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The Use of Support and Coping Skills Among Emerging Adults Following Parental Loss

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The Use of Support and Coping Skills Among Emerging Adults Following Parental Loss

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MSW Clinical Research Paper

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Abstract

Experiencing the death of a parent is often a life changing event, regardless of the age at which the loss is experienced. This research explored the experiences of adults who lost a parent during emerging adulthood, between the ages of 18 and 26. Using a qualitative method, 10 adults were interviewed regarding the support that was available and that they utilized following their loss, as well as the coping skills and mechanisms which they employed to assist with their grief. The resulting data from interview transcriptions were analyzed and themes were developed. The themes that developed included participant views of and feelings about support following the death of a parent, participant understandings of coping skills utilized following the death of a parent, and participant experiences of grief over time. Findings revealed common themes in the use of support and coping and also unique grief experiences among participants. This life crisis during emerging adulthood presented particular challenges with regard to individuation, while participants also yearned for connection. Social workers need to be prepared to encounter grieving emerging adults in various settings and understand their perspective on the world. Further research would be helpful with more specific groups of emerging adults.

Acknowledgements

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The Use of Support and Coping Skills Among Emerging Adults Following Parental Loss

Introduction

The death of a parent can be one of the most difficult experiences in a person's life. Parents are a child's connection to the past and the people with whom they form their primary attachments. In the best situations, children are nurtured and cared for by parents and regardless of the time of the death, it can be very difficult. The deep loss of the love, connection, care and guidance that parents both provide and represent can cause deep grief reactions and long mourning periods (Aiken, 2001; Marks, Jun & Song, 2007; Sanders, 1999). The loss may become more complicated but can still be deeply felt and mourned for those without an ideal parent-child relationship (Peterson & Rafuls, 1998).

Parental loss at any age can be challenging but differences exist between the challenges faced by children and those faced by adults after losing a parent. Parental loss during childhood and adolescence, from birth to age eighteen, provides difficulties because children are still in the care of the parent and rely on them for most or all of their emotional and physical support. The loss takes on different meanings and significance for adults, but until more recently has been less researched. The loss of a parent during adulthood is considered an expected loss and part of the natural progression of life, therefore having profound grief is generally less acceptable (Sanders, 1999).

The time of "emerging adulthood" or the developmental stage between adolescence and adulthood, approximately ages 18 to 26, is a newer area of research (Arnett, 2004). Emerging adulthood has developed as a distinct stage in the last fifteen years. The stage of emerging adulthood was developed to provide a better understanding of young people as they transitioned from adolescence into adulthood. It is theorized that this is a distinct time in life that cannot be accounted for by an extended adolescence or by beginning adulthood (Arnett, 2004). In the past, young people who are now considered emerging adults were considered to be in early or young

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adulthood. It was believed that they had moved past adolescence and were adults (Erikson, 1963). Grief and loss during this developmental stage has been under-researched and even less attention has been given to the nature of parental loss during emerging adulthood. Many emerging adults are not actually independent of their parents because they still rely on them for financial assistance, housing, moral support, and mentorship (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004).

Emerging adults may seek assistance through grief counseling, support groups, or therapy as they navigate their own grief. However, there appear to be few services that are explicitly for grieving emerging adults. Studies have indicated that emerging adults find talking with others who have experienced a similar loss helpful, but they do not seek out participation in grief support groups because they do not want to be vulnerable in front of their peers (Janowiak, Mai-Tal, & Drapkin, 1995; Balk, Tyson-Rawson, & Colletti-Wetzel, 1993). According to Worden (2009), grief can be of a complicated or uncomplicated nature. Professional intervention may be indicated for those experiencing more complicated grieving, but utilizing coping strategies and informal support can be sufficient for those with uncomplicated grieving. Additionally, most people utilize informal support networks following a loss due to death. A more developed support system for an adult may include a spouse or partner, colleagues, community and neighborhood, adult friends, and other family (Worden, 2009). However, emerging adults generally are not yet married and have not developed their own adult support network and therefore typically utilize their parents for extra support (Arnett, 2004). This can reduce the support that emerging adults have following the loss of a parent because they would normally utilize their parents for support. In two parent, intact families, one parent has been lost to death, and the other may be unable to offer the support that the emerging adult needs due to their own grief (Servaty-Seib & Taub, 2010).

Emerging adulthood is characterized by transition which may result in further lack of support. One common aspect of emerging adulthood is instability and frequent moves (Arnett,

2000; Arnett, 2004). Therefore, emerging adults may live away from their childhood support systems and many peers are not equipped to adequately assist a grieving friend. Emerging adults may conceptually know how to comfort someone who is grieving, however they are not perceived as being particularly supportive by bereaved peers (Balk, 1997; Balk, 2001; Balk et al., 1993; Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998; Tyson-Rawson, 1993). Additionally, maintaining and making friendships while grieving requires deep vulnerability on the part of the griever (Tyson-Rawson, 1993). Although some emerging adults may feel ready to be vulnerable with friends in order to get the support they need, this may not be a reliable support for all emerging adults. Finally, although many emerging adults live away from their primary support systems, they are generally part of an institution such as work, school, or the military. Emerging adults have noted that having adequate support from their institution is helpful in the grieving process (Balk, 2001; Johnson, 2009).

