them going up the hill, they did not know the driver or have any idea that he was intoxicated, it was

supposed to be a ride not even a quarter mile up the hill back to the dorm rooms, and the driver sped up, lost control of the car and hit a tree killing four people.

P7 was a tenth grader at the time her sister was killed, she shared that she and her sister used to fight a lot when they were younger, but with her sister being in college they had gotten pretty close, she was like the cool older sister. She considered her a friend even more than just a sister.

P7 went on to share that once her sister graduated from high school she had wanted to move, to change schools or to go to a private school. She was not happy where she lived or at the school she was at, she stated that she did not have a lot of close friend even before her sister was killed. When her sister died she felt that the friends she had tried to be nice and helpful but they just really could not help, she recalls one person who she considered to be one of her only good friends say “Oh, it’s okay, I know how you feel”, because her grandmother had passed away. P7 said she was like, you have no idea how I feel but at least she tried to say something. By the end of her tenth grade school year, P7 and her mother picked up and moved out of state so she felt she could start over somewhere new, P7 shared she had absolutely no problem just picking up and leaving. Where she moved to no one had any idea of her background and what had happened to her unless she shared it and states she refrained from sharing it with many others.

When examining family, P7 shared that her mother and father were divorced, they had been for a significant period of time and her mother was remarried. P7 states that she and her mother were always very close, this dynamic she states has not changed. P7 shares that her mother has often encouraged her or tried to get her to talk about her sister

and the loss she has experienced but she states that she just really is not open to that. P7 shares that following her on high school graduation she ended up on the opposite coast for college and in time her mother moved there to follow her as well. She states they just have always been close and supports for one another. P7 identifies that with her father their relationship remained the same from before her sister's death to after. P7 shares that they struggled in their relationship before her death, in how they connected and that remained after her death. P7 identifies that now with time and age that that their relationship has begun to improve.

Participant 8 (P8). Participant 8 is a thirty year old female, she was thirteen years old when she lost her eighteen year old brother on a family trip to visit her grandparents and go to a well-known family amusement park. She states that she and her family had saved up for a significant period of time to make this trip possible. On the first night they were there they all went out to dinner (her grandparents, parents and her brother and herself). They had to take two cars, so on the way back P8 vividly remember fighting with her brother about who was going to ride in which car. Her brother ended up riding with their grandfather and their mother, she rode in the second car with their father and grandmother. P8 remembers seeing a car run a red light and hit the car in front of them, her brother was seriously injured and brought to the hospital where he was on life support for a short time until her parents made the decision to take him off it.

P8 recalls returning home from out of state, it was the only time she has ever flown first class. P8 states that her parents were the biggest sense of support, they tried to shield her and protect her from some of what was going on with her brother. She shares

that her parents had a priest share with her that her brother had passed, they were trying to be as gentle as possible. P8 shares that they've just always been there for her, probably more than most parents because they overcompensate at times, being that she was the only child.

P8 recalls being excited to go back to school when she returned from being out of school for nearly a week. She recalls how awkward it then was. She feels like her brother's death was the first death that a lot of her friends had experienced, her friends just didn't know what to say or how to react. She recalls feeling very awkward, but going forward P8 feels that also helped her to build a lot of strong relationships, because she had to learn to depend on these friends because she did not have a sibling to turn to. P8 reports to this days she has an extremely tight knit group of friends in high school and in college, P8 identified these friends like they were sisters to her. To this day they get together several times a year; they get their families together continuing these friendships.

P8 states that she and her family have always been very close, even before her brother's accident. Following his accident as a teenager they had some difficulties, some which she attributes to the normal growing up. But parts she identified with trying to hang out with her brother's friends who were older, trying to be accepted by them, going to parties, "just pushing the limits". Even so, she feels like they remain very close, they live in close proximity to her and to this day she talks with or interacts with them daily.

Data Analysis

Coding

As was described in chapter 3, all interviews were transcribed through the use of NoNotes. The auditory recording of each interview was reviewed three times, and then the transcriptions were checked for accuracy. Two interviews, interview 5 and 8 had to be re-transcribed due to issues found within the transcription. From the transcription each interview was coded.

According to Reissmann (2008) there is no one set protocol for the analysis of qualitative data. However, using the theoretical framework of family systems theory and psychosocial development each transcript was hand coded using a thematic analysis. Thematic analysis takes the raw data that is gathered through the transcripts of each interview, and organizes the narratives by patterns and themes (Reissmann, 2008). Codes, which may be words or phrases, became labels for sections of data (Reissmann, 2008). The codes emerged from the content analysis of the narratives themselves. The codes that were revealed included strong sibling relationships, risk taking behaviors, distance from family member (s), strength in friendships, need to return to everyday life, counseling support, change in family expectations, emotional struggles, feeling overlooked, school as a support, school as a struggle, avoidance of emotions, overcompensating for family, struggles in relationships with surviving siblings, continued connections with those who were lost, how we remember them (those who were lost). All codes are available in appendix E. Thematic analysis continued by examining each of these codes within the context of Bowen's family systems theory, Erickson's

psychosocial theory and Rando's six R's model of loss. From the codes and the texts associated with each of the codes I was able to group the codes into conceptually similar categories, this led to the development of five primary themes: returning to school, being there, emotional separation, identification of self/moving forward, and family dynamics with departed and surviving. These are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1

Results of Thematic Analysis: Codes Organized by Themes

Returning to School	Being There	Emotional Separation	Identification of Self/Moving Forward	Family Dynamics with Departed and Surviving
school experience	parent(s)	anger at sibling who died	college attendance	continued connections with who was lost
college experience	friendship new friendships friendships with surviving siblings re-establishing friendships with those who lost a sibling boyfriend	avoidance of parents/family avoidance of feelings overcompensating-making up for loss struggles in relationship with surviving siblings struggles in relationships with friends numbness	professional in the workplace make a difference sibling would not want me to give up what is important now compassion to self	how we remember them connections within family dynamic

(table continues)

Returning to School	Being There	Emotional Separation	Identification of Self/Moving Forward	Family Dynamics with Departed and Surviving
		depended on difference of experience of loss of surviving siblings growing up to soon	finding direction	

Themes

Returning to School

This theme emerged from the following group of codes: school experience, and college experience. As all participants were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen when they lost a sibling, they were all either in high school or college at the time of their loss, and all had experiences with schooling in some way. P1, P2, P3, P5, P7, and P8 were all high school students at the time of their loss, all participants but P2 were in public schools. P2 attended a private school. P4 and P6 were in their first year of college. Participants had a range of reactions to the experience of returning to school. P1, and P7 described school and or college as serving a “normalizing” or “focusing” experience after the sibling loss. P1 shared:

I was a junior in high school and I actually wanted to go back to school. I wanted to start the semester; we had new classes to start in January and I wanted to go back to school for my first day. This was the day of my brother’s funeral and my

parents won't let me. I went the day after his funeral which now when I think about it, it wasn't a good idea; like I should've taken more time. But at that time I just like wanted to get back to my normal life and do the things I was used to doing. I felt like it was the only place where I was going to be able to be normal.

This was further echoed by P7 who shared:

I think school was probably a way of coping for me. School for me was like a good outlet. This is probably a little weird but... I never had issues with my grades or anything like that was a way for me to keep myself busy and it's very focused. When you're in school, it's very internal kind of like internalized, I didn't handle a lot of things, so I just welcomed the challenge of school, it was good for me. That was like a way to stay busy and focus on other things.

For these participants, school was experienced as a place of normalcy, a welcomed distraction when everything around them was "consumed in loss". In contrast, the school experience was described by the other participants as awkward, and somewhat threatening. P2 described her experience:

School sucks, I was a junior when my sister passed and I wanted to go back to school immediately. That Monday I wanted to go to school because I thought I am good with distractions, I thought every something would be the same in my life, something did not change. I thought school was going to be my 'go-to', it is the same. Man was I wrong? I got to school. As soon I walked in to the door, I felt like everybody staring at me, like everybody stopped what they were doing

and just turned and looked at me. I hated people staring at me. I got into the classroom; I sat in my chair and put my book bag down to the sides. Everybody's staring at me, my teacher staring at me, she was like standing right next to my desk and she was like, we are going to make the announcement do you want to be here, do you want to go to down to the guidance office, really I guess want to go down to guidance office because I am not about to just sit here and lose it in the class. I went down to the guidance office, my counselor was actually really good family friend of ours. She was the only good part of school. She was always there, she was nice to go, very good family friend and I talked to her like an hour and a half and I think I even completely missed my whole first hour. I just felt like everybody was staring at me and the entire building, I think I ended up leaving like by third hour. I couldn't handle it anymore, everybody staring at me so I ended up leaving and I didn't think I would get back to school.

