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## Friendgrief: Perspectives on the Loss of a Friend

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## Friendgrief: Perspectives on the Loss of a Friend

by

Katie M. Ueland, BSW, LSW

MSW Clinical Research Paper

Presented to the Faculty of the  
School of Social Work  
St. Catherine University and the University of St. Thomas  
St. Paul, Minnesota  
In Partial fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

Master of Social Work

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The Clinical Research Project is a graduation requirement for MSW students at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work in St. Paul, Minnesota and is conducted within a nine-month time frame to demonstrate facility with basic social research methods. Students must independently conceptualize a research problem, formulate a research design that is approved by a research committee and the university Institutional Review Board, implement the project, and publicly present the findings of the study. This project is neither a Master's thesis nor a dissertation.

**Abstract**

This purpose of this study was to determine the connection between friendship and grief through interviews with professionals in the grief and loss field. The literature review explored friendship and grief within the framework of adult attachment theory. The two independent topics then merged in a discussion about the concept of Friendgrief, the grief experienced due to the death of a friend. The present qualitative study interviewed five grief and loss professionals working in various settings to discover their perspectives on Friendgrief and its implications on social work practice. The content analysis of the data was accomplished through transcription and coding of the interviews. Four major themes emerged from the data analysis: attachment, friendship, grief, and integration of the loss. The interviewees all emphasized the importance of the depth of attachment and connection within a friendship and put less emphasis on the title of the relationship. The respondents also discussed that grief is an individual experience unique to each person that goes through the process. The last major theme found in this study was the importance of the integration of the loss into one's life. Surprisingly disenfranchised grief, which was very prominent in the literature review, was only mentioned sparingly throughout the interviews and was not determined to be an overarching theme in this study.

### **Acknowledgements**

First and foremost, to my family and friends, I would not have made it through the last two years without your love and support. To my parents, Bob and Mary Ueland, thank you for always knowing I would make it through even the toughest times and doing whatever you could to ensure that I would. To my friends, my psychological family, you know who you are. No matter how irrational or crazed I was throughout this clinical research project (and graduate school all together), you all stuck by my side and gave me strength and encouragement when I needed it most. I would be lost without you guys.

Sarah Ferguson, my research chair, thank you for never giving up on me and for the constant reassurance that I would make it to the end. While overwhelming most of the time, I know this project would have been unbearable had it not been for the direction and guidance you provided me throughout the year.

To my committee members, thank you for making my paper what it is today. Without your constructive criticism and guidance I would still be stuck in a pile of peer reviewed journals with absolutely no direction or focus. Your expertise and insight made it possible for me to discover where I wanted to take this project and made it a reality.

And last but certainly not least, thank you to those professionals who volunteered their time to be a part of this research project. Without your knowledge and willingness to share your expertise, this paper would be nonexistent. Thank you for your time, participation, and dedication to enhancing social work practice.

**Table of Contents**

Introduction ..... 1

Conceptual Framework..... 2

Literature Review ..... 3

    Friendship ..... 3

    Grief..... 6

    Sorrow and Solace ..... 10

    Disenfranchised Grief..... 12

    Friendgrief..... 13

Methodology ..... 16

    Research Design..... 16

    Sample..... 17

    Protection of Human Subjects ..... 17

    Data Collection ..... 18

    Analysis Technique..... 19

    Strengths and Limitations ..... 19

Findings..... 20

    Attachment..... 21

    Friendship ..... 24

    Grief..... 25

    Integration of the Loss ..... 28

# FRIENDGRIEF

|                                                               |    |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|----|
| Discussion .....                                              | 31 |
| Interpretation of the Findings .....                          | 31 |
| Limitations of the Research .....                             | 36 |
| Implications for Future Research and Social Work Practice.... | 37 |
| Conclusion.....                                               | 38 |
| References.....                                               | 39 |
| Appendices .....                                              | 41 |
| Appendix A.....                                               | 41 |
| Appendix B.....                                               | 43 |

## Introduction

“With the friendships I have made over the years, it will never be too dark because my friends are the stars.’ But how different the sky appears in the absence of that special star” (Smith, 2002b, p. 16). Smith (2002b) posits that ten to twenty million people experience the death of a friend annually (p. 7). Friendgrief, the term that defines this experience, is “the thoughts, feelings or behaviors experienced when acknowledging and integrating a friend’s death into our daily lives” (Smith, 2002b, p.7) The friendships we form throughout our lives mold and shape who we become. Seen through the lens of attachment theory, friends become members of our psychological families and important attachment figures who “not only gives us reasons for action but makes an important contribution to who we are” (Cocking & Kennett, 1998, p. 526). The loss of such an attachment figure can have a deep emotional impact. That impact will differ depending on the depth of the relationship between the deceased and the bereaved friend; the quality of the relationship will impact a person’s grief more than the relationship label or title (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2010, p.733). Friendgrief is a concept that has been relatively ignored in grief literature (Smith, 2006a, p. 15). This research paper seeks to find where friendship, death and grief meet and how they intertwine. To better understand the concept of Friendgrief, this study will explore the perspectives of grief and loss professionals, and their opinions on Friendgrief’s implications for practice. What is the intersection of friendship and grief in the loss of a friend?

### **Conceptual Framework**

Attachment theory grew out of the work of John Bowlby and his research about children and their primary caregivers. It has developed and broadened into a concept that can be applied to adult relationships as well. Adult attachment theory applies the same principles of attachment to adults in relationships, romantic or platonic. Fraley (2010) stated in his brief overview of the theory that “the emotional bond [in adult relationships] is partly a function of the same motivational system—the attachment behavioral system—that gives rise to the emotional bond between infants and their caregivers.”

In a review of early theories regarding grief within the attachment framework, the authors stated that it was important to “work through” or detach from that relationship (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006, 716). More recently, however, those researchers say it is better to adapt and integrate the lost attachment into life without that person. Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies state:

[Contemporary] theorists have emphasized how a constructive reorganization rather than relinquishment of the bond can be achieved by “internalizing the lost loved one as an extension of the self... taking him or her as a role model, appreciating that individual’s unique legacy, or cultivating a sense of the figure’s comforting presence at times of stress. (717)

Attachment affects many pieces of human development. That extends to coping with grief and loss as well. How it affects that process is critical to



## FRIENDGRIEF

understanding how best to address it. When losing an attachment figure, a bereaved person's "sense of identity may have to be redefined" (Mallon, 2008, p. 7). The same can be said about the loss of a good friend, with whom there is also a strong attachment. As stated previously, friends, just as much as family sometimes, define who we are. Without that particular friend, a person will have to reorganize not only how others see them, but also how they see themselves without that friend.

### **Literature Review**

The review of the literature for this paper focuses on two main concepts, friendship and grief, and what happens when the two intertwine. Friendship is defined and its significance within life's experience is explored. Grief resources will include Kubler-Ross's (1969) stages of grief as well as several other grief theories including continuing bonds, the dual process model, and sorrow and solace. The concepts of friendship and grief start to intertwine with the introduction of disenfranchised grief and join completely in the discussion of Friendgrief.