Emerging adults are developmentally seeking their own identities and working towards definitions of who they are, including career decisions, the right love choice, and a clear direction for their lives. Encountering a life crisis, such as the death of a parent, in the midst of this identity seeking can potentially impede these developmental tasks (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004; Thomas & Kuh, 1985). Emerging adults may find themselves torn between a desire to be cared for and the need to provide care. They may also feel torn between returning to their homes to help in the time following the loss or continuing to work on their own emerging life away from their family of origin (Johnson, 2009; Tyson-Rawson, 1993).

Emerging adults who seek support or help with their grieving may need assistance from social workers who can understand them within the context of their grief. Social workers may encounter grieving individuals throughout many different areas of practice including hospitals, hospice, support groups, and private practice. Grieving emerging adults may additionally be encountered in college counseling centers, military programs, or employment assistance

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programs. It is important for social workers to understand the experience of parental loss for emerging adults and their needs in terms of coping skills and support. Social workers are committed to focusing on the person in their environment and viewing an individual as part of the systems that surround them. Therefore, social workers should be especially attuned to the support needs of those they encounter in their work, including the support needs of parentally bereaved emerging adults.

This research will focus on support and coping following parental loss for emerging adults. It is important for social workers to have a better understanding of emerging adults' experiences of parental loss and the factors that assist with grief work. Emerging adults that cope with their grief without professional support can lend an understanding of what factors helped them with their grief. Those that have had more difficulty with grief can share how they feel they could have been best supported through their grief. This research will provide further information for social workers who work with parentally bereaved emerging adults. The research will examine the experience of parental loss for emerging adults through a lens of support and coping.

Literature Review

Understanding the needs of emerging adults following parental loss requires a deeper understanding of grief and loss and the development of emerging adults. The literature review will examine the areas of: 1.emerging adulthood, 2. grief and loss, 3. parental loss in adulthood and adolescence, 4. grief during emerging adulthood, and 5. the support needs of the bereaved. The current research will show a need for further study in the area of parental loss during emerging adulthood and specifically in understanding how support and coping play a role in emerging adults' lives following parental loss. The availability of peer support and community resources for this population appear fairly scarce and a better understanding of their needs is vital to providing effective social work interventions and assistance when bereaved emerging adults are encountered in the field.

Emerging Adulthood

History of development.

Young people have transitioned into adulthood all throughout human existence. The transition to adulthood has looked different depending on the time and culture of the place. Adulthood followed very closely on the heels of adolescence until the last twenty to thirty years in the United States. Young people were leaving high school, getting married, finding full-time work, and having children, all in their late teens and early twenties. The timing of this transition has been delayed in the last few decades. Young adults are no longer beginning independent lives immediately after graduating from high school. This can be attributed in part to more young people attending college or delaying marriage and childbearing (Arnett 2000). There is often a time period from the late teens into the twenties that involves transitioning from adolescence to adulthood. During this in-between time, young people are attempting to learn more about who they are and who they would like to become. They often do not have full adult responsibilities and may maintain a high dependence on parents and their home for financial and emotional

support. One label given to this time period, which will be used throughout this research, is "emerging adulthood" (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004).

The time of transition between adolescence and adulthood looks different in different cultural contexts. In some developing countries, young people are moving into adult responsibilities in their teens or early twenties including starting families and their own homes (Arnett, 2004). In some European countries, it is not uncommon for young people to continue living at home well into their twenties or thirties with a strong dependence on parents. Additionally, within the United States, there are differences within cultures and groups regarding the most accepted time to leave home and to begin a new family (Arnett, 2004; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006).

The definition of when an emerging adult has reached full adulthood is debated and the age range varies depending on the source. Puterman and Cadell (2008) reported that it can be anytime between the ages of 18 and 35. Others state an average age range between 18 and 25- 28 years old (Arnett, 2000; Thomas & Kuh, 1982). In addition, what adults and emerging adults consider the criteria for moving into adulthood also are without a clear definition. Most people who consider themselves adults felt that marriage or parenthood were the defining moment that made them an adult. Most emerging adults believe that being completely self-sufficient will mark their transition into adulthood (Arnett, 2000). Relational maturity was considered important for becoming an adult, but emerging adults also felt that family capacities and role transitions were more important than norm compliance, which most parents felt was very important to the transition (Nelson, Padilla-Walker, Carroll, Madsen, Barry & Badger, 2007).

Developmental needs and tasks during emerging adulthood.

Human beings begin their development in the womb and continue throughout their life. The period of emerging adulthood is no exception. In Erikson's (1963) eight stages of development, this is considered the stage of intimacy versus isolation. During this time, young

people are described as moving from a search for identity during adolescence to using that identity in relationship with other people (Erikson). In some ways, the search for identity may now go beyond the initial scope of adolescence as described in 1963, because of the changing needs of emerging adults. They may still be trying to understand who they are in relation to the world, seeking identity, and also seeking others with whom to share that identity. This time was described as novice adulthood; a time when adults are forming life dreams and goals and building relationships with others who want to share those goals (Levinson, 1978; Thomas & Kuh, 1982). They are trying to find the right way to live and they have a need for intimacy and exploration, which can cause conflicts both internally and in relationships.