Being There

This theme was developed from the following codes; parent, parent(s), friendship, new friendship, friendships with surviving siblings friends, re-establishing friendships with those who lost siblings as well, boyfriend. The participants were split with P1, P5, P7, and P8 identifying either one or both parents as their biggest sources of support through the bereavement process. P2, P3, P4, and P6 identified an existing friend or boyfriend, or a new friendship that formed after their loss as their biggest source of support. For example, P1 identified that her mother has always been her biggest support and her best friend. P4 shared that her biggest support was:

My dad, he did lots of stuff to support me, but it was more than just the things he did, it was the unsaid stuff. My family was in torment; we didn't talk a lot about a lot of stuff. It's more of show by actions instead of by words, that's my family. But my dad was just the one I went to through all of it.

This was echoed by P5:

My dad was there even when I was purposely doing anything I could to push him away and ignore him. It was my freshman year of college and he would pick me up just to check in on me, just to see me. To some degree I think that I wanted to hate my dad because I could be angry at him that I didn't have my brother to talk to anymore. My dad was there and did his best, I mean he was a parent who lost their son and I was a teenager that didn't know what I was doing or how to deal with grief after my brother died. Even when I didn't want him I know I could depend on him.

P7 continued this theme:

I would definitely say my parents. Yes, even though I couldn't always open up to them about how I was feeling because I felt like I had to be like I said strong and bubbly and happy. Today I have definitely stuck it out and show how they can work through it together. And they've just always been there for me, always.

These four participants all identified that a parent was their biggest support through the bereavement process; the "constant" they would go to when they were struggling. In contrast, P6 who is the older sister of P5 saw her boyfriend (now husband) as her biggest support.

Talk about a rock, I mean that's really what it was. I mean, he was there that day my brother died, by the Grace of God, whatever that is, there was a mysterious way that he worked out. I can't use words stronger than, just like an anchor or a rock or something to kind of keep everything, the water smooth. You know, it's that he has always been able to see what I need, there has been no one else that has been more supportive. I could go on and on, but I don't know what else to say.

The message of consistency and someone being there the moment that they found out that a sibling had passed that was also shared by P3.

My best friend she is really my biggest support. She was there that night when it happened, she has being my best friend forever. At the time I think my brother kind of liked her and I knew she has had regrets for that not being with him or spending more time with him. But even though she felt this way, she put this all aside for my feelings and to be there for me as a friend. She just really put that aside and just was always there but, was really sensitive and just like watched what I needed.

P2 identified a friend as the biggest support as well; this friend was also there and knew her sister as well,

My biggest support is my best friend H, she has been my friend since I was eight years old. So she grew up with me and with my sister and she knew everything. She was very helpful. She's still is. She'll probably always be the one person I turn to.

In all cases, the person who was identified as primary sources of support was one who had known the sibling prior to their death (as a family member or friend), and in many cases was there when the participant learned about their sibling's death.

Emotional Separation

The codes identified used to develop the theme of emotional separation included: anger at the sibling who died, avoiding parents and family, avoidance of feelings, overcompensating, making up for loss, struggles in relationships with surviving siblings, struggles in relationships with friends, numbness, depended on, difference in experience of loss with surviving sibling and growing up too soon. Thus, two dimensions of this theme emerged. While all of these codes had the common element of the distance and separation, some participants described it as distance between themselves and another; while others described it as a "separation" from themselves.

P2 shared the anger she felt at her sibling for leaving her, and described the emotional separation that it caused for her.

I just remember being mad at her, because I just thought it was rude that she just left. It was my junior year about to be my senior year in high school, she wasn't going to be there to see me graduate or be there for my dance recitals and I was like, really. You couldn't have waited, you had to do it now, I just remember being mad at her leaving me hanging all alone. Because it was just me and her that we were living at my mom's house, I was all by myself now. I was just mad that she put me in that situation.

P2 also shared the emotional separation she experienced for her parents following the loss of her sister, the need to removed herself from them:

I remember just not wanting to eat and I didn't want to be at my house. I just wanted to be anywhere that I could be. My friend called, I stayed there like four days because I couldn't just handle my parents and seeing them like that.

P4 shared that she too separated herself from her mother:

Clearly she's never going to be the same person. I know a big chunk of her life is gone, I understand that. I think what she needs to go for counseling. Everything completely just revolves around her (my mother) all the time, like she made a Facebook page, like a memorial Facebook page for her (my sister) which is fine. It was actually my idea to do it but now she's like post every single day and like novels about just anything, like she sees a car and it was the same color like my sister's car. It's just a huge deal. All these things that have happened and she's just like all the time, every single day she's on it. Whenever I go to my mom's house there's just stuff everywhere and always reminding me. I guess it's like her whole computer is just full of stuff about her (my sister) and nothing else. She doesn't take the time to dedicate to me or my other sister like she should. I just feel like me or my other sister were to part ways she would completely regret the way she's been acting because she wouldn't even know what to do. She has a --. I don't know how to describe this. She hasn't put forth any efforts to us. I think she's terrified of her (my sister) being forgotten. I can't stress to her that the

people that love can never forget her. But it like she just doesn't even remember the rest of us.

Participant 5 described the experience of emotional separation as one where she felt separated from herself:

I didn't feel if I was myself; I didn't feel the same as me. One thing I never understood like for about six months I knew I was supposed to be crying, realizing that my brother died. I just didn't feel like that is real, one of the therapists I talked to said "you should not blame yourself" you know I had guilt over that when my brother died, that was norm and I didn't cry over it.

The therapist I saw said children lack the capability, they I was in such shock about it, that I tried to protect it and she (the therapist) felt like she didn't think that my brain was not going to allow me to go through that. I always remember that thing was extremely frustrating because when everybody is going back to their life, and I wasn't even feeling anything.

P5's expressed feeling disconnected and this was evidenced by her explanation of her relationship with her sister, (P5 and P6 are sisters), where she stated:

I was trying to deal with it because my sister and I were never close. I don't know why and I wonder if she knows. I think we kind of differently handled things because obviously we both lost our brother but I would not take anything away from her (my sister) but I felt like I lost the best friend, somebody you have grown up with, I felt like I had lost my best friend. I don't know who I was anymore, I grew angry somedays, my life was supposed to be different, he (my

brother) was supposed to be there to get my humor. This feeling would never be taken away but during your past and you don't want anything new and there was this feeling of emptiness that no other relationship could fill, even my other sibling.

The emptiness, the separations, the anger, and consequences to relationships were also experienced by P8.

I do remember... I remember kind of overcompensating. I remember trying to be funny and very positive and trying to make the best of the situation because I didn't like seeing my parents so sad. And I still chose to stay and like that, very bubbly but there was a time in my early twenties that I was always like, man I'm kind of masking some of my true feelings just like I am pressured, I did back then. And it really became evident when I had met my now husband. I would check out sometimes and I get really quiet when I get upset. And I wouldn't be able to communicate with him why I was upset. And because I'd always been so bubbly I just was so used to putting on happy face and when things weren't happy I was into the habit of shutting down and just being quiet.

Identification of Self/Moving Forward

The codes identified in identification of self/moving forward included: college attendance, professional in the workplace, making a difference, what is important to me now, sibling who passed would not want me to give up, compassion to self, and finding direction.