This research posits that relationship between friends is significant but left unacknowledged in the grief process. Friendships are significant attachment relationships; friends can become a part our psychological family and the loss of a friend can be just as devastating as the loss of a biological family member.

### **Friendship**

Friendships exist, but a good friend, a true companion, is someone who offers "company and comfort and [possesses] highly [valued] attributes such as trust, loyalty, and self-disclosure" (Smith, 2002a, p. 5). A friendship is a voluntary,

## FRIENDGRIEF

intimate relationship devoid of romantic or familial obligation. Being a part of this kind of friendship impacts people in profound ways.

The loss of a good friend has an equally profound impact. Friendgrief, the grief response after the death of a friend, affects ten to twenty million Americans a year (Smith, 2002b, p. 7). Because this loss is prevalent, it is important to inquire as to what makes a friend such an important relationship and what kind of impact it has on a person's life. Smith (2002b) quotes Theroux:

Every person is born into a particular quadrant of the heavens. Our friends hang like companion stars around us, giving us point and direction. We run to them when we have something to celebrate, fall back upon them when feeling ill-used or ill-defined. (p. 16)

People have friends for many reasons throughout life: as supporters, guides, and fellow champions through life's challenges. Friends give shape to experiences and meaning to questions. Friends help carry us through. They most often represent the benefit of shared experience; they offer the reassurance that we are not alone in this world. Friends make us happy.

Demir (2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2011, & 2013) has published extensive research exploring the correlation between friendship and personal happiness. He uses Hays' definition of friendship throughout his research; friendship is a "voluntary interdependence between two persons over time, which is intended to facilitate socio-emotional goals of the participants, and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance." Demir seeks

## FRIENDGRIEF

to discover what makes people happy in friendships by looking at a number of factors such as personality traits (2007a), best versus close friendships (2007b), needs satisfaction (2010), perceived mattering (2011), and sense of uniqueness (2013). Demir found the two strongest predictors of happiness within a friendship are companionship and self-validation (2007a, 2007b). While Demir's extensive research has found that many variables affect and predict happiness within friendship, these two are the most prominent. "Companionship is one of the most basic dimensions of friendship" (Demir, 2007a, p. 201). It offers a foundation to build intimacy, support, and a deeper connection. Companions, friends, are attachment figures in which we see ourselves; "... our attachment to our friends not only gives us reasons for action but makes an important contribution to who we are" (Cocking & Kennett, 1998, p. 526). The death of a friend is not only the loss of a companion, but also the loss of a source of self-validation. Friends serve "a need whereby individuals seek to confirm their self-view, even when it could be negative... [Individuals] develop closer relationships with those who verify their self-views" (Demir, 2007a, p. 202). In the loss of a friend a person also loses a piece of himself or herself in a way.

As defined by both Smith and Demir, friendship is a voluntary relationship; friendship lives outside the constraints of pre-constructed family dynamics. We get to choose our friends. We get to choose who influences us and how. Boss (2006) distinguishes the difference between a physical/biological family and a psychological family. A person's physical family includes those people who are physically present and biologically related. The psychological family includes the

## FRIENDGRIEF

people we choose to attach ourselves to. “The people we perceive as family may be an amalgam of biological kin plus those dear to us (a lifemate, partner, noncustodial parent or child, friend, coworker, neighbor, fictive kin) who are kept present psychologically” (Boss, 2006, p. 30). The psychological family, as Boss defines it, is influenced by attachment, and not biologically driven. “I define attachment more generally, as the deep connection between individuals in couples, families, or other close relationships. Clearly, a person to whom you feel attached would be viewed as a part of your psychological family” (Boss, 2006, p. 164). Good friends fit into Boss’s definition of psychological family. Good friends choose to attach themselves to one another and are kept present in their lives by that choice, not by biological necessity.

### **Grief**

Experiencing loss through the death of a good friend is a guaranteed part of life. The normal response to that loss is grief. The grief process “include[s] at least temporary negative psychological consequences for most persons, and for many the changes also include the experience of positive personal transformation, and these positive and negative responses tend to coexist” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2008, p. 29). Kubler-Ross (1969) was at the forefront of defining the stages of grief. She developed a model identifying five stages in the grief process through her work interviewing people living with terminal illness. She identified five stages most grieving people experience, they include: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance.

Kubler-Ross’ (1969) were initially referring to individual’s response to their personal death, for this proposal, the stages will be described in relation to the loss

## FRIENDGRIEF

of a good friend. Denial is evident and identifiable when grieving a loss of a friend.

The bereaved friend does not accept the death and cannot believe that it has happened. This stage is a defense mechanism, a way for the bereaved person to shield himself or herself from the initial pain of the death (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 40).

The second stage of grief is anger. A bereaved person can focus this anger on any number of things: themselves, the deceased, or the circumstances surrounding the death. They can't understand how this could happen and they are looking for someone or something to blame for their pain (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 50).

Bargaining for more time, one last conversation, or the chance to say goodbye is a common grief experience. Those left behind after the death of a friend are left wanting more and are willing to bargain for the chance to get it (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 82). During the depression stage of grief, the finality of death sinks in. Sadness, fear, and regret are emotions that are felt during this stage (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 87). As negative as it can be, it is also this realization about the conclusiveness of death that brings about the final stage of grief: acceptance (Kubler-Ross, 1969, p. 113). A bereaved person in the acceptance stage can still be grieving. But he or she has acknowledged the loss and are working to integrate it into their life.

In contrast to Kubler-Ross (1969), many scholars assert that the stages of grief are fluid. Grievers can flow back and forth between stages and even skip a stage (Kellehear, 2009). "[People] experiencing the stages should not force the [grief] process. [It] is highly personal and should not be rushed, nor lengthened, on the basis of an individual's imposed time frame or opinion" (The Huntington's Disease Society of America, unknown). Each person experiences grief differently

## FRIENDGRIEF

and deal with a loss in an individualized manner (Lattanzi-Licht, 2002). Diverse situations, relationships (good friendships), and coping styles lead to diverse grieving experiences. “Although people react to... loss in different ways, grief affects us in all dimensions of being: physiological, psychological, social, and spiritual. Coping and adaptation take place across all of these dimensions” (Lattanzi-Licht, 2002, p. 171). Depending on the depth of the relationship with the deceased, a person will be affected differently on each of these levels (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006). A person’s grief and response to loss can be as diverse as the relationships they have; the grief they feel over one loss might not feel the same as another. Friends who grieve feel a different type of loss than a grieving biological family member; they will be affected, cope, and integrate the loss in different ways.