In addition to the needs of emerging adults, certain tasks are also important to development and movement towards full adulthood. The development of emerging adults has been found to include the following concepts: identity exploration, instability, focus on the self, feeling in-between, and the hope of possibilities. It is often a time of frequent moves, self-fulfillment, seeking love interests, and developing new relationships with parents (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004). Balk et al. (1993) found that college students were seeking their own identity in the midst of also seeking love, careers, and clear direction for their lives. It is a time of branching out and away from parents and homes while forming an independent identity. Emerging adults do not seek to participate fully in the responsibilities adults have to assume, but they feel ready to move beyond parental control.

Often parents serve as mentors and friends during emerging adulthood in addition to remaining in a parental role. This can assist the emerging adult in their search for identity, while allowing for independence that was not available in adolescence. The shift in relationship with parents seems to rely partially on the child moving away from home. During this time, emerging adults recognize the things they both admire and dislike about their parents. The distance gives them the freedom to make choices about how much time they spend in relationship with their

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parents. Some emerging adults remain in the home and have to negotiate a different relationship with parents than those who move away. Other emerging adults return to their parent's home during summer breaks, following college, or at other times of need in order to receive extra financial assistance as they begin their new lives. This arrangement also often requires rethinking the roles that family members have filled in the past. Many parents and children move to a more equal relationship than the previous parent-child relationship, and parents continue to fill an important role in emerging adults' lives as they transition into adulthood (Arnett 2004; Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; McGoldrick & Walsh, 2004).

Grief and Loss

Understanding the parental loss of emerging adults requires an understanding of grief and loss theory and history. The review will examine bereavement including what grief looks like and how it occurs in people's lives, specifically in the lives of emerging adults. It will also look at parental loss specifically for adults and children. Finally, it will examine support related to parental loss.

Bereavement.

The field of grief and loss is extensive and has been revised over time to better accommodate the normal process of grief following the death of a loved one. Research supports the idea that although each person has an individual experience of grief and each situation and person are unique there are common threads between the grief processes for most people. Early work on grief was done by Freud (1917) in *Mourning and Melancholia*, in which he discussed the process of grieving and established that mourning ends when people end their attachment to the person who has passed away and reinvest their energy in something else. Another work used to explore grief was by Kubler-Ross (1969). This work was designed to explain and explore the stages of dying, but was used as explanation for the stages of grieving for many years after it was

written. Current theory on grief and loss is based on these pioneers in the field, but understandings of some parts of the grieving process have changed over time.

Phases of mourning have been described by multiple researchers in more recent years. Parkes (2001) describes the phases as numbness, yearning, disorganization and despair, and finally reorganization. Sanders (1999) describes the phases as shock, awareness of loss, conservation withdrawal, healing, and renewal. Finally, Worden (2009) describes the mourning process as one involving tasks. He states that each mourner has to work through certain tasks in order to move into a new understanding of themselves and the world in light of the loss they experienced. The first task is to accept the reality of the loss, the second is to process the pain of the grief, the third is to adjust to a world without the deceased and the fourth is to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life (Worden, 2009). Each theory has its own description, but in each there is a moving from understanding the person has been lost, towards the pain of the loss, healing, and finally, a new life.

Grief can become complicated depending on multiple factors. Freud (1917) described this as non-normative grief. Worden (2009) describes four categories of complicated grief. The first is *exaggerated grief* which is when grief reactions cause major psychiatric diagnoses. The second is *chronic grief*, when the grief continues for an extended amount of time. The third is *delayed reactions* when the grief comes up for the bereaved at a later time. The fourth is *masked grief*, when physical symptoms are experienced as the grief reaction. Although anyone may experience complicated or uncomplicated grief, there are certain circumstances which can increase the likelihood including: difficult circumstances surrounding the death, the bereaved's history of grieving, personality characteristics of the bereaved and social factors surrounding the death (Worden, 2009).

All of the theories of mourning allow room for individuals to move at their own pace, but emphasize continued movement toward a new life following the loss. The steps, tasks, or phases

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may not happen in a sequential order and they may be revisited after being completed at one time. Grief is a process unique to each individual (Aiken, 2001). Importantly, the person who is grieving may need to readjust their understanding of the world and themselves in order to move forward (Worden, 2009). Individuals can have different styles of grieving that may be reflected in gender or personality. Doka and Martin (2010) explore styles of grieving related to gender and expectations for those in mourning. They include *intuitive* which can be more affective or emotional grieving, *instrumental* which can be more task or strategy focused grieving, and blended and dissonant styles which combine both intuitive and instrumental. These styles can all be effective for individuals, but often are received differently depending on the gender of the person in mourning and the culture of acceptance around them (Doka & Martin). The individual process of grief can be challenging for the individual as well as family and friends.

Grief occurs in the individual processes explored above, but it also must take place within family systems. The family has to realign and grieve following the death of a member (Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004). Murray Bowen (2004) describes the process of realignment in terms of equilibrium and disequilibrium. Families seek to maintain their functional equilibrium, but an event such as a death will cause a shock wave in the system and lead to disequilibrium. Depending on the family's functioning and the member that has passed away, this can be extremely disruptive, can be a relief, or it can pass with very little notice (Bowen). The death can also be viewed as a challenge to *homeostasis* which refers to a person's attempt to maintain a steady state of functioning (Seyle, 1991). Any stress event causes a need for adaptation for each individual, the family and other systems experiencing the event.