All participants identified that they were either currently in college or that they had graduated from college. P8 is currently a teacher, P7 is in school to be a physician's assistant, P6 is an attorney, P5 works in an assisted living facility and P4, P3, P2, and P1 are all college students. P1 was going to be graduating in May. All participants expressed the need to find a way to move forward, P8 identified that:

Yes I think my mission in life is to make a difference as a teacher. I really want to have close connections with my students. I'm not just there to teach them the curriculum and a common core and pass them on to third grade. I just really want to be connected with them and help be a support to them, help get to know them and be a support to little children who come with so much baggage and so just trying to use my experience and relate it to the troubles that kids come to school with. I may not always know what it is but just to be a listening here and a support and a friend... as one of their teacher guiding them through what they need to learn. And just I want to connect not just to the students but with people in general. Life's so short. It's so easy to get caught up and this and that and I really... I think valuing family and friendship and connection is important and I know that comes from my experience of loss.

P8 described moving forward as using her experience of loss to understand and be compassionate towards others who may have experienced loss or pain. She continued:

You just have to keep going. There were times that I was just so sad and distraught but I knew I had to keep going because I knew my brother would want me to. And that I can hang onto the memories. I felt it's so important to share

what happened to me and my brother. I don't want him to be forgotten. I don't want all those quirky little stories that we have growing up to ever be forgotten. And then it does get easier you just never will forget the good and bad.

P4: The way I moved forward was following these words of advice. "In the whole scheme of your life is this important? I tell my husband this like every single day, when he is freaking out because milk is spilled down the counter or whatever, the thing I say to him always is, "In the whole scheme of your life is this important?" And the answer to that one would be, "No, the milk is not that big of a deal." I think because I didn't really know anybody where I was living when my sister died, I had to move forward this way. The little things are not that important, it's the people you have in your life, the way you treat them and depend on them that makes them important.

The thematic element shared across all of the participants was to find a way or ways to move forward and manage the grief they experienced.

Family Dynamics with Departed and Surviving

A final area that participants touched on was the continued connections that they had with who they lost, and the struggles that they faced in doing this as each member of their family was so different.

P4: Not many people understand that weird idiocracy this was the last thing...like my parents dog that was her dog; it was so hard when she died because that was the connection to my sister. Next week I have to put down my horse that I got because she died, because she and I went to my friend's house and

watched this horse be born, and when my sister died he called me and said, “Anytime I see this horse I think of you and your sister. If you ever have a chance to have a horse, he is yours.” When I moved I got this horse and now I’m waiting for my friend to let us borrow his excavator so we can dig up a hole big enough because he is going down next week, and that’s like another connection gone. All those little things you think about like random things.

P6 echoed this connection when she talks about the connections that she sees in her own children that remind her of her brother.

I recognized this and it's really our oldest daughter she's now twelve, and she started to get into, a couple of years ago, something in like social studies class, they were doing like Greek mythology and something to do with the Greeks and so she started reading, like bizarre and she got over immersed in it. She started taking out more books and she started reading about all the Gods and, like really like we have a stockpile of books now. She got really in depth to it and the bizarre thing is my brother did the same exact thing. He did the exact same thing. He has had so much about all the ancient Gods and the Greek Gods and all of the different stories about the Greeks, the ancient Greeks, and the Romans and all of this stuff. It has just been so cool watching my daughter develop these interests and knowing they were once my brothers. And not one of us ever said to her, that her uncle liked those things, only until later, much later, did anyone ever say to her 'you know, your uncle was into this too.'

This is yet another connection that has helped P6 through bereavement. The impact of connections because of children is echoed by P1:

I think having my niece has certainly helped too. She looks just like him (my brother), she acts like him, and it's just there's always still a piece of him. We've always thought since she was a baby that like she has some connection with him because when she was a baby, she would always make a noise and then try to talk like up at the sky. And now she's like "Britney I talked to my daddy" and I'm like "Your daddy in heaven", and she's like yeah I did and she's was like "daddy loves me" and I'm like "oh does he love me" and she's like no and I was like "okay, that's typical answer." So, like all of the stuff she says connects me to him.

P8 shared the story of her brother and her connection with him because of the bouncy balls;

On our way down to Florida, where the accident happened, I remember very vividly that my brother was playing with a little bouncy ball in the airport. He ended up losing it, I made him feel like something terrible was going to happen and of course it did. I would not play with bouncy balls. I wouldn't have it in the house. I wouldn't have my own children have them. Anyway, when we finally made the very high anxiety decision to bring our own children to Disney, we get down there. We go to a restaurant, and in the restaurant there, there's a huge cylinder of bouncy balls. My husband pointed it out. Look at those bouncy balls and I'm like yes with that. That's a sign. It was just so funny. Yes, we had a

picture where I didn't realize that I have the calendar now that I made up all the pictures from the trip two years ago and in the background there, its bouncy balls.

It's almost like he was in the picture with us.

The continued connections that P1, P2, P4, and P8 talk about have been positive experiences for them, positive connections. Within the family dynamic though participants identified ways that family members continued their connections with those they lost but lead to the participants experiencing other emotions. P6 stated:

My mother has a shrine, literally you know, that's how she's coped. It's very, she needs to bask in the light of it. You know, the adoration I call it. My mother found religion at various points, and she went to the whole like the psychic readings, and the people who thought they could talk to him and she bought in. Like there were some strange times with some really strange information about that and that's how she coped and that's how she still copes.

P2 stated:

Me and my mom are in a very big debate right now. I think that my mom --. Clearly she's never going to be the same person. I know a big chunk of her life is gone, I understand that but I don't feel like she's going about it. This completely just revolved around her all the time, like she made a Facebook page in like a memorial Facebook page for her which is fine. It was actually my idea to do it but now she's like post every single day and like novels about just anything like she sees a car and it was the same color like my sister's car. It's just a huge deal. All these things that have happened and she's just like all the time, every single day

she's on it. You go --. Whenever I go to my mom's house there's just stuff everywhere and always reminding me. I guess it's around like her whole computer is just full of stuff about her and nothing else. She doesn't take the time to dedicate to us or like she should. I just feel like me or my other sister were to part ways she would completely regret the way she's been acting because she wouldn't even know what to do. She has a --. I don't know how to describe this. She hasn't purported her efforts to us like towards my sister even after she died. I think she's terrified of her being forgotten. I can't stress to her or to the people that love can ever forget her.

The connection that each participant describes with those they lost plays a role in their bereavement.

Discrepancies in Responses and Cases

One area where a discrepancy was noted was in the theme of being there. P1 identified her mom initially as her main support but through further conversation she clarified that biggest sense of support to be a new friendship she had made. She stated:

Yeah, and I actually found out my best friend here (where she now lives), she is my fiancée boss and we met at a football game. She lost her sister and I didn't realize how I like almost being friends with someone who has had this experience. We get along somehow, we can kind of relate to our lives.

This was different from all the other participants who noted that either a parent(s) or a current friendship were their biggest support through the bereavement process.

A second discrepancy to note is that P5 and P6 are sisters. They both lost their younger brother, P5 is the middle child and P6 is the oldest. Through the interview process, both siblings identified significant discrepancies in their bereavement experience.

P5: I don't know, it's true enough for some reason I wonder and if she (her sister) knows. I think we kind of without saying out loud understand that her grief is different because obviously, we both lost our brother. I would not take anything away from her grief (her sister) over mine, but I felt like I lost my best friend. It wasn't about just losing a sibling or somebody you grew up with that was literally like you see every day of your life with this person. I don't know who I was anymore. Someday it's also that way, I get angry about my life was supposed to be this one way or I have a silly brother who is a crazy uncle and is the only one in the world that gets my secret [party] type of humor and never would be [late]. I don't know if... feeling never goes away.

P6: My sister is mixed, she's much--but they were closer, my sister and my brother were much closer than I was with my brother. She (my sister) has had a bit of counseling and she struggled and she still--Well, we all struggle, I mean we all struggle. We all have our moments. We all have like the rollercoaster of emotion, but her struggle has been much more challenging for her I think. Counseling, it just never works for me. But I think that that's because I'm a very real strong person. We (my sister and I) are just so different and how we have handled this being in the same family is just so different, we don't ever even talk about it.

Though they were siblings sharing the same loss, their experiences, supports and bereavement were very different.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

As described in chapter 3, guidelines for managing trustworthiness were followed to establish credibility, transferability and dependability.