Another model of grief is the Dual Process Model; and even though some professionals see Kubler-Ross’s five stages as more rigid, the Dual Process Model explicitly states that bereaved persons oscillate between different phases of grief. Stroebe and Schut (1999) theorize that bereaved people oscillate between loss-orientation and restoration-orientation in coping with their grief. “Loss-orientation refers to the concentration on, and dealing with, processing of some aspect of the loss experience itself, most particularly, with respect to the deceased person” (Stroebe & Schut, 1999, p. 212). Restoration-orientation refers to secondary sources of stress, such as financial burdens, life changes, distractions from the grief, or new life roles and responsibilities (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). The periodic movement from loss-orientation to restoration-orientation allows the bereaved to find short-term relief from their grief and allows time for healing (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). It should

## FRIENDGRIEF

be noted that “dwelling on intense suffering can have severe mental consequences; thus, moving beyond the pain should not be misinterpreted as a signal that the bereft have forgotten the deceased or that the grief has ended” (Wright & Hogan, 2008, p. 353). A bereaved friend may appear not to be grieving, but Stroebe and Schut (1999) advocate that they may be taking the necessary time for mental recovery and integration of the loss.

The continuing bonds theory (Epstein, Kalus, & Berger, 2006), developed from attachment theory, describes how a bereaved person will integrate the loss of their friend. Early theorists such as Freud hypothesized that the bereaved work to detach himself or herself from the deceased friend “in order to permit psychic and behavioral adaptation through investment in new relationships” (Neimeyer, Baldwin, & Gillies, 2006, p. 716). Contrary to this view, contemporary researchers have found that continued attachment to a deceased friend can be used as a “secure base” while integrating the loss and aid in positive adjustment (Field & Filanosky, 2010, p. 6). In their study about continuing bonds and adjustment, Field and Filanosky (2010) discussed the difference internalized and externalized continuing bonds. Externalized continuing bonds include “illusions and hallucinations of the deceased, indicative of unresolved loss,” whereas internalized continuing bonds speaks to a “mental representation of the deceased” which can be the beginning of the secure base mentioned previously (Field & Filanosky, 2010, p. 2). Researchers have also found, however, that in some instances continuing attachment to the deceased can create more distress (Epstein, Kalus, & Berger, 2006). These outcomes were usually paired with externalized continuing bond factors and led to “high

## FRIENDGRIEF

anxiety, insomnia, and [complicated] grief” (Epstein, Kalus, & Berger, 2006, p. 263). Neimeyer, Baldwin, and Gillies (2006) found that “some form of... ‘silver lining’ in the loss, to experience a progressive rather than regressive transformation in one’s identity... predicted more positive grief outcomes” (p. 733). Bereaved persons who have lost a friend still have an attachment to that person; finding a way to properly integrate the loss while still holding on to that bond of friendship is possible and can create a platform for personal growth and transformation (Field & Filanosky, 2010).

### **Sorrow and Solace**

As the continuing bonds theory suggests, grief and the attachment to a dead friend, do not necessarily come to an end. While a friend can continue to grieve the loss of their companion throughout the years, there is nothing pathological about this grief; it is not something that needs to be fixed (Klass, 2013, p. 597). Klass (2013) states there are pieces of grieving that are left out of bereavement research: sorrow and solace. He argues that the present “research and practice in the field is on the side of finding positive resolution, not dwelling on the sorrow” (p. 597). He states that this positive view of grief has caused certain aspects of the grieving process to be overlooked or ignored (p.597). Grief “is not an either/or matter” (p. 599). Instead of either assimilating or accommodating the death of a friend into their lives, Klass (2013) argues that people do both simultaneously. Klass writes:

They assimilate into their preexisting worldview,  
change their worldviews, and evolve in their sense of  
sorrow. And they continue to do all three in their



## FRIENDGRIEF

ongoing lives long after clinicians would say that they are done grieving. Most of us are seldom of one mind or psychic state, and bereaved people remain of many minds and states. (p. 599)

As Klass (2013) stated, sorrow is commonly continuous. When trying to define sorrow, he stated, "it cannot be truly understood by those who have not experienced it" (p. 601). Even though, in most cases Klass argues, sorrow persists longer than would be clinically acceptable, that sadness is different from depression and should be treated as such. "Grief's depression is about our relationship to our world when that world includes the inescapable reality that death is real... When a significant death happens... we must deal with the fact that it can and did happen to us" (Klass, 2013, p. 604).

"But sorrow remains and into that sorrow comes solace" (Klass, 2013, p. 614). Klass says that solace is a paradoxical concept that integrates "pleasure, enjoyment, or delight" with "hopelessness, despair, and sorrow" (p. 609). Solace is about finding comfort within the grief (Klass, 2013, p. 610). Klass (2013) stated that this happens via many avenues: a consoling friend, continuing bonds with the deceased, memory making, and faith are just a few (p. 610-612). However solace is found, Klass made the important point that while solace is seen as a positive outcome, it is "ambivalently so" (p. 597) because it is so heavily intertwined with the continued sorrow of grieving. Klass's (2013) argument was that this "deep and abiding sense of sadness, emptiness... nothingness" is normal, and should not be pathologized or overlooked, but integrated (p. 597).

### **Disenfranchised Grief**

While grief is a natural process, our society has traditionally attributed this process to the loss of a family member. However, if good friends become psychological family (Boss, 2006) what occurs when the grieving process with the loss of a good friend is not recognized? Doka (2002) explores the circumstances of disenfranchised grief, who is affected by it, and how it impacts the grieving process. There are three “primary ways” that grief or bereavement can be disenfranchised: the relationship between the bereaved and deceased is not recognized; the loss of the deceased is not recognized; and the bereaved is not recognized (Corr, 2002, p.42). There are many instances when the bereaved person’s role in the deceased person’s life is not recognized the way it is with immediate family; friend grievers and the psychological family are examples of this type of disenfranchised grief. “The closeness of non-kin relationships may simply not be understood or appreciated” (Doka, 2002, p. 10). The psychological family that Boss (2006) references is not considered a traditional family by society’s view and is therefore left out of normal biological family grieving practices. Sometimes, even if the relationship is understood, the loss itself is not acknowledged as acceptable or significant. Some grief situations are outside the social norms and acknowledged as such, if recognized at all (Doka, 2002, p.11). Doka (2002) explains that excluding the griever is another form of disenfranchised grief. “Here the person is not socially defined as capable of grief; therefore, there is little or no social recognition of his or her sense of loss or need to mourn” (p. 13). Young children, developmentally disabled, and the elderly all fall into this category.

## FRIENDGRIEF

There is a cultural aspect to disenfranchised grief. Different cultures have different rituals and norms when it comes to death, grief, and loss. America is a mosaic of cultures; even so, we expect different cultures to ascribe to the “American funeral,” the American way of grieving (Doka & Martin, 2002, p. 339). In a traditional American/Christian funeral, the biological family lines the front of the church. They are closest to the deceased; friends, coworkers, acquaintances file in behind them. The family makes all of the decisions regarding the funeral arrangements from flowers to caskets to eulogies. Friends only become involved in the process by the invitation of the family. Grieving is done quietly without drawing much attention. This is in stark contrast to the atmosphere of some Hispanic or African American funerals, where mourners are expected to display their grief and emotion (Doka & Martin, 2002, p. 339-340). “Grieving, then, can be partially disenfranchised, supported within one subculture even as it is disenfranchised elsewhere” (Doka & Martin, 2002, p. 339). Culture has a piece, too, in who has the right to grieve the death of a loved one. Doka and Martin (2002) explain that different cultures have different “patterns of kinship” (p. 339). Immediate family members are not the only ones who grieve a lost loved one. Psychological family, friends, fall outside of the traditional American/Christian patterns of kinship. Their grief is disenfranchised due to the nature of their relationship to the deceased and is not recognized by the traditional parameters.