Parental loss in adulthood.

Although most people expect to lose their parents to death during adulthood, the expectation does not negate the deepness of the loss for many adults. Despite years of independence for middle aged adults, many still maintain a deep attachment to their parents.

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Parents have been with them since their birth and know them and their history better than anyone else (Marks et al., 2007). As Sanders (1999) states,

> The early established bond between parent and child creates an attachment that endures well into old age . . . Forced with the loss of this unconditional love, the adult child can feel greatly deprived when forced to give up the attachment (p. 233).

Losing this connection and moving into the next part of their adult life without their parent can be very challenging. Parents ideally provide many things for their children including unconditional love, advice, guidance, and role modeling. Additionally, parents provide a separation between a child and his or her own death (Aiken, 2001). Depending on the child and parent and their relationship, recovering from that loss can involve immense pain and a lot of time.

In previous research, the loss of a parent in adulthood has been shown to lead to grief reactions which are influenced by numerous factors (Kaltreider & Mendelson, 1985; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998; Umberson, 2003). Kaltreider and Mendelson (1985) examined how to assess adult children for intervention needs following parental loss. To examine this, they studied 35 persons seeking treatment following parental loss and 36 not seeking treatment to determine what they experienced related to the death. Umberson (2003) utilized data from a national study and in-depth interviews with 73 individuals who had lost a parent in the previous four years. In the Peterson and Rafuls (1998) study of bereaved women, the loss was marked by phases which included a brief period of confusion just after the death and a time of preoccupation later in which the participants dealt with their feelings and thoughts about the meaning of the death internally. The loss of a parent can cause grief reactions similar to other losses including insomnia, nightmares and periods of deep sadness or anger (Kaltreider and Mendelson). Additionally, the grief of an adult child can be expressed in numerous ways and is sometimes seen in psychological distress, including avoidant behaviors and deep sadness (Umberson, 2003).

When adults who have lost a parent are compared with those who have not, those who have lost a parent had greater psychological distress (Marks et al., 2007; Umberson & Chen,

1994). Both Marks, Jun & Song (2007) and Umberson & Chen (1994) utilized data from the National Survey of Families and Households to look for associations between parent loss and the well being of adults. Both found that the loss of a parent led to declines in physical health and psychological well being.

Although these large studies reveal the difficulty in losing a parent in adulthood, the actual experience is unique to each parent-child relationship. Some factors influence what the bereavement period is like for the child, including how close and how positive the relationship was prior to the death. The gender of the child can have an impact. Daughters generally have a harder time with the death of a parent. This is due, in part, to the higher likelihood of daughters filling a caregiver role for their parents and feeling more emotionally connected. Finally, the marital status of the child can affect their bereavement, as unmarried children tend to rely more on their parents than married children, and therefore are likely to have a more difficult time (Umberson & Chen, 1994; Worden, 2009). There does appear to be a bias in the literature towards purposeful studies of women, their experience of grief and losing a parent and very little done specifically about men losing a parent.

Conversely, the Peterson and Rafuls (1998) study emphasized the positive nature of the loss of a parent. The children moved into new roles and were able to deeply form their own families and identities without the need to fill the role that was given to them by their family of origin. The study stated:

> Through the sense of having faced the most difficult thing, having fulfilled the obligation of adult child to the parent, and having discovered the importance of life in a new and different way, death provided an arena to test emotional strengths and discover adequacies. Every one of the participants described this process as difficult (Peterson & Rafuls, 1998, p. 511).

The experience of facing the death of their parent allowed them to realize their own strengths and capacities and strengthened their relationships with their spouses and children (Peterson & Rafuls, 1998).

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Some studies have highlighted the fact that in losing a parent during adulthood, adult children are losing both the parent of their childhood and the newer relationship they have formed with their parent in adulthood (Kaltreider & Mendelson, 1985; Umberson, 2003). Adult children may view the lost parent as their caretaker and their loss means losing the ability to be cared for (Kaltreider & Mendelson). Other secondary losses can include the loss of the friendship provided by a parent, the sense of family that the parent offered, stability, connections across generations, mentorship, and personal validation. On the other hand, for some adult children, the loss of a parent can be a relief because a difficult relationship has ended. Some of these relationship types can include a critical parent, a parent who did not show the child love, or a dysfunctional parent. For others the loss involves the loss of the opportunity to make the relationship different including the lost opportunity to have a good parent and the lost opportunity to give back to a parent (Umberson, 2003).

Parental loss in childhood/adolescence.

For children, losing a parent means losing a caretaker and a person who is a part of their daily life. Children are also in a different place developmentally than emerging adults and older adults as they try and comprehend the loss and its impact on their life. Although children display similar emotions and reactions to the death of a parent as adults, they also show some different trends in their behavior. The Hope and Hodge (2006) study of social workers perceptions of how children adjust to parental death found that male children displayed more externalizing and acting out behaviors in dealing with grief, and female children were more likely to internalize and express somatic symptoms. Feelings evident in grieving children included sadness, fear, anger, and enjoyment. The last of these emotions, enjoyment, was a theme in the Brewer and Sparkes (2011) study. In this study, Brewer and Sparkes, examined the experience of children who utilized a bereavement center following parental loss. Children felt a need to continue identifying ways to enjoy their life and feel happy.