Credibility

Through the use of well-established qualitative research strategies credibility was preserved. (Shenton, 2004). First, a minimum of three e-mail and two phone contacts were made with each participant which helped establish trustworthiness and credibility, this is referred to as prolonged engagement (Shenton, 2004). Researcher/participant interactions occurred at the initial contact from the online postings either through e-mail or Facebook messaging. Those participants who responded to the initial participant posting through Facebook were asked to e-mail me directly through my Walden University e-mail address as the posting stating. All participants who initially responded to participate through Facebook did follow through with an e-mail to the Walden University e-mail address.

Next a phone screening was set up, during the phone screening some aspects of their journey as well as my professional and academic activities were shared. Next a semi-structured interview was set up, the open-ended questions allowed participants to freely share their experiences with sibling bereavement and provide thick, rich descriptions for analysis. To further protect credibility, there was also the promotion of openness and honesty among the participants, with the knowledge that they could remove

themselves from this research at any time. This was to ensure that those who were participating in the data collection process were doing so freely and openly which further protects the credibility of the study (Shenton, 2004).

The use of member-checking was also used following each interview. Each interview was audio recorded and the recording was transcribed within three days following each interview to prevent any confusion, the transcription was completed by NoNotes. Following transcription participants had the opportunity to review the accuracy of the data through the process of member checking. Participants were e-mailed a summary of their interview with the opportunity to revise their ideas or the summary for improved accuracy in representation of their story. This took on average approximately one week from the time of the initial interview. Only five participants took part in the member checking process, all eight participants were e-mailed their interview summary only participants 1, 2, 4, 5, and 7 responded with follow-up confirmation that the document they received was accurate to their interview and personal story. Participants 3, 6, and 8 had a second follow-up e-mail sent with their interview summary attached a second time. After waiting 10 days following the second e-mail it was identified that the participants would not be responding to the member checking process. As a result of the member checking process, there were no significant changes made by the participants during the review of their interview summary.

Transferability

Transferability allows readers to take the information gained from this study and make associations between this research and their own research or personal experiences

(Reissmann, 2008; Shenton, 2004). This researcher made every effort to (a) provide a detailed description of the data collection procedures and (b) provide detailed descriptions to view the concept of adolescent sibling bereavement in terms of the participants stories and backgrounds (c) support the description of the thematic elements of the narratives to allow readers the ability to fully understand and relate to this experience, and then if necessary compare it with other research.

Dependability

Dependability is the means by which the information gained in research is accurate and consistent (Reissman, 2008). Dependability was assured through a detailed description of each step of the process used to carry out this research (Shenton, 2004). The researcher used audit trails, including journaling from the start of the research project to the development and reporting of findings, it included such information as preparation for interviews, observed themes, process of data gathering, methods of analysis, and outcomes (Reissmann, 2008).

Results

The central research questions of this study are:

- What is the narrative of bereavement for adults who experienced the death of a sibling when they were in their teens? and
- What is the role of family and friends in the bereavement process?

The results of this study provided a multi-dimensional understanding of how siblings experienced loss of a brother or sister, which was expressed through the narratives of the bereavement and recovery process. The narratives gave way to themes

that represented how participants experienced the loss of a sibling and the challenges that they faced.

What is the narrative of bereavement for adults who experienced the death of a sibling while they were in their teens?

The narrative of bereavement is a very personal journey. There are no two experiences that are identical, although similar threads of narrative emerged (i.e., experience returning to school, who was there as support following loss, changes in family dynamics, connections with those they lost).

How does the narrative of bereavement begin?

Across all participants the narrative began at the time their sibling died. In this study all participants lost a sibling in an unexpected manner, either due to overdose, a car-accident or unexplained causes. P1 shares:

Well, let's see my brother was twenty years old when he died. I was seventeen, he had a drug issue to a point. That night my brother's neighbor called my dad and say "hey he's not at home and it's like three in the morning" So, my dad went and searched for him and he was with the guy that we don't like. Like this guy is no good, all he does is like get him in drugs and stuff like that and my dad found him and he went and got him and took him back home and like he was... I think he was high and my dad took his phone from him so couldn't call anybody out to come to him. Then the next morning my dad went back over there in to go check on my brother. He went over there about 9:00 AM and my brother didn't answer the door and he went back again at 12ish and my brother didn't answer the door

and he called me and he was like this is getting weird like why he's not answering and I was "well, he's probably still sleeping because you know he choose to get high instead". The landlord lives in front of where my brother lives and I was like "go get a key" and my dad went inside and he found my brother dead across the bed and my dad called the house phone. My brother lived like a mile from us and my dad was like hysterical like I cannot gather a word my dad was saying like I could hear was saying CJ being dead I mean there's something along those lines.

P2, P3, P5, P6, P7, and P8 all lost their siblings in car accidents. In each of their descriptions their sibling was a passenger in the car they were riding in.

P5 describes the loss of her brother;

He was in a car accident, an automobile accident with three of his other friends driving on a back road. Being teenage boys, trying to.... not purposely be rough with, but they were driving fast in an attempt to get back feeling you get when you drive over hills and your stomach drops. They are actually aiming to do that and the end of that... The car was going too fast and they landed horribly. The driver could not control the car and without much time landed upside down in a ditch in front of somebody else's property. The other three boys were able to come out safely to get help. My brother actually was unconscious, but he didn't pass until he got to the hospital. The men on the house of the property that the vehicle landed on came out .and from there the police came and the ambulance and took him to hospital. They tried to revive him, but he had substantial amount

of brain contusions. Basically, what killed him was the impact of his head to the back corner of the car.

Each of these participants shared a common story of a car accident starting their bereavement. P4 lost her sibling in a different manner; to this day they are not sure of her cause of death. A concern that stick with P4 as she fears for her own family and could the same thing happen to them.

That evening my sister comes to me she says, “I need your help. You are my big sister, I’m going to go to college in a couple of months and I don’t know any drinking games. I don’t know anything about drinking; I’ve never had a drink. Mom and dad made me promise I would have a drink with them. I don’t want to have a drink with them, they don’t know anything, and they can’t teach me anything. Will you teach me how to play a drinking game?” So its spring break, , and I’m like, “What is the most deluded, but good tasting thing I can give them and make sure they don’t get drunk.” She just wants to have a drink and not look like an idiot when she goes to college. So I get drinks and ginger ale, a bag of Doritos and a deck of cards. My sister and her three best friends, we are sitting at the dining table at the lake, I poured the drink, I gave them like almost nothing in a glass and I taught them how to play.

If you knew my sister you knew she was constantly cold, she would sit on a black sweatshirt out in the under the dark in the summer times with the hood up, like chronically cold. So we finish playing cards and she says to me, “Do you have a T-shirt and shorts, I’m really hot?” Okay, its April, she’s never hot in April, but

whatever. So she went and changed into a T-shirt and shorts, then she is lying on the couch and she says, "I don't feel very well." And I'm thinking like, "I didn't give them enough to drink, to even give them a buzz let alone make her sick?" She goes in the bathroom, she starts throwing up. I'm sitting with her in the bathroom, she is laughing about the Dorado chunks in the toilet, because that's how she was and what she did and her personality. And her friends are there still watching a movie, and nobody is concerned, I'm not concerned. I go to get her a glass of water because I said, "If you are throwing up, this is what you need to stay hydrated or whatever." So I go to get her a glass of water and we hear this thump. She had just risen up and just fell back, like it hit her head on the back of the door in the bathroom.

I did CPR, I had one of the girl's calls 911, I had one of the girls go out and wait for the ambulance, and I had another one of the girls doing something else, and I did CPR forever. It felt like forever. These people came, they send like four fire trucks and eight police cars and all these ambulance and whatever. My parent's dog that was really my sister's dog came over, licked her on the forehead and went and laid down on her bed. All these people are coming into the house and the dog knew, she just knew, she just laid there.

We don't know, we still don't know what she died from, because they did CPR for so long it was finally put down as hear failure. But she was a healthy three sport athlete, just a kid. There was nothing they found to point to why she died, so I worry, I worry for my kids that this can happen to them.

The sibling's unexpected death was the point where each participant's narrative of bereavement began.

What are the turning points?

There were a few turning points in the narrative arc from the time of the loss to the present moment that were identified. Just as each participant's experience of loss was very individual, each participant's experience of bereavement was too. A few common experiences emerged.