### **Friendgrief**

Beder (2009) explores the disenfranchised grief of friends and psychological family. He writes, “We have terms and labels for those who grieve—wives and

## FRIENDGRIEF

husbands become widows and widowers; children become orphans; brothers and sisters are said to experience sibling loss; but there is no term to describe those who grieve friends” (Beder, 2009, p.228). Friendship is recognized as a significant bond and relationship; but in grief, the same care and attention is not paid to the close friend that is paid to the family, even though friends may grieve with the same intensity as immediate family. While there is minimal recognition of this, Beder (2009) stated that some literary articles found “the bereavement experience following the death of a close friend can be as severe as, and in some cases more severe, than that of an immediate family member” (p. 228).

Smith (2002b) has written several articles and books narrating his vast experience with the concept of Friendgrief. “Ten to twenty million American experience the death of a friend in a given year” (p. 7). Even though a very common occurrence, the death of a friend has not really been seen as a major loss. The loss of a parent, spouse, or child has been seen as greatly overshadowing the loss of a friend (and maybe rightfully so). Smith (2009b) asks the question, who is to say that they death of a friend isn’t just as significant? He argues against the statement “‘She was only a friend.’ (Maybe she was only a friend, but she was *my* friend)” (Smith, 2002b, p. 9). Smith argues that no matter how insignificant the loss might seem in contrast to that of bereaved family members, it is still significant to the friend. While their grief maybe overshadowed in most instances, Smith (2002a) maintains that friends have rights while coping with their grief (p. 9). Friends have the right to grieve just as much as the family. Their grief is very real. No matter the value assigned by society, the friendship does have significant value and deserves to be

## FRIENDGRIEF

acknowledged. Bereaved friends should be able to maintain that friendship and that continuing bond to help facilitate “their own unique integration of the loss” (Smith, 2002a, p. 9).

Smith’s books *When your Friend Dies* and *Friendgrief: An Absence Called Presence* offer a “how-to” approach to coping with Friendgrief. His books are laced with personal stories, snippets from newspaper obituaries, and tributes of famous people given by friends. He discusses practical circumstances about how to support the family, how to attend the funeral, even how to eulogize a friend. Personal quests such as cherishing and remembering a friend are also addressed. No matter what the context, Smith speaks to the importance about broadening the presence of Friendgrief in the grief literature. As it stands now, there is relatively little discussing the concept. “Unexamined is an understatement when applied to the subject of grief following the death of a friend” (Smith, 2002a, p. 15). Including more research on Friendgrief within grief literature is pivotal to the practice of grief and loss professionals. Practitioners need to understand and recognize the complexities of Friendgrief and the implications it has for their practice.

### **Conclusion**

Good friends play an important role in our lives, they can become our psychological family (Boss, 1969). They are companions who guide us through life, define who we are, and become a part of our psychological families. Ten to twenty million Americans lose a friend each year (Smith, 2002b). Experiencing this loss and working through the grief are events that all people will endure in their lives. In traditional grieving processes, the biological family of the deceased gets the majority

## FRIENDGRIEF

of the attention and support. This study will investigate how this type of loss is viewed and understood by clinical social workers working with grieving individuals. Sometimes a friendship runs deeper than a relationship with a family member, but the grief of the friend is still disenfranchised. This type of grief is considered to be outside the norm. There is minimal literature regarding Friendgrief and its impact on the bereaved friend. The purpose of this research paper is to discover the perspectives of grief and loss professionals and their opinions on Friendgrief's implications for practice. What is the intersection of friendship and grief in the loss of a friend?

### **Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to discover the intersection of friendship and grief in the loss of a friend. I hoped to shed some light on the answer to this question by interviewing grief and loss professionals about their experiences with Friendgrief and how they perceived its implications for clinical practice.

### **Research Design**

Previous research designs within the realm of grief and loss included both quantitative and qualitative methods. The research in this paper used the qualitative approach in order to gain more in-depth information about how practitioners working with grief and loss saw and addressed the concept of Friendgrief. The research question proposed in this paper was posed to professionals working with grief and loss: What is the intersection of friendship and grief with the loss of a friend?

## FRIENDGRIEF

### **Sample**

The sample for this study included five professionals working within the realm of grief and loss. The professionals were from a variety of disciplines, but all had experience working with individuals' faced with grief and loss. Professionals included social workers, therapists, chaplains, and professional counselors. The researcher used Snowball sampling to find these individuals. A Snowball sample recruits participants through a network of known individuals (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011, 151). This researcher approached professionals in the social services field for referrals to experts in the field of grief and loss. Sources included personnel within the researcher's practicum setting at a local teaching hospital and supervisors at her current employment location.

These professionals were asked for their input in this study because of their position working with grief and loss on a daily basis. Their insights as to how attachment affected friendship grief was relevant because they were the frontline workers intervening on a day-to-day basis.

### **Protection of Human Subjects**

Any individual participating in this research project was asked to sign a consent form before being interviewed. The consent form informed the participant of the background of the study, its procedures, risks, benefits, and confidentiality. The participant was notified that all participation is voluntary. The proposal and consent form was submitted to the Internal Review Board of St. Catherine University and reviewed to ensure that the study was ethical and appropriate. Participants were not identified in the final paper, and their identity was kept

## FRIENDGRIEF

confidential throughout the research process. While the interviews were audio taped, the researcher erased the interviews upon completion and final submission of this paper. All identifying information about the interviewees was removed from the paper.

### **Data Collection**

The data for this paper was collected through one-on-one semi-structured interviews with professionals working with grief and loss. The researcher first contacted the professionals to inquire about their desire to participate; the researcher described the background, purpose, and method of this paper to those individuals who wished to participate. Next, the participant signed a consent form. The interview was semi-structured and contained eight pre-developed questions. The researcher provided the list of interview questions to the professional at the same time as the consent form. The interviews were semi-structured to allow the researcher to ask any necessary follow-up questions that presented in the moment. The researcher developed the interview questions in response to the literature review and her personal experiences with grief and loss (See Appendix B for full list of interview questions). The questions began broadly by asking the participants in what capacity they worked in grief and loss. The researcher also asked the participants if they saw any difference between friendgrief and familial grief. Interventions and tools to address friendship grief are also discussed. The focus of the questions then narrowed to focus on the interaction between attachment theory and grief and loss.



## FRIENDGRIEF

The interview questions were approved by St. Catherine University Internal Review Board to ensure that they were appropriate and ethical. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed onto paper. Both the recordings and the transcriptions of the interviews were destroyed following the completion of this paper by June 1, 2014.