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Grief more closely resembles that of an adult for adolescents, as they are able to comprehend the magnitude of the loss and its impact on their life. Moving slowly into the grief and allowing time to really delve into deeper feelings was the most effective way to cope with the grief emotions for some (Cait, 2008). Cait explored the identity development of 18 young women who experienced parental loss between ages 11 and 18. It was noted that for adolescent girls who lost a mother to death, they felt they could not have prepared for the pain and feelings associated with the loss whether it was sudden or expected. Their experiences were explored in the Schulz (2007) study which also looked at identity development in young women, but focused on those that lost their mother during adolescence. They felt shock, guilt, and depression following the loss. Reasons stated for guilt included not spending enough time with their mother, not doing more for her, or not getting to know her better. There was a deep sense of isolation because others could not understand what they were going through which also led to a sense that they were different from others, at a time when fitting in is very important. The adolescent girls also mourned the loss of a mother-daughter relationship in adulthood which they would not be able to have, and the loss of having a mother at times when the mother-daughter relationship is particularly important, such as marriage and childbearing (Schulz, 2007).

Grief in emerging adulthood.

Due to the shortage of research focused particularly on parental loss in emerging adulthood, the literature related to bereavement in general in emerging adulthood was also reviewed. As emerging adults seek to form their own identities outside of their parents and begin to find love, careers, and direction, crises can potentially have a large impact on their ability to navigate these developmental goals. One potential crisis is dealing with the death of a loved one. Multiple studies have investigated the prevalence and nature of bereavement in college students (Balk, 1997; Balk, 2001; Balk et al., 1993). Balk (1997) explored what the experience of bereavement is like for college students and found over 80% of college students had experienced

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the death of a family member with the majority of that number being the loss of a grandparent. Regarding grief in a college or university setting, Balk et al. (1993) stated, "Into this population of young adults- persons who are seeking to celebrate being alive and dreading being alone-bereaved college students are thrust to work out their grief" (p. 428).

Emerging adults who lose a loved one are faced with continuing to live their lives in the midst of their loss. For many this is a very challenging prospect and takes a lot of time. Dealing with grief was harder and took longer than the participants in the Balk (1997) study imagined it would. Many emerging adults could acknowledge positive changes in their lives many years following the loss, but getting to that acknowledgement was often a painful process (Bagnoli, 2003). As with adolescents, emerging adults found sharing their experience with others who had been through the same thing very helpful in studies of group experiences (Balk et al., 1993; Janowiak et al., 1995).

Support Needs Following Bereavement

There is some controversy regarding the need for intervention following a loss due to death. There is an expectation that death and grief are a normal part of human existence and therefore, people should be able to work through the experience of grief in their own way, that without intervention, most people are able to work through their grief (Worden, 2009). People often utilize informal support networks to assist them in their grief. In certain situations, such as having an absent support system, when the support system is not able to assist with grief or when other factors complicate grief, intervention may be necessary for support and assistance. Utilizing grief counseling, either with an individual counselor or a grief support group, can be a helpful process for those without complicated grief. Therapy may be necessary to overcome obstacles for those that experience complicated grieving. Regardless of the form, most people require some assistance to move through the phases of grieving to a new existence (Aiken, 2001; Worden, 2009). Social support is a very important part of working through grief, but often, the support is

most evident in the first few weeks following a death and then begins to dwindle as others return to their previous lives. The mourner is sometimes left alone as he or she continues to struggle with his or her grief for months to years following the death (Aiken, 2001).

Family, support, and parental loss.

As families reorganize following the loss of a parent new roles are negotiated and defined. Two studies highlighted the loss of a parent for women. In one, adolescent girls became caretakers for their remaining parent and the other children in their home (Schulz, 2007). In the other, adult women took on the care of their remaining parent and provided the support that the deceased once gave to that parent (Cait, 2008). For many, the loss of a parent does mean the child will provide more care for the remaining parent. It can be a conflict for adults that wish to seek comfort from their remaining parent as they grieve, but also wish to be the support that the parent needs (Kaltreider & Mendelson, 1985). For emerging adults, this conflict may become even more pronounced as they may seek the comfort of their home and remaining parent but feel torn by being an adult that should be providing comfort as well. In Johnson's (2009) study on parental loss in emerging adults, over half of the participants returned home for some time after the death of their parent to help and care for the remaining parent.

Adults can find themselves needing to return to their family of origin for a time as they navigate their grief. After the need for this time has passed, they can return to their own homes or families (Peterson & Rafuls, 1998). Peterson and Rafuls interviewed six women who lost a parent about transitioning into a different part of their life. For emerging adults, they may still feel the need to reenter their family of origin, but subsequently may have more difficulty forming their own homes at a later date (Johnson, 2009). There can also be a conflict for emerging adults that seek to continue their own lives but feel obligated to provide more support at home (Tyson-Rawson, 1993). One of the developmental tasks of emerging adulthood is seeking an independent identity from the family of origin and beginning careers, relationships, and homes (Arnett, 2004).

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An emerging adult may face conflict both internally and with family if they wish to continue working on their own development rather than returning home.