For all the first turning point was their experience of loss. This is identified by Rando as recognizing the loss, or acknowledging the loss that they have experienced (Rando et al., 2012). As described above, each participant experienced the unexpected death of their sibling, this was due to overdose, a car accident or unexplained medical reasons.

For some participants the next turning point was the realizations that their sibling was really gone. This is called reacting to the separation, as Rando et al., (2012) describe this is experiencing the pain, feeling, expressing and reacting to the loss that has been experienced. As P4 stated;

I would think about like the dumbest things- like here in the shower and you think, "Okay, she (my sister) used the shampoo and we are almost out of it. Oh my God, I'm panicking because we are almost out of the shampoo that she once touched." It's all those little tiny things ...I can't even explain.

For P1 it was seeing her brother in her niece;

She looks just like him (my brother), she acts like him, and it's just there's always still a piece of him.

It was the constant everyday reminder that he wasn't there, that his daughter was and looked so much like him but he would not be. It was these constant reactions that many participants experiences for a significant period following their loss.

For some participants the next turning point was the return to day to day activities. For some this occurred immediately, for others it took longer. This is called readjusting (Rando et al, 2012) or moving forward into a new world without forgetting the old world. This is done at different paces for all individuals. All participants were either middle/high school or college students. Therefore, the return to school was part of what they had to do. P1 states:

I desperately wanted to go back to school, I was a junior in high school
I just wanted to get back to my "normal life" as soon as I could
following her loss.

This was further echoed by P7 who shared:

I think school was probably a way of coping for me. School for me was like a good outlet. Which is probably a little weird but... I never had issues with my grades or anything like that was a way for me to keep myself busy and it's very focused.

For P3 returning to those day to day activities took time:

I was like, you know, why yeah like schools dumb like I'm not going to go to school. So, I told them all is like, I'm just even going to get my GED. I can find

other ways around everything, I'm going to do my own things. And so, I tried to do that and I stayed out of school for a month and then, my parents got the principal and like a bunch of the counselors to sit down in a room with me and them, and I basically got like forced to go back to school which I'm thankful for now of course. But they knew it was going to be hard on me.

P5 continues this feeling, as a senior in high school she didn't want to finish the end of her school year.

I mean I was a senior, so we only had two months left of school. I considered myself a good student; I already got into college. I literary gave up and I didn't want to go. I skipped quite often. I remember my dad getting called because I didn't show up again.

Subsequent turning points were marked by personal events. This is reinvesting, or putting energy into new goals, people or dreams (Rando et al, 2012).

For P3 it was the new transition to college.

I feel like me going away to college has put a different dynamic into it just because when I'm away I don't – it's the whole avoidance thing again. I don't feel like he's gone because he wouldn't be at college with me, but then coming home on breaks is terrible because it's like I'm home and he is not and every other college kid is home and okay. This was my real turning point that he was gone.

That I had to figure out my way forward.

P1 talks about that:

Right after my brother passed away I got married and moved across the country. It was one of the hardest things I have ever done, everyone my whole family lived in Virginia. And I was moving across the country with my husband because of his job. I was not only adjusting to a move but a move without the support of my brother.

These were significant turning point that were individual to each participant.

What is the role of the family and friends in the bereavement process?

All participants identified that a family or friend member were their biggest support through the bereavement process. The participants were split with P1, P5, P7, and P8 identifying either one or both parents as the biggest support they had through the bereavement process, the constant that they would go to when they were struggling or need support. P2, P3, P4, and P6 identified a friend, boyfriend or that formed after their loss as their biggest sense of support. In addition, to all participants who identified a friend as a main support, they also identified that their friend also knew and had a relationship with their sibling who died. This friendship was also a way of connecting to the lost sibling.

Across all choices of support, the theme of consistency in someone being there from the moment that they found out that there sibling had passed intensified and solidified that relationship as a main support.

What is the Role of Other Resources?

The single other resource that participants identified was counseling support. P1, P5, P6, P7 all identified that counseling was another resource offered to them. P1 identifies:

My mom and my dad were like concerned that I was shoving everybody out but I'm sure I was. So, I just read through all that. Yeah, I agree to go to counseling and try it, it could make her happy and it ends up being like, the counselor was my best friend because I went like weekly and stuff like that. I would say just having somebody who is like a non-biased talking to you is helpful. He just let me talk about stories and I'm also on a very big question about why me, why my brother. So, my counselor helped with that struggle and like managing everything else. It is just more like somebody I could get through who's not going to have an opinion.

P5 shared:

My parents made me go (to counseling) right after; I hated them for that. At the time, it felt... I don't know, it wasn't good. I stopped. Five years later, I went back, I think that was helpful. As much as I hated it, I say that, she said things that still ring through my heart today.

P6 shared that she too was made to go to counseling by her parents:

You know, counselors or whatever, and I went down and that was one individual and it was kind of superficial. We talked about the stages of grief and basically she left the door open to come back and I was like "you know, I don't need

education. I just need somebody to listen to me" and it just didn't work for me, and at that point I never, I never went to counseling ever after that. Not that I went to counseling a lot of times, but it was sure and all she wanted to do was talk about my relationship with my mother, and that wasn't what I needed to do either, basically, I just guess I am a strong personality. So I just didn't need it.

P3 shared how she chose to go into counseling on her own time after she lost her brother. Almost two years later she still sees this counselor as she needs to.

I do go and talk to one counselor still, I'm just like monthly and it's nice, but I wouldn't say it's like some big like where I come out of there and I'm like wow! That it felt really great. I didn't so much like opening up to some random lady that wants to tell me how to fix all my problems, when they are not really fixable. But the counselor I see is not like that, it helps.

Participants, 1, 3, 5, 6, and 7 all currently have or had in their past some interaction with the outside resources of a counselor. Participants 2, 4, and 8 did not identify if they had any interaction with a counselor or not.

Summary and Transition

Chapter 4 described the results of the data collection process, the analysis and interpretation of themes from the interviews of the participants and the participant's demographics. Processes to support trustworthiness were also explained. Finally, themes relevant to adolescent sibling bereavement were exposed and provided insight into the experience of adolescent sibling loss.

Primary themes identified were returning to school, being there, emotional separation and identification of self/moving forward were presented and will be discussed further in Chapter 5. A comparison to previous literature and how the findings confirm, disconfirm, or extend knowledge in the discipline will be further examined. Additionally, how the findings align with the theoretical framework, limitations and recommendations will also be discussed. Lastly, the potential for positive social change based on the study will be explored

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the narratives of young adults who experienced the death of a sibling during their adolescence. The intent was to better understand the meaning of the bereavement experience of sibling loss by examining the narratives of the loss, and exploring the role of family, friends, and resources through their journey with loss. The phenomena of interest are bereavement and sources of support (family, friends, and resources). A narrative analysis was conducted to examine the stories of bereavement each participant had, as well as to examine the differences in their experiences. The researcher explored the themes emerging from the narratives of bereavement, the turning points identified as well as the role of family and friends in the bereavement process.

Codes that lead to the development of categories include the following: sense of support, counseling support, avoidance of parents/family, anger at sibling who died, avoidance of feelings, numbness, difference of experience of loss in surviving siblings, depended on, overcompensating for loss, struggles in relationships with surviving siblings, struggles with relationship with parent(s), growing up too soon, changes in family dynamics, new friendships, school experience, college experience, school as a support, avoidance of school, avoidance of counseling, parent(s), friendship, friendships with other surviving siblings, re-establishing friendships, boyfriend, college attendance, professional in the workplace, making a difference, sibling who passed would not want me to give up, what is important now, compassion to self, continued connections with who was lost and connections with in the family dynamic.

Five primary themes emerged from the categories, returning to school, being there, emotional separation and identification of self/moving forward.

Interpretation of Findings

Comparison to Published Research

Sharing the loss experience. Participants all described the need to have support following the loss of their sibling and the need to have someone to share the experience with. For some participants this support was in the form of a family member, parent, friend, or significant other (i.e. boyfriend, girlfriend). This was the common theme amongst participants was having support on this journey.