### **Analysis Technique**

This researcher utilized content analysis to analyze the data gathered in the interviews conducted. Content analysis “refers to a method of transforming the symbolic content of a document, such as words or other images, from a qualitative, unsystematic form into a quantitative, systematic form” (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011, p. 208).

Each interview was transcribed onto paper following its completion. Once transcribed, the researcher coded each interview. Coding was a way to look for patterns within the interviews (Monette, Sullivan, & DeJong, 2011, p. 208). These patterns were grouped and analyzed by the researcher. The researcher determined if there were any similarities in trends and connected them in broader themes to see if they recurred throughout multiple interviews.

### **Strengths and Limitations**

A strength of this research paper is that it has the potential to add to the growing amount of research in the field of complicated grief and its relationship to attachment theory. If professionals understood how type of attachment affects the grieving process, then they would have a better starting point to addressing grief when it becomes complicated. Another strength of this paper is the uniqueness of its

## FRIENDGRIEF

topic. While Friendgrief is rarely discussed within the existing grief and loss literature, this paper brings a different perspective to research.

This study has several limitations, including its very limited scope. The professionals that were interviewed will most likely be from one metro area within the Midwest. There may be cultural concerns related to attachment or grief and loss that might not be addressed. Also, attachment theory and grief and loss are both categories that far outstretch the boundaries of one research paper. Many more research questions presented themselves during the development of this paper; unfortunately, only one small piece can be addressed at a time.

### **Findings**

This qualitative research was intended to be conducted with grief and loss professionals with different educational backgrounds and employment addressing grief and loss. Interviewees included a hospital chaplain with a doctoral degree in divinity working primarily with children and their families; a palliative care licensed independent clinical social worker (LICSW) in a hospital setting working with individuals and families in both the inpatient and outpatient settings; an LICSW school-based counselor; a grief counselor employed through a funeral home with a bachelors of arts degree with an emphasis in grief and loss; and a private practice LICSW psychotherapist working primarily with cancer patients and friends and family members of cancer patients. All practitioners had worked in the field a substantial amount of time; the shortest amount of time was about 10 years. Several interviewees had around 30 years of experience working with grief and loss. While

## FRIENDGRIEF

the amount of time working in the field did not seem to impact respondents' answers to the interview questions, the educational backgrounds did. The three LICSWs had very similar responses regarding the interaction of attachment, friendship, and grief. The hospital chaplain also had similar views to the LICSWs but had varied responses for some categories. This could be attributed to the fact that the chaplain worked on an interdisciplinary team within the hospital setting and worked closely with other LICSWs addressing patients' and families' emotional and spiritual needs. The grief counselor employed by the funeral home made similar connections to the other interviewees; however, he did seem to be the outlier with several of his responses and observations.

Four major themes emerged that helped gain a better understanding of the intersection of friendship and grief in the loss of a friend: attachment, friendship, grief, and integration of the loss. The first theme, attachment, speaks to the depth of the connection between the two people in a friendship. The second theme, friendship, explores the interviewees' professional perspectives on their work with friendgrief and what kind of friendship they see when working with patients or clients. The third theme, grief, details the experiences of clients experiencing friendgrief. The final theme, sorrow and solace, mirrors the research that grief can coexist with positive emotions as people continue on with their lives. These four themes will be discussed separately in order to address the nuances of each.

### **Attachment**

*The depth of attachment impacts a person's grief more than the title of the relationship.* This concept surfaced in all interviews conducted with the

## FRIENDGRIEF

participating professionals. All respondents agreed that the depth of the attachment and the connection between two people, no matter the title of the relationship, will affect a person's grief more than the label given to that relationship. In their experiences, the interviewees stated that friends can have deep attachment to each other; it doesn't matter that the grieving person was "just a friend" (respondent, 2014). Within that friendship is a deep connection and attachment. It is this attachment that impacts a friend's grief. One respondent stated it wasn't uncommon to see friends grieve more deeply than someone's immediate family. In many cases, her patients had deeper attachments to their friends than to their blood-related family. Respondents made statements about the bond of the friendship relationship or the closeness of the two individuals. One respondent noted:

*[Would] there be a difference [in the grief?] Only in that there might more often be family members that have the stronger more intimate attachment. But in terms would I say a friend's grief is different from a family member's grief? Not necessarily. Because grief has to do with the loss that's experienced.*

It is the loss that is experienced, not the familial connection that affects a person's reaction to the loss of a friend. The depth of the grief reflects the connection with the person. Another respondent noted: *If you really loved this person and had a connection with them then you will grieve them deeply.* Other respondents noted no distinction between family and friendship grief, with many of the respondents commenting on the depth of the love. Two examples of this sentiment include: *We grieve as deeply as we love* and *[Not] to have loved is not to have grieved. To love is to grieve.*

The professionals interviewed repeatedly used the phrase "deep connection" when discussing the strength of the attachment that they see in friends that grieve.

## FRIENDGRIEF

This emphasis on the strength of the attachment mirrors the findings within the literature.

***Attachment may depend on a person's developmental stage.*** Some professionals that were interviewed discussed how the friendgrief they see in their practice is not as strong as familial grief. They attributed this to the griever's developmental stage and who were their primary attachment figures were at the time of the loss. A school counselor who has seen both friendship grief and familial grief with her students stated that the kids felt the loss of family members much stronger than the loss of friends.

*[At] this age, I think they feel the loss of their friend strongly, but I do think the family [grief] is actually more complex and is a longer healing process... because they are younger. That's their stronger attachment now.*

Another professional discussed segmenting adult attachment further into different age groups. He felt that older adults, men and women in their 40s and 50s, have stronger attachments to their friends than younger adults in their 20s and 30s and therefore would grieve more if a friend passed away. One respondent noted: *I do think that friendship grief, a lot of it has to go by what are the ages because everybody's different developmentally.* The same interviewee also stated he believed that a person would have a stronger attachment to someone they have known for many years versus someone they have known a relatively short amount of time. Another professional felt the opposite about this concept. She stated that in her experience, it didn't matter the age of the friends or length of time they were in the friend relationship; some connections are automatic and can cross many boundaries.

## FRIENDGRIEF

*And it's fascinating because haven't you met people you've just fallen in love with them within five months and they feel so familiar to you. And you feel like you have more of a connection than with people you've known for ten years.*

### Friendship

Friendship stood out as another important theme within the interviews.