The death of a parent may change the relationship between the adult child and the other parent. The loss can highlight difficulties that existed in the relationship before the loss or help reveal positive aspects of the relationship that may have been unnoticed when the deceased was still living. This relationship is unique in each situation, but for some who have lost a parent, the death led to frustration and anger with the remaining parent during their grief. The way that the parent handled grieving or moving forward was a challenge to the child (Peterson & Rafuls, 1998). The experience of loss led to a deeper and closer connection with the remaining parent for others (Johnson, 2009; Schulz, 2007). In Tyson-Rawson's (1993) study of college women who had experienced father loss, 14 of the 20 women reported a much stronger relationship with their mother and siblings that depended on both providing and receiving support following the death. It is important to note that in a study done by Balk (1997), college students noted that when they experienced difficulties following the death of a family member, that they most often spoke with their mother about their feelings. Many also spoke with their father. For emerging adults that lose a parent to death, they may have lost the person that they would have utilized for support in the midst of crisis, or the remaining parent may be unable to offer the support they need in the midst of their own grief.

Death also has an impact on the entire family system and its functioning. The death of a parent for an adult child can lead to new dynamics between different family members, the position that one holds in a family, and new levels of relationships and conflicts (Bagnoli, 2003; Johnson, 2009; Kaltreider & Mendelson, 1985). One aspect of grief that has been shown in theory and research is that if a family was dysfunctional prior to a death they may encounter increased difficulty in grieving (Peterson & Rafuls, 1998). For some families, there is not a large amount of perceived support within the family which may cause conflict (Tyson-Rawson, 1993). It is

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important to note that there appears to be a bias in the literature regarding family structure and grief. Research done has narrowed in on a family unit which includes two married parents when one passes away. Less information appears to be available about the loss of a parent when the child was raised by only one parent or divorced parents, when the child has already lost a parent to death, or if a child is estranged from one or both parents. These factors may complicate the grieving of the individual, or change their available support and resources in comparison to a child who has another available parent.

A theme of continuing bonds, or remaining connected to the deceased parent, was present in all of the reviewed literature on parental loss. Although the parent was no longer physically present, children still felt both connected and impacted by their parent and made efforts to remain connected in some way to their memory. This can be considered a changed family relationship because the child has redefined their relationship to the deceased and maintained that connection. This integration of the lost parent into the life of the child helped with the grieving process and moving forward into a new life without having the parent physically present (Bagnoli, 2003; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998; Schulz, 2007; Smith, 2005; Tyson-Rawson, 1993; Umberson, 2003). On the other hand, Tyson-Rawson also found that feeling the continued presence of a father after his death was intrusive and scary for some of the participants or nonexistent for others who may have had a more ambivalent or conflicted relationship with their father prior to his death.

Coping skills and support following parental loss.

Managing the grief of losing a parent requires both individual coping skills and support from others. Being able to express feelings and talk about the loss was found to be helpful for many bereaved adult children. Coping methods utilized by adult children included thinking about positive memories of the deceased, participating in religious practices, crying, and keeping busy

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(Balk, 1997; Umberson, 2003). Returning to normalcy helped some adult children work through their grief and move forward in the study done by Johnson (2009).

Many of the supports that are useful for adults are also useful for children and adolescents facing parental loss, but they also face the added difficulty of the immediate change in their day to day functioning without one of their caretakers. Again, children use internal coping methods to handle their grief and begin new rituals or routines to begin moving forward after their loss. Some examples included physical activity, creative activities, writing, becoming more deeply connected to faith and religion, and utilizing strengths such as a sense of humor or passion (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Hope & Hodge, 2006; Schultz, 2007). The Brewer and Sparkes (2011) study of bereavement services for children and adolescents in England found that children used physical activity as a form of distraction, as a channel for anger and aggression, to give them a sense of freedom and control, and to give them something at which to excel.

In addition to internal sources of coping, many adults seek outside support in helping them grieve the loss of a parent. For those involved with an institution, such as school, work or the military, receiving support and understanding following a loss is noted as very important. For those that find their institution unsupportive, the grieving becomes even more difficult. Support from an institution could include extended time off, ability to turn in assignments late, and bosses and colleagues who offer empathy to the workers' situation (Balk, 2001; Johnson, 2009). In the work that Balk (2001) did with bereaved college students and the needs of the college students within the university, it was noted that a bereavement center or trained counselors to work with grieving students would be of great help to those facing bereavement. Conversely, in the Janowiak et al. (1995) study on grief support groups for college students, it was indicated that they were not overly receptive to attending a group. In addition to institutional support, support from friends and family was noted to be very helpful in some studies (Johnson, 2009; Peterson &

Rafuls, 1998). Finally, support was found most clearly from others who had experienced a similar loss including in a support group setting (Balk et al., 1993; Johnson, 2009).

Children are clear about needing to know other children who had experienced a similar loss. Developing friendships with others who understood them was important, as was having a place to share stories about their deceased parent and feelings (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011). A study done by Schulz (2007) about women who lost their mothers during adolescence found that most of the women found maternal figures including other relatives or female friends to fill a maternal role in their life. For many this resulted in finding positive women to be emotionally engaged with, but for some, the need for emotional support led to dysfunctional relationships and dependency (Schulz, 2007). The remaining parent is a very important part of the grief process for a grieving child. Social workers who have worked with grieving children stated that if the remaining parent was adjusting well to the death and modeling good grieving the child would cope better (Hope & Hodge, 2006).