Many of the published studies on loss, including child/significant other or sibling have strongly referenced this fact. Hogan and DeSantis (1994) conducted a qualitative study and found common themes of coping, including stress-reducing activities, personal belief systems/religion, parental support, extended family and friends, peer support groups and professional support as the most helpful mechanisms in coping with the loss of sibling. Martinson and Campos (1991) interviewed adolescents who lost a sibling to cancer within the past seven to nine years and found that sharing the death experience with others, sharing memories of their sibling, and using family for emotional support were necessary supports during the bereavement process.

In this study, sources of support varied. This was often described in the context of the initial bereavement experience. Some participants reported not wanting to be around family after the loss; i.e., that they felt they needed to take care of their parent(s),

feeling like they had to overcompensate for their parents. This identifies that support comes from a multitude of places.

Walsh and McGoldrick (1991) pointed out that “of all life experiences, death poses the most painful adaptational challenges for the family as a system and for every surviving member” (p.3). The results of the study revealed that for some of the participants a parent was a source of support. Participants 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8 all identified that a parent (s) were their biggest sources of support following the loss of their sibling, and were able to manage their grief and make positive choices to move forward (attend in college, get married, start a family, etc.) because of this support. As P8 stated:

I would definitely say my parents. Yes, even though I couldn't always open up to them about how I was feeling because I felt like I had to be like I said strong and bubbly and happy. Today I have definitely stuck it out and show how they can work through it together. And they've just always been there for me, always.

The period after the sibling died was when surviving siblings most need stability and security, yet this is often when parents are not able to provide that (Davies, 1999). Within the family systems construct, the difficulty lies in that parents play an essential role in helping their surviving children cope and adapt with death (McCown & Pratt, 1985) and when this support is not available the family system begins to crack and break. As reported, the family unit is often looked to for support following great loss, yet family members are often not able to provide what is needed. Participants sought out the best means of support, and found this support in friends and significant others. The benefit of these relationships through the experience of loss was not downplayed.

Relationship with the deceased. Each participant noted in their narratives the necessity to maintain a relationship with the sibling they lost. This is often referred to as continuing bonds (Packman, Horsley, Davies & Kramer, 2006), the means of keeping a connection with the deceased. In the literature, this is described as recognizing birthdays, holidays and special events that hold meaning to the deceased; continuing to share stories; and using the deceased names in everyday conversation.

This was identified in numerous different ways from P4 and how she spoke to her own children about their aunt, to P6 and sharing with her family her brother's love of Greek gods, to P5 who connects with her brother through what was their shared humor and jokes. Participants identified these continuing bonds in many different ways from the everyday mundane tasks (shampoo bottles), to larger recognitions and celebrations.

A study of parental adjustment following the loss of a child found that it was important for families to maintain a relationship with their deceased child, (this can be seen through acknowledgement of the deceased child's birthday or other special occasions, including memories of the deceased child in daily family life etc.), access support from family and friends for stability, and maintain structure with old and new routines (Barrera, et al., 2007, Barerra et al., 2009).

A few participants identified with the struggles members of their family experienced in their efforts to continue their relationship with the deceased. As participants ranged in anywhere from two to seventeen years since their loss, the chronological distance from the death corresponded to the intensity of the struggle. Those participants who had lost a sibling more recently identified more intense struggles

with how family members still connected. One participant described the shrine that their family has for her deceased brother; another participant described how their mother still writes on Facebook everyday about her sister. They described an intense struggle with these continued connections. From the current study, it is not clear whether the changes in the struggle occur with time, or if this is a function of specific family dynamics.

Thompson et al., (2011) who explored advice from forty families of children who died from cancer within the previous six to nineteen months in a qualitative study. Content analysis of grief advice revealed three categories: before the death, soon after the death, and long-term (Thompson et al., 2011). This suggests that there participants may share the experience of changes in grieving over time corresponding to these iconic turning points.

Moving forward. Participants were at distinctly different places in their process of reinvesting. This is the final process in Rando's (1996) 6-R theory of Loss, which includes moving forward and finding a way to invest energy into hopes, wishes, dreams, goals and new people again (Rando, 1996). However, all participants in this study identifying moving forward in positive, healthy ways. All participants were either currently enrolled in college or had graduated and were employed professionally. Some participants were married with families. All participants identified hopes and dreams for themselves or family moving forward. It was the identification of moving forward, of seeking ways to find personal growth during such a time of great pain that was shared by all participants.

Many studies have examined the possibility that out of great loss can come growth. Martinson and Campos (1991) found in their qualitative study of thirty-one adolescent siblings interviewed seven to nine years following the sibling death that the majority of adolescents had the experience of death that led to their personal or family growth. This was connected to a strong family communication, ability to share their experience with death, and reliance on their family for support (Martinson & Campos, 1991). These findings are comparable to those found in the current study.

Alignment with Theoretical Framework

Adolescence is a significantly challenging time of unique personal development. Often times these challenges are seen and played out within the context of the family unit. Therefore, this research utilized three theoretical models as the basis for developing the contextual framework for this study, Erik Erickson's theory of Psychosocial Development (1963), Murray Bowen's theory of Family Systems (1978) and Rando's 6-R Theory of Loss (1996).

Erikson's Theory of Psycho-Social Development

Adolescence occurs in stage five of Erickson's (1963) theory where the principal conflict is identity versus confusion. The developmental goal of adolescence is autonomy and independence, where adolescents are testing the limits of independence and working to identify a sense of self (i.e., who they are, what they believe, how they experience society and how they manage those social interactions) (Carver & Schier, 2000). It is during this stage that an adolescent is laying the foundation to leave home, by first becoming more autonomous emotionally. Adolescents become less family-oriented

and more peer-oriented during this stage (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). Participants all identified that as adolescent's friends were a big part of their lives, that many had close peer relationships. P2, P3, P4, and P6 identified a friend, or boyfriend as their biggest sense of support through bereavement. In addition, to all participants who identified a friend as a main support, they also identified that their friend also knew and had a relationship with their sibling who died. This friendship was also a way of connecting to the lost sibling.

During this developmental stage adolescents who have strong family supports receive encouragement and guidance and thus emerge from this stage with a strong sense of self, a feeling of independence and ability to control and pursue their future goals (Erickson, 1963). When an adolescent does not have this experience they emerge from this stage confused, insecure and unsure of themselves, their beliefs, desires and their future (Carver & Schier, 2000). Participants 1, 4, 5, 7, and 8 all identified that a parent (s) were their biggest sources of support following the loss of their sibling, and were able to manage their grief and make positive choices to move forward (attend in college, get married, start a family, etc.).

Bowen's Family Systems Theory

The foundation of family systems theory is Bowen's eight interlocking concepts: (a) the nuclear family emotional system, (b) the differentiation of self-scale, (c) triangles, (d) cutoff, (e) family projection process, (f) multigenerational transmission process, (g) sibling position and (h) the emotional process in society (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006). The results of this study revealed elements that were consistent with these concepts.

Nuclear family emotional system. The nuclear family emotional system identifies four relationship areas where conflict can develop and in turn affect a family system (Bowen, 1978; Gilbert, 2006). These areas are marital conflict, dysfunctional spouse, emotional distance, and child impairment. The single most identified area in this research is emotional distance. Emotional distance refers to how members of a family unit may distance themselves from one another to reduce tension and anxiety and this in turn can result in isolation. Despite the understanding that bereavement is a difficult, highly individual experience even among members of the same family, all participants identified times of emotional distance between themselves and their parents and surviving siblings. P2 stated:

They've (my parents) been very distant and they're only growing more distant. I'm more matured now so I can be more mature with my mom. But they're just pouring themselves farther and farther apart and isolating themselves. My mom was trying so hard to keep us together because she was so afraid that we are going to die now, but we are all just overwhelmed and we don't know what to do. The last person we wanted to talk to was with each other and I felt bad because I know she wants to be there but she just couldn't handle it and I couldn't handle it to. I didn't want to be around it. It's just maybe more sad that's why I moved out my house. It's just make me sad because she's so sad all the time. I don't blame my mom really, for not being able to help me really because she was so devastated herself. For probably 6 months, none of us wanted anything to do with each other

my mom was still so positive that we need to be together, but none of us wanted to be around with each other at all.