Practitioners discussed their own personal connections to friends and how that knowledge about that special connection impacts how they see friendships in their clients or patients. Regardless if the interviewees worked with kids or adults, they identified several core concepts that could be found in any friendship. Being one's self was one of these core concepts; one participant stated that *Friendship for me is being able to be with that person and be totally authentic and totally real... It's a much deeper level of knowing and awareness of someone. And taking time with them.*

Many of the respondents spoke about the spectrum of friendship. There was a continuity throughout the interviews that there are different levels of friendship, but one practitioner defined what a true friendship meant to her: *Friends are very much based on [a] heart connection to somebody... It's more about a connection and a mutual respect.* For this respondent, friendship went much deeper than any surface connection. She noted: *[In] fact I think the word friendship is sometimes even a really light word for a connection that people have for that attachment... Intimacy is a huge part of that attachment and friendship.*

Interviewees also identified reciprocity and support as two other key concepts found in friendships. One participant stated that *[A] friendship is a two-way street. You both give and you both take. You both add and you subtract.* Another spoke

## FRIENDGRIEF

to the need for mutual support found in a friendship: *They know what it means to be a good friend. To have fun together, but also to support each other, help each other.*

The professionals interviewed all talked about the intimacy that is involved in a close friendship. One respondent noted: *I mean intimacy is a huge part of that attachment and friendship and so many people get that confused with sex, but that intimacy is so strong.* One respondent reflected on how she identified deep intimate friendships with her patients:

*If you throw all the people up in your life and you catch them in your palm, those are [the ones] you should be putting your energy into... And I look at those people in my palm and I think, 'Is friendship even enough of a word to describe what I feel for them?'*

Several professionals discussed the concept of the psychological family and how it intertwines with friendship; as a person grows up, they replace their blood-related family with their friends. One practitioner stated: *I think as we grow up we do lose connection with blood family. I think it's normal. I think it is part of growing up... But friends, they are like extended family. They call it family of choice.* This was reflected in the literature regarding the connections a person can make with a psychological family in place of a blood-related family.

### Grief

***Everyone grieves differently.*** The practitioners interviewed agreed that grief can take different forms and every expression of that form of grief is valid. Regardless of the title of the relationship, the interviewees stated that they have seen grief take many different forms. The hospital chaplain that was interviewed discussed the diversity in grief she sees while people begin to process the death of their loved one:

## FRIENDGRIEF

*Every situation is different... Every family, every group of extended family [and friends is] different in how they are with each other. So you watch people closely. I'm watching people closely to see who needs maybe more care. Who needs more space. Who needs to tell their story.*

Another respondent talked about how important it was to provide education about grief taking many forms. She stated that it was an important piece to ensuring that grief was validated. Even though a friend might not look like they are outwardly grieving, more than likely they are trying to process through that grief in their own way:

*And what I educate people on too is grief has so many different looks to it. You can be cheersing with a glass of wine and be grieving. You're not just sitting and crying and I think that's the mistake that a lot of people make. You can be sitting there on a beach thinking about [your loved one] with a glass of wine and actively grieving.*

The grief counselor employed through a funeral home described that in his experience, the manner of death often affects how loved ones grieve as well. He stated that in instances of terminal illness, there is more of a chance for closure and therefore more easily addressed; sudden death, like a car accident, is more difficult for grievers to accept. Suicide was the manner of death that affected grief the most in his experience. Guilt and anger are pervasive emotions that complicate how grief is experienced in survivors of suicide.

***The practitioners' interventions when working with the griever depended on individual assessment.*** This theme was prevalent throughout the interviewees' responses. They thoroughly discussed the tools and interventions they use when working with a grieving person. They all said that it didn't matter whether the griever was family or friend, but what place they were at in their grief, what specific emotions they were experiencing, and what issues needed to be addressed. One



## FRIENDGRIEF

respondent stated that her work with grieving friends always begins with assessment:

*It's always, always a matter of assessment first. And so, if you go in assuming that because someone is a relative they're going to have a certain kind of grief, or intensity of grief, and somebody is a friend and they're going to have a different one. You're doing them a disservice. And professionally that's just not appropriate.*

Another interviewee held a similar stance regarding the assumptions made about grieving friends and loved ones. She also stated that practitioners should never assume one way or another about a person's grief: *Everything is case-by-case but now I think I approach [familial grief and friendship grief] all the same. After being in this field for so long it's realizing you cannot make assumptions.*

When working through grief with her kids, the school counselor stated that they could spend any time from an hour a week to an hour a day working with her individually or in small groups depending on their need. The counselor stated that she allowed the kids to guide the conversation and talk about what they wanted to. In her experience, kids only want to talk about their grief for a couple of minutes, and then they want to move on to other activities. The counselor stated that even if they don't utilize the entire session to address their grief and loss, it is important for the kids to know they have that option and that safe space to express themselves.

There were also differences in responses depending on if the professional was providing long-term grief therapy or immediate counseling interventions. The professionals that worked long-term with clients/patients stated that there was more opportunity for them to get in depth when working through a person's grief, whereas the professionals providing more immediate interventions after a death

## FRIENDGRIEF

identified that their role is more about consolation and education regarding grief and loss.

### **Integration of the Loss**

*Grief is an ongoing process.* This theme was very prevalent in the professionals' discussion regarding the outcomes they work towards with a grieving friend. It supports the research that grief is fluid and has no set course. Many of the professionals interviewed made the point of addressing the assumption that grief has an end. They felt it was imperative that grief and loss professionals make no assumptions just because a grieving friend appears fine one day because it may not be the case the following day. A respondent spoke about an analogy she used with her patients that compared grief to riding a wave:

*The Buddhists talk about riding a wave in grief and that when it's really intense you're at the top. It's peaking, but if you try to get off that wave by going backwards you're going to drown. So you ride the wave and it eventually lets you down. But you remember that you always got let off that wave and you will again. And there will be a time when it will peak again and you don't know necessarily when it's coming. But if you just surrender to it and just ride it, it will serve you well. But if you panic, kind of that hopeless, helpless feeling, think about trying to get off a wave that has crest. It won't happen. You'll go under.*

The professionals interviewed all discussed the importance of the integration of the loss of a friend. Many of the professionals emphasized the significance of integration versus getting over the loss. *We also want them really to have integration of the loss and that's something that takes time and in some cases a lot of time. The goal is not for people to 'get over it.'* Instead, one practitioner described the goal was more about grief management: *My hope is that I can get them out of that acute pain; get them feeling like they can manage their grief. That the grief won't manage them.*

## FRIENDGRIEF

One interviewee even spoke about her own ongoing grief about a patient passing away. She stated that even though it had been a couple of years since her death, and even though it was a professional relationship instead of a friendship, she still felt that ongoing grief process and was still working through her own grief two years later.

Another interviewee spoke of his mother's death and the impact it had on her core group of close friends. He said that even 25 years later, they still talk about her and express their sadness that she is no longer in their lives. Grief is an ongoing experience that can last a lifetime. The grief and loss psychotherapist explained that she usually has to explain to the patients she works with that the grief doesn't necessarily go away with time.