Support for emerging adults.

Grief for an emerging adult can be a very lonely experience due to the nature of emerging adulthood. Although many emerging adults have experienced bereavement, losing a close family member or friend is more uncommon and therefore others do not know how to support the bereaved (Balk, 1997; Balk, 2001; Balk et al., 1993; Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998; Tyson-Rawson, 1993). This lack of peer support can be amplified for those that are living some distance from their home. One aspect of emerging adulthood is frequent moves. Therefore many emerging adults are separated from their community, friends and family during their grief (Arnett, 2004). They are lacking the support that they would normally use during a time of grief or crisis (Balk, 1997). In other work done with college students, the students expressed difficulty because they returned to school changed by the death they experienced, but the rest of the system continued as it had before. The loss was amplified when other students did not understand their

continued grief and were unsupportive of the grief process (Wrenn, 1999). Similar to adolescents, feelings of isolation are very common in emerging adults experiencing grief because they feel that others do not understand what they are going through or how to help them (Balk et al., 1993; Johnson, 2009).

Although emerging adults may feel isolated, professional assistance does not appear to be seen positively for the purpose of working on grief issues. In one study by Balk (1997) the few college students who sought professional therapy following a death were disappointed by the help they received. Other studies also found similar reactions among college students (Balk et al., 1993; Janowiak et al., 1995). In the Janowiak et al. (1995) study, the research team had trouble recruiting participants for a college student grief support group. The students stated that they wanted to hear about others' experiences, but did not want to share their own feelings in a vulnerable way. The members shared that their loss had made them less able to share feelings in relationship with others. The study did not expand further on how participants dealt with this difficulty, but it illustrates the vulnerability inherent in the grieving experience and indicates that it may impact emerging adults' interpersonal functioning during the grief period, which could lead to less support from peers. For many of the women in Tyson-Rawson's (1993) study, being away from their family during college meant that they relied on close friendships for support, but the participants noted that they had to be willing to be vulnerable in order to make friendships work in the midst of their bereavement. In both studies, a few of the participants took risks towards participation in either a support group or in sharing their grief with friends.

Although most emerging adults have moved out of their parent's homes, they are not yet completely independent. They may not have established their own support system, such as a spouse or community, but are also no longer part of their childhood support system. Therefore, the loss of a parent at this time can be especially difficult. The Puterman and Cadell (2008) study which examined the impact of serious illness among parents of emerging adults found that much

of the challenge was based in the event being off-time, or not at the time that most peers are dealing with a similar type of issue. Most adults face the loss of their parents not in their late teens or early twenties but in middle age. The stress of dealing with this loss at an off time includes the lack of peer support as mentioned earlier and less time for preparation or to consider this loss as part of their story. One example of this was seen in the study done by Peterson and Rafuls (1998) which focused on the loss of parents for women. Most of the women that were interviewed for the study were in their forties and fifties, but one participant was twenty-two at the time that her father passed away. The other participants had spouses who were able offer them the support that they needed in grieving the loss of their parents, but the youngest participant was unmarried and living away from her family. She had more difficulty trying to grieve without the support of a spouse or her family (Peterson & Rafuls). The loss at an off-time may also change the focus from the developmental tasks of most emerging adults, to living in the present moment with either a dying parent or the grief that follows the death (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Puterman & Cadell, 2008). A study by McClanahan and Sorensen (1985) found a relationship between life events happening off-time, or at a time that was not common among peers, and negative effects on psychological well-being.

Emerging adults may be particularly vulnerable to difficulty following parental loss due to their developmental stage and the potential lack of support following the loss. A study by Raphael (1977) indicated that if the bereaved perceived a life crisis or non-supportiveness they are at higher risk for more complicated grieving, and many emerging adults have the potential to experience both of these risk factors following parental loss. Worden (2009) also describes support as one of the mediators of complicated grieving. Hooyman and Kramer (2006) explore one possible resilience factor for emerging adults, "Young adults who have been able to define a direction for their lives have more personal resources with which to cope with adversity" (p. 193).

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Assisting emerging adults in defining direction and building support networks may help to protect them in a time of crisis.

One study by Johnson (2009) provided an overview of the grief experience of people who had a parent die when they were between the ages of 18 and 26. Six individuals were interviewed including four females and two males who lost their parent at least three years before the interview and who had not experienced complicated grief. The participants ranged in age from 27 to 59. The purpose of the study was to examine the stages of grieving and the experience of grief for emerging adults who lost a parent. The study found many important themes related to parental loss in emerging adulthood including the topic of support and coping skills, however the study did not go beyond a very basic understanding of these topics (Johnson, 2009). The current study aims to fill this gap in the research and develop a deeper understanding of the support and coping utilized following parental loss in emerging adulthood.