Triangles. The triangle refers to a three-person relationship system considered to be the building block of the larger emotional family unit (Bowen, 1966). The triangle is seen as the smaller unit in the emotional family unit. Tensions center on the dynamic of the three interlocking relationships. The tension can be spread around the triangle which may stabilize it, but often times the tension results in one person in the dynamic feeling as the odd one out, so they in turn will push for change in the triangle to avoid this position (Charles, 2001; Gilbert, 2006). Participants who lost their only sibling experienced these triangles, with the participant and each parent being a point on the triangle. An outside person (e.g., an extended family member, friend, minister, and therapist) may be pulled in to support and attempt to decrease the tension (Gilbert, 2006). Some of the participants used counselors as the outside person to address the triangles that they were experiencing.

Emotional cutoff. Emotional cutoff refers to the way in which individuals manage their unresolved issues within the family unit (Gilbert, 2006); i.e., reducing or cutting off completely the emotional contact with the person of interest. The “cutoff” can happen by means of physically placing space between individuals, such as not living near one another; or it can be done by creating psychological “separation” such as avoiding specific issues when in contact with that family member (Gilbert, 2006). All participants identified times of cutoff, this was with parents, extended family or other siblings. This

is especially relevant surrounding bereavement, participants identify not being able to talk to a parent about the sibling who passed.

Of interest is the narrative of Participants 5 and 6 who siblings who lost their youngest brother were.

(P5) My sister and I have the epitome of a love hate relationship, she is always sad and worried and I'm happy. Sometime things can go to the point where we don't talk for a month. My parents hate this, and I hear it every time we go for a couple of months without speaking "you know how it is to lose a sibling - how can you not be talking to your sister?" It's like come on: but it goes on because I don't need to make up with her that is part of our relationship and that's who we are.

P6 stated:

So we just don't get along, we just don't. I mean, there are times you know, we can get along superficially but we are very, very different people.

Emotional process (8). Emotional process is relative to how the family system interacts with the greater societal system (Bowman, 1978). This part of the theory suggests that the "triangles" within a family move and interact with societal forces the family uses to function and evolve (Gilbert, 2006). This includes, for example, the involvement of an outside agency, therapist, institution, friendship or employment which causes change with anyone within the family system (Gilbert, 2006). This aspect of Bowen's theory is important to this age group as all participants in this study were involved with academia in some way. This was either as a high school student or a

college student. Participants either identified their connection to and involvement with school as a positive connection such as P7 who identified that school was a good outlet for her,

A way of coping, of keeping herself focused and redirecting her energy from the grief that she was experiencing.

Other participants identify the struggles of returning to school or college, P3 shares;

I was like, you know, why yeah like schools dumb like I'm not going to go to school. So, I told them all is like, I'm just even going to get my GED. I can find other ways around everything, I'm going to do my own things. And so, I tried to do that and I stayed out of school for a month and then, my parents got the principal and like a bunch of the councilors to sit down in a room with me and them, and I basically got like forced to go back to school which I'm thankful for now of course. But they knew it was going to be hard on me.

Rando's 6-R Model of Loss

Rando's 6-R model of loss is a more contemporary model of loss. This model supports a developmental pattern of adjustment to bereavement to include recognize, react, recollect, relinquish, readjust and reinvent as the processes that one survives loss through. A model that many participants described working within.

All participants, without knowledge of this model of loss, described throughout the interview process their placement in this loss model. P1 shares her experience readjusting to move adaptively into the new world without forgetting the old world. She shares:

I feel like things are finally calming down. My niece with my parents, they get along fine, with each other. My dad is a great father, he is a horrible husband and he is a horrible boyfriend, but he is a great father and he and my mother are so much better off not being together. So, I feel like they're much happier alone like sometimes my dad still tries to argue and I'm like nope, not dealing with it. She's still my mom, so we just leave it at that. There's so many different issues so I feel like death in it really tears a family apart, but eventually it starts to settle down a little.

Participant 4 shares her experience with relinquishing old attachments,

Next week I have to put down my horse that I got because she died, because she and I went to my friend's house and watched this horse be born, and when my sister died he called me and said, "Anytime I see this horse I think of you and your sister. If you ever have a chance to have a horse, he is yours." When I moved I got this horse and now I'm waiting for my friend to let us borrow his excavator so we can dig up a hole big enough because he is going down next week, and that's like another connection gone.

Participant 7 who described the process of reinvesting, she had returned to school to achieve her degree.

I'm actually in PA (physician assistant) school right now and I just started rotation so I've been at an OBGYN office. So yeah, that's what I am doing, which is great. I love it. She was moving forward after her goals and dreams.

Throughout the continued process of bereavement each participant touched on at least two or three of these stages and the specific struggles that go along with it.

Limitations of the Study

The determination of how many participants to include is referred to in qualitative research as “saturation.” This is the point in which enough data is collected that no new data would add to, or change the understanding of that data (Guest et al, 2006; Mohr, 2010). Originally, this researcher planned to interview twelve to sixteen participants, to improve the possibility of data saturation and to provide sufficient breadth of experience to explore thematic saturation. Due to the problems in recruiting participants (as described in Chapter 4), the researcher stopped data collection after eight participant interviews were conducted. Therefore, it is not clear as to whether saturation of themes has been reached.

Additionally, as finding participants became difficult, the researcher extended the age in which participants could currently be. Originally, participant had to currently be between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five to participate. As those who were eligible to participate were difficult to connect with, the researcher increased the age range to be participant could currently be between the ages of eighteen to thirty to participate. Though this allowed ma greater number of individuals to access it also presented some challenges. Participating adults were asked to recall their experiences, thoughts and feelings. For some this was a very recent memory, while for others it was nearly eighteen years ago. The reliability and meaning of memory introduced an unexpected variation in participants’ responses; and it is not clear how this influenced the results.

Recommendations

As social media has changed over the past decade, so has the use of each social media platform. Facebook was the only social media platform used to access participants. Future research should include use of other social (Instagram, Snapchat, and Twitter). Therefore, a primary recommendation would be in the recruitment of participants in the eighteen to thirty age grouping to access all social media platforms, as well as identifying means to access participants on college campuses. This would ideally allow for a larger sample size to be achieved.

Furthermore, all participants in this study were female, and self-disclosed Caucasian. This was not intentional. Future researchers are encouraged to intentionally sample other demographics to broaden the understanding of sibling bereavement through gender, ethnicity and religion.

Through the course of research, as a result of snowball sampling two surviving siblings both participated in this study and their narratives included. As has been well documented, the experience of bereavement is a very individual experience even within the same family. Though siblings recalled the same experience of loss, their experience of bereavement was very different. Their needs of family, friends, of each other, the roles they took on following loss, their experiences as they moved forward were distinctly different. Future researchers may want to examine the experience of sibling loss as seen by surviving siblings of the same family.

Narrative analysis examines the stories that individuals have to tell and, through telling stories, individuals were able to share an experience that has happened, put that experience into sequence, look at explanations of the experience and examined the series of events that shaped the individual (Jovchelovitch & Bauer, 2000). Participant's narratives could cover a number of years, for example if a participant was thirteen when they lost their sibling and they are now thirty giving their narrative that is a window of seventeen years. This is a substantive period of time to recall adolescent experiences, and raises concerns about reliability of memory. Therefore, further qualitative study is needed to explore the experience of bereavement in time frames closer to the loss.

Implications

Implications for Social Change

Exploring the narratives of young adults who have lost a sibling during their adolescent years and the continued personal struggles that they experience has led me to a profound implication for social change – the call to professionals, counseling programs in school districts and colleges to become more aware of the specific needs of this population. Bereaved siblings have been called the forgotten grievers, as their grief is often overlooked in the bereavement experience. More guidance, and support is needed to provide a voice for the needs of this population.