*My hope is that they'll understand that this [grief] is going to be a lifelong experience. Grief is not an event. It's not like the flu. You don't feel it coming on; it's really bad; and then you're over it and you forget it... It's a reaction that will ebb and flow and it's a reaction that will need to be managed more at times. But that it will be a process; it will be something that will truly be with you. Just like the color of your eyes. I mean it will be with you forever.*

***It is important to reinvest the energy from the broken friendship into something else.*** This theme surfaced when discussing the outcomes the practitioners hoped for when working with a grieving friend. One participant explained that he tries to normalize grief in his work: *It's helping them to understand that grief is normal. There is no right or wrong... [Hopefully] somewhere you will take energy from over here and reinvest that.* His goal, hopefully, was to help grieving friends get to a place where they were able to reinvest their time, energy, and love into other relationships and people. Another participant spoke to this as well:

## FRIENDGRIEF

*[The goal] is to really integrate that loss into their identity and who they are... I keep coming back to the word integrated. The goal is not for them to never feel sad about it again, but to be able to function at a level that's certainly at least adequate for them. And hopefully to have something positive that they take from it.*

Their responses validated the research that even though a person may still be connected to a deceased friend through a continuing bond, it is also important to reinvest in themselves and in other relationships.

***It is important to live in the moment.*** The last theme that was dominant throughout much of the interviews was the importance to live in the moment. Most of the practitioners interviewed worked with grief and loss as their main focus; the exception was the school counselor who only worked with several kids regarding the loss of parents or schoolmates. She stated: *[The kids] inspire me to live in the moment. That things happen and you can just put it behind you and let it go. We adults, we fester.* All practitioners interviewed talked about the importance of embracing what we have in the present and living in the moment. One interviewee discussed the lessons learned when a friend dies and how she hoped people respond to that lesson:

*It's such a powerful lesson to have a friend die and to know that everybody does die. And so what's your consensus about that? I'm going to enjoy life. I'm going to enjoy the people who I love now. I'm going to enjoy being with them because yes, shit happens.*

The private practice grief and loss psychotherapist stated that she tries to live by example for her patients by not holding anything back and living every moment to the fullest. *[So] much of grief... is walking around with regret and guilt about things we didn't do and we should have said and we didn't. And I pound that into people every day... Live now and love now and love more.*

## FRIENDGRIEF

What was interesting about this theme and these responses was the fact that all of these quotes came from different points in the interviews, not just responding to the desired outcomes of working with a grieving friend. This was clearly one of the most important messages that the interviewees wanted to be taken from the present research.

## Discussion

### Interpretation of the Findings

The four themes presented in the above section were found to be the most relevant and applicable in the data that was collected. These themes further the discussion about the intersection of friendship and grief. Throughout the transcriptions and coding of the interviews, it was interesting to discover how many of the themes overlapped and intertwined. The theme of attachment within a friendship was at the forefront in most of the interviews. Attachment was discussed not only as its own stand-alone theme, but was also closely tied into the discussion of friendship and grief.

The first theme centered on the attachment experienced between two close friends. Similar to the literature, the participants all agreed that there was some level of attachment in all friendships (Fraley, 2010). The difference between a casual friendship and a true close friendship was the depth of attachment felt between the two friends. The depth of the emotional connection between the two friends is what made the attachment profound. The deeper the connection, the deeper a person will feel the impact of grief in the loss of their friend. In most instances, the practitioners

## FRIENDGRIEF

interviewed did not see a difference in the grief between friends and family members. The exception was the school counselor that was interviewed. In her experience, the kids that lost a family members were impacted more by that loss than those kids that had lost a friend and classmate. This may be because parents and family members are children's primary attachment figures at that developmental stage. This concept reflects back to the concept that adult attachment develops out of the attachment between children and their parents (Fraley, 2010). Both the school counselor and another interviewee spoke about how a person's developmental stage has some correlation to whom a person grieves and how deeply they grieve.

Further expounding on developmental stage, age was discussed as a factor that affected attachment and grief. It was suggested by one of the interviewees that young adults in their 20s or 30s do not have as strong of attachments to friends as middle-aged adults in their 40s and 50s. Older adults have had more time to develop friendships and will therefore have a deeper attachment to their friends. However, it could be argued that by the time adults are in their 40s and 50s, they have families of their own. Their attachment might shift back to their relationships with their spouses and children. Younger adults, in contrast, may not yet have formed those types of connections and would still have a greater attachment in their friendships. Friends in their 20s and 30s will be members of one another's psychological families. "Clearly, a person to whom you feel attached would be viewed as a part of your psychological family" (Boss, 2006, p. 164).

## FRIENDGRIEF

It was also theorized by one interviewee that the longer the relationship, the deeper the attachment. What was interesting about this concept and the aforementioned theory about age was that they were opposed by another practitioner. She felt that attachment was formed by an intuitive connection between two people and was not necessarily governed by age and length of time. Instead a person could have a stronger attachment with a friend they have only known for six months than with someone they have known for 10 or 15 years.

Friendship was the second main theme that surfaced throughout the qualitative research. The respondents discussed different types and levels of friendships. They noted that people might have connections to acquaintances or casual friends, but the primary focus was on determining the traits of a true friendship. Close friendships were described as a rarity in the world. Many of the practitioners agreed in their responses that a person is lucky to have three or four very close friends that they have an intimate relationship with. These results reflect Boss's (2006) concept of the psychological family.

The interviewees all spoke about friendship being a two-way street and a camaraderie. This reflected Demir's (2007a, 2007b, 2010, 2011, & 2013) definition of friendship as a "voluntary interdependence between two persons over time... and may involve varying types and degrees of companionship, intimacy, affection, and mutual assistance." In the current research, friendship was described as being "totally authentic and totally real" (respondent, 2014), having a "deeper level of knowing and awareness of someone" (respondent, 2014), and a "heart connection...

## FRIENDGRIEF

and a mutual respect” (respondent, 2014). The participants used much of the same terminology as the literature when describing a good friendship.

The data reflected the idea that everyone grieves differently; “people react to... loss in different ways” (Lattanzi-Licht, 2002, p.171). This reflects the literature that discusses how the diversity of everyone’s upbringing and life experiences can affect a person’s grief (Lattanzi-Licht, 2002). Interviewees discussed the variety of ways people cope with the loss of a friend. Celebrating the person’s life with a libation, telling stories, crying, comforting one another, and “living big” (respondent, 2014) were all identified as reactions to the death of a friend. There was a consensus among the practitioners interviewed that assumptions should not be made when discussing how a friend expresses their grief. To assume that a family member would be grieving more than a friend would hinder the friend’s ability to feel validated in his or her grief. The private practice psychotherapist gave the example that one of her clients had a close friend and her mother pass away within months of each other. Instead of assuming that this woman was more distraught over her mother’s death, the therapist asked her which loss she was struggling with more. The woman was so relieved that her friendgrief was validated; most other people in her life just assumed that she was grieving more for her mother than for her friend.

Due to the prevalence of disenfranchised grief in the literature (Doka, 2002), disenfranchisement of friendship grief was expected to be a prevalent theme; however, it was a relatively minor subject compared to the other themes. In fact, most of the research participants acknowledged that they rarely see it play out in



## FRIENDGRIEF

their places of practice. Instead, families welcomed friends with open arms to share in the sadness and grief and friends sought out family members in a similar fashion. This directly contradicted one piece of the literature review, which stated, “the closeness of non-kin relationships [friendships] may simply not be understood or appreciated” (Doka, 2002, p. 10).

Several practitioners worked in the hospital or funeral home setting. Working with grievers so close to the time of death of a loved one, they saw little difference between the grief of family and friends. One practitioner is a private psychotherapist specializing in grief and loss. In her experience, there is also little to no disenfranchisement of friendgrief. Close friends were often considered to be family. This again reflects Boss’s (2006) concept of friends’ inclusion within the psychological family. Several of the practitioners commented on the fact that friends often disenfranchise their own grief because they were just a friend. One respondent identified psycho-education around this issue as one of her main interventions with grieving friends. This helped friends self identify that they were grieving and that their grief was validated and acceptable.

The interviewees’ responses to their clients’ or patients’ grief was another subtheme that emerged. Assessment of the individual situation was imperative when addressing a friend’s grief. The practitioners all discussed the importance of discovering what a friend needed to help move them through the grieving process. As stated previously when discussing self-disenfranchised friendgrief, psycho-education was important in allowing the grieving friend to identify his or her own sadness as valid.

## FRIENDGRIEF

Integration of the loss of a friend was the fourth and final theme that presented in the participants' interviews. The discussion centered on the idea that a person does not necessarily get over the death of a friend, nor should they be expected to. Instead the outcome practitioners are hoping for is integration or reinvestment. Klass (2013) discussed this process as maintaining a balance of sorrow and solace. A person must assimilate to a new world without their good friend and accommodate the fact that their lives continues while their friend's does not (Klass, 2013, p. 597-599). As one interviewee stated, the goal isn't to be sad ever again, the goal is to live life and function at a sufficient level. Grieving friends could use the experience of loss as a learning or growth opportunity and in some instances make positive gains from the experience. Moving through the friendgrief and reinvesting that energy into different relationships, the griever must acknowledge that no relationship is going to be exactly like the lost friendship. Grief is an ongoing process that a person must battle through at sometimes and coast through at others.

### **Limitations of the Research**

There are several limitations when considering the current research. While friendgrief is relatively absent from grief and loss literature, it was still found to be a surprisingly broad topic to undertake for this assignment. Several interviewees suggested additional avenues and topics that could be discussed within the framework of friendgrief, such as its correlation to age at time of death and manner of death.

A second limitation was the fact that this research was conducted in predominantly homogeneous community in a Midwestern city. Past literature has

## FRIENDGRIEF

spoken to the impact that culture has on grief and loss, but that was not reflected in this paper. Again, that is another avenue in which friendgrief can be explored.

Lastly, the sample pool for this research was small. There were five practitioners that participated in the current research. While the small sample size was appropriate for the constraints of this research paper, tapping a larger and more diverse pool of respondents would be more beneficial.

### **Implications for Future Research and Social Work Practice**

As stated previously, while friendgrief is fairly under-represented in the existing grief and loss literature, this research has opened the topic to future discussion. Grief over the loss of a friend is something everyone will in their lives. Furthering the literature on friendgrief will give a voice to these friends and give them validation that their feelings are appropriate and experienced by others. This paper also opened up several avenues of further research exploration into factors that could impact a person's grief such as age, gender, and culture.

The implications for social work practice are vast. Research in general must continue to ensure that frontline practitioners are providing the best possible interventions to their clients or patients. Practitioners must be open to all forms of grief experienced by their clients and the variety of ways it can present. This research has possibly opened the door for the discussion about friendgrief and may even make practitioners more aware of its existence.

Another implication of this paper could be its potential impact on macro-level social work practice. One practitioner stated that the only real disenfranchised Friendgrief she encountered had to do with bereavement leave. Many employers

## FRIENDGRIEF

offer bereavement leave but only in the instance of the death of an immediate family member. Due to the findings in this paper that many people have closer relationships to their non-blood-related friends than to some of their family, it could be argued that these kinds of policies need to be revised to acknowledge that type of relationship.

### **Conclusion**

Friendgrief is an under-represented portion of grief and loss literature. Within the framework of adult attachment theory, this research explores the intersection of friendship and grief. Findings of this current research reflect much of the literature regarding the depth of attachment in close friendships. Friendships with this deep attachment are included in Boss's (2006) concept of a psychological family. When a person loses close friend in death, their grief is profound. The current research explores different professionals' experiences working with grieving friends, what interventions they use, and what outcomes they hope for when working with a grieving friend. Interviewees' responses and insights into their work with grieving friends add to the minimal literature regarding friendgrief. The current research has the potential to open the door for further friendgrief research and impacts social work practice by illuminating the necessity for individual assessment when working with grieving friends.

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## FRIENDGRIEF

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## Appendix A

### CONSENT FORM UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS GRSW682 RESEARCH PROJECT

#### **Helping the Bereaved Get “Unstuck”: Perceptions from Grief and Loss Practitioners Regarding Complicated Grief**

I am conducting a study about grief and loss practitioners' experiences working with the chronically bereaved. You were selected as a possible participant because you work directly with those suffering through grief and loss, or are in a setting where grief and loss is prevalent. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Katie Ueland, a graduate student at the School of Social Work, College of St. Catherine/University of St. Thomas and supervised by Sarah Ferguson, MSW, MA, PhD, LISW.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is: To gain insight from experienced practitioners about the presentation of complicated grief and how it presents in family members and non-family members.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: You will participate in an interview that will run anywhere from 30 minutes to one hour. I will be recording the interview for playback, transcript, and coding purposes. I will transcribe and code the interview. I will use these findings in the data analysis section of my final paper. My committee will read the final product and approve it for my final oral presentation.

#### **Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risk. The interview questions will be focused on the professional's work with grief and loss.

The study has no direct benefits.

#### **Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. As a classroom protocol, I will not publish any of this material. Research records will be kept in a locked file in my apartment. I will delete any identifying information from the transcript. The audiotape and transcript will be destroyed by July 31, 2014.

#### **Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer and may stop the interview at any time. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University, the

## FRIENDGRIEF

University of St. Thomas, or the School of Social Work. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Should you decide to withdraw, data collected about you will still be used. Please just let me know by February 28, 2014.

### **Contacts and Questions**

My name is Katie Ueland. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 612-875-1497 or Sarah Ferguson at 651-690-6296. You may also contact the St. Catherine University Institutional Review Board at 651-690-6204 with any questions or concerns.

**You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study and to be audiotaped.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Print Name of Study Participant**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Signature of Researcher**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**



## Appendix B

### Interview Questions:

1. Describe the capacity in which you work with grief and loss.
2. How do you define friendship?
3. How do you define a profound adult attachment?
  - a. Would you consider friendship a profound adult attachment?
4. How would you describe the type of connection or relationship to the deceased you see? What types of friendships?
  - a. Do you see a distinction in grief depending on the depth of the attachment?
5. What tools and interventions do you use to help move through the grieving process? Is there a difference depending on who the deceased was?
6. Do you think there is disenfranchised grief exists when there is a loss of a friend?
7. How do you work differently with friend grief and family grief? Do you respond differently to friendship death vs. family death? (Is there the possibility that friend grief may be more complex?)
8. When working with a grieving client, what outcomes are you hoping for?