The opportunity to effect social change at the local level includes presenting this information to providers, school districts, professional groups and organizations that work with bereaved adolescents such as the Chenango County Counselors Association and the New York State School Social Work Association. This researcher will also reach

out to the Compassionate Friends Organization and other interested groups that have an interest and mission to serve this group.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

The theoretical approach of Erickson's psychosocial development, Bowen's family systems theory and Rando's 6'R's theory were used to reveal the diversity and complexity of the adolescent sibling bereavement experience. Erickson's psychosocial development provides the foundation of adolescence and the work that is being done during this developmental stage. Rando's 6'R's theory provides the lifespan context of bereavement and the work that is done through the course of loss. However, it is Bowen's family systems theory that provides the groundwork for the participant's narratives to be heard. Adolescents though seeking independence are strongly interconnected in the family structure. When loss is injected into this family structure that is where significant impact is observed. This is seen as struggles within the family structure between members of the family, it is observed as individual struggles of the bereaved sibling. In some instances there has also been observed personal growth by the surviving sibling as a result of the family support and guidance through bereavement. Bowen's family system theory better addresses the effects of sibling loss and the participant's abilities to find a way through that loss.

Recommendations for Practice

The results of this study offer to clinicians, school staff and families recommendations of support and guidance that can be helpful to assist bereaved adolescents through this difficult journey. This information can be used by clinicians in

the development of treatment plans, by school staff and for resources that families with children in their schools.

Mental health practitioners, counseling programs located in school districts and on college campuses as well as organizations that serve bereaved adolescent populations will want to evaluate the various components addressed in the literature and highlighted by the participants in this study.

Those who work with this population will want to evaluate for barriers to the sustained support, care and guidance that adolescents will need following loss. This would include an evaluation of their family and social environment, with the understanding that sometimes the family structure is not going to be where the adolescent finds comfort and support. The results of this study suggest it may be helpful to reassure the adolescent that it is acceptable to look outside the family for support, such as formal counseling, or connections with friends and other positive adults in their lives.

These results also suggest that adolescents vary in the experience of returning to school. Adolescents may immediately need to reconnect to the known and want to return to schooling, or they may find that it is too difficult to return. This highlights the need for school and college counseling programs to provide the flexibility and creativity to address the individual student needs; i.e., different ways to allow bereaved sibling to access school, either through the transitional means of school attendance, half day programming, use of a tutor for a student to remain out of school if they need to, or even the use of on-line classes.

Conclusion

Adolescents faced with the death of a sibling are often left to navigate difficult emotions, feelings, and fears. The death of a sibling can have profound and lasting effects on the psychological and emotional functioning of the surviving siblings (Horsley & Patterson, 2006). Researchers have suggested that with support from both inside the family system and from friendships and relationships outside the family system, young people can grieve in a healthy way, reconcile loss and create opportunities for growth and meaningful relationships as they move through bereavement. It enforces the notion that sibling's experience of loss cannot be overlooked, as research has identified siblings are often the forgotten grievers (Devita-Raeburn, 2004), but in order for sibling bereavement to be navigated in a healthy way their needs cannot be overlooked.

The results of this study add to the body of literature on adolescent grieving by providing deeper insights as to how friends and family support contributes to the narrative of bereavement, and supports future efforts in both research and practice on this subject.

As Kubler-Ross (1969) said:

The reality is that you will grieve forever. You will not “get over” the loss of a loved one; you will learn to live with it. You will heal and you will rebuild yourself around the loss you have suffered. You will be whole again, but you will never be the same. Nor should you be the same, nor would you want to.

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Appendix A: Participation Invitation A & B

Participation Invitation A – Used in first posting

Would you like to help? Would you like to participate in a research study of sibling loss?

You are invited to take part in this study if you experienced the death of a sibling when you were between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old.

If you are *currently* between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five, I invite you to contact me about participating in this study.

The purpose of this study is to explore the stories of those who experienced the death of a sibling during their adolescent years. The researcher is inviting women and men between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who experienced the loss of a sibling and who are not currently struggling with an active mental health illness or substance abuse problem.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Kelly Collins-Colosi, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. She too has experienced the loss of a sibling, losing her only sister when she was twenty-one. If you would be interested in learning more please contact Kelly Collins-Colosi via e-mail at Kelly.collins-colosi@waldenu.edu. Please make sure to note this invitation in your e-mail. Thank you!

Participation Invitation B – Used following IRB Approved Research Changes

Hello,

I am doctoral student at Walden University conducting a study on how adult siblings recall their experience of bereavement of the loss of sister or brother as a teenager.

I am seeking adults between the ages of eighteen and thirty years old who experienced the death of a sibling when they were a teenager between the ages of thirteen and eighteen years old.

If **you** are currently between the ages of eighteen and thirty, and are not currently experiencing mental health or addictions problems, I invite you to contact me about participating in this study.

Or, you may know someone who meets this description, and I would appreciate you passing this invitation on to them.

As the researcher, I (Kelly Collins-Colosi,) experienced the loss of a sibling when I was twenty-one, I lost my only sister.

If you would be interested in learning more please contact Kelly Collins-Colosi via e-mail at Kelly.collins-colosi@waldenu.edu Please make sure to note this invitation in your e-mail. Thank you!

Appendix B: Participant Screening Guide

Thank you for contacting me with your interest in my study, I have a few questions to ask you to identify if your experience is a match for this study. You are free to pass on any question that you choose not to answer. This will take about 10 minutes.

Contact Information:

Name:

Address:

Phone Number:

E-mail Address:

Screening Information:

How old are you currently?

At what age did you experience the loss of a sibling?

Whom were you living with at that time?

How old was your sibling when they died?

Are you currently struggling with any mental health issues?

Are you currently struggling with any addictions?

Appendix C: Interview Guide

Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about the loss of your sibling. Before we begin, I want you to know that this is not only research to me, but it is also a personal journey. I too lost a sibling, my only sister Emily when she was eighteen years old in a tragic car accident. Not a day goes by that I do not think of her. Because of my loss I have spent a great deal of my personal, professional and academic life addressing issues of death and loss. I truly appreciate the personal stories that you are willing to share with me.

So we're here to talk about your experience of loss of a sibling. Where would you like to start?

There are some parts of your experience that I want to make sure that we cover, so I may be asking you some questions along the way.

Examples:

1. What was life like before your sibling died?
 - a. What was happening in your life?
 - b. Tell me about your relationship with your sibling.
 - c. Tell me about your relationships with other members of your family.
 - d. Tell me about your relationships with your closest friends.
2. Tell me how your sibling died. (Circumstances of his/her death).

- a. What do you remember about that moment when you found out your sibling had died?
 - i. What was happening in your life?
 - ii. How would you describe your grief? Your feelings?
 - b. Tell me about your relationships with other members of your family.
 - i. What changed?
 - ii. What stayed the same?
 - c. Tell me about your relationships with your closest friends.
 - i. What changed?
 - ii. What stayed the same?
 - d. What was your greatest sense of support?
 - e. Can you describe the experience of loss that you felt?
3. And finally, let's talk about where you are now. What is life like with your sibling gone?
 - a. Probe: What is happening in your life now?
 - b. Tell me about your relationship with your sibling.
 - c. Tell me about your relationships with other members of your family.
 - d. Tell me about your relationships with your closest friends.
 4. How did you integrate the loss of your sibling in the meaning of your life?
 5. Is there anything else you'd like to share that would help me understand your experience?
 6. Do you know of any other individuals who lost a sibling between the ages of thirteen and eighteen who are currently between the ages of eighteen and twenty-five who might be willing to participate in this research?

Appendix E: Codes Identified

Sense of support,
Counseling support,
School Experience
College Experience
Not being able to handle parents/family,
Avoidance of family,
Anger at sibling who died,
Avoidance of feelings,
Numbness,
Difference of experience of loss in surviving siblings,
Depended on – had to step up to help with everything,
Shut down – did not want to feel,
Overcompensating for loss,
Struggles in relationships with surviving siblings,
Struggles with relationship with parent(s),
Growing up too soon,
Changes in family dynamics,
New friendships,
Changes in friendships,
Re-establishing friendships,
School experience,

College experience,
School as a support,
Avoidance of school,
Avoidance of counseling,
Parent,
Friendship,
Finding a direction,
New friendships,
Friendships with other surviving siblings,
Re-establishing friendships,
Boyfriend,
College attendance,
Professional in the workplace,
Making a difference,
Sibling who passed would not want me to give up,
What is important now
Compassion to self.
Continued connections with those who were lost
How we remember them
Connections within the family dynamic