Conclusion

The area of grief and bereavement in emerging adults is an understudied area; therefore understanding how bereavement impacts emerging adults' relationships needs to be further studied. The specific area of parental loss during emerging adulthood has even less completed research. Based on previous research it appears that many emerging adults that face the loss of a parent believe that they face their grief alone (Balk, 1997; Balk, 2001; Balk et al., 1993; Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998). Understanding the needs of emerging adults facing parental bereavement will assist professionals that work with this population to provide better support and to advocate for appropriate services. It will also give tangible ideas to emerging adults that wonder how to move through their grief as they continue to move into the next phase of adulthood. With a good support system, many people are able to work through grief without deep complications or a need for professional intervention, therefore assessing the needs of emerging adults in this area will give them a better ability to have uncomplicated grief following parental

loss (Worden, 2009). McGoldrick and Walsh (2004) stated, "because of our society's assumption that young adults should become independent of their families, the significance of loss may not be recognized and mourning may become more complicated" (p. 31). It is important to give recognition to this loss and give emerging adults the support they need.

This research will build on understandings of emerging adulthood and grief and loss to gain an understanding of the experience of parental loss during emerging adulthood and the support and coping mechanisms used to deal with the subsequent grief. The existing literature, building on theory and research on emerging adulthood and grief and loss, shows that emerging adults manage their grief in many ways, and that support may be limited for this population. The literature has not examined how parentally bereaved emerging adults utilized coping skills and support to work through their grief. This area of focus will provide information to assist grieving emerging adults and the professionals that encounter them in the field.

Conceptual Framework

Having an understanding of the concepts and theories that shape research is helpful for providing context and avoiding bias. Grounded social work research is formed by building upon previous research and previous theories which give understanding to human behavior. The current study has been influenced and shaped by two distinct theories as well as the personal experience of the researcher.

Developmental Theory

In developmental theory, it is believed that people move through developmental stages during their life. This belief is based in part on Erikson's (1963) eight stages of development. In these stages, people either accomplish the tasks of each stage or become stagnant in a negative aspect of the stage. The stage that occurs during emerging adulthood, intimacy versus isolation, supposes that people need to learn how to be in intimate relationships otherwise they move more towards isolation or being unable to form intimate relationships (Erikson, 1963). The more recently proposed stage of emerging adulthood is based on developmental theory and provides a more modern view of development between ages 18 and 26. Arnett (2004) describes emerging adulthood as a time for identity exploration, instability, focus on the self, feeling in-between, and having many possibilities.

It has been presupposed in this research that the development of emerging adults will impact their grief experience. Research indicates that many of the factors of emerging adulthood including exploration and instability can negatively impact emerging adults during a crisis (Hooyman & Kramer, 2006; Johnson, 2009; Puterman & Cadell, 2008). Understanding parental loss during this timeframe supposes an understanding of the new relationships that emerging adults are forming with their parents, in addition to looking to others for deeper relationships. This change in parental relationships may impact emerging adults, as well as the general movement away from their families of origin. At a time of crisis, emerging adults may feel torn

between reentering their family of origin and continuing to build their own, independent lives. Understanding developmental theory gives a deeper understanding to the issues that adults between the ages of 18 and 26 may experience when they lose a parent during this time.

Systems Theory

Ecological systems theory also builds the framework for the current research. In understanding the support needed and sought by emerging adults following a parental loss, it is important to understand how the different systems in their life interplay to provide support. In Brofenbrenner's (1979) theory of ecological systems, it was found that development occurs in five interconnected levels. Individuals are impacted by their immediate surroundings such as their family, the relationships between their closest connections, the external factors that affect their microsystem, larger social class and culture, and changes across time. Therefore, an emerging adult facing parental loss is being impacted in their immediate microsystem of family both by the death of their parent and the impact that death has on the rest of the family. They are also impacted by the changes in their relationships with friends, colleagues, schools, and jobs. They are impacted by their own status in the larger culture and by the availability of support resources such as support groups and counselors both in their actual availability and the perceived availability to the individual. Barriers such as cost and transportation can impact the possibility of emerging adults getting the support they need. The current research is framed through an understanding of ecological systems theory and the impact that systems have on an individual and their own process of grief.

Personal and Professional Lens

Developing this research topic came from a personal desire to improve the grief experience of emerging adults who have lost a parent. The researcher considered the potential challenges of the developmental stage of emerging adulthood, the experiences of others she knew that lost a parent during that time, and the lack of resources available specifically for grieving

emerging adults. The researcher completed a social work field placement with a hospice organization a few years prior to beginning the research. Although the researcher did not encounter any emerging adults in that work, the experience of working with death, dying, and the bereaved had an impact on the researcher. Additionally, the resources available to the grieving were mostly aimed at young children and older adults with very little for those in between. Reflecting on that experience gave the researcher a desire to learn more about the experience of parental loss for emerging adults.

The researcher is also close in her own lifespan to the developmental stage of emerging adulthood and has witnessed other emerging adults deal with the challenge of parental loss. Examining the topic of parental loss can bring forth personal feelings about relationships with parents and the possibility of their death at any time. Although the researcher has not experienced parental loss, she does acknowledge closeness to the topic and also a potential for bias because of that closeness. All of these factors have given the researcher the motivation to investigate this topic further and find useful ways for social workers to support emerging adults following parental loss.

Methodology

The use of qualitative interviewing is one technique for collecting information in exploratory research. Due to the paucity of studies on the current topic, exploration is a valid starting point for further research. The research question for the current study is: What supports and coping skills do emerging adults utilize following the death of a parent? Berg (2009) describes qualitative research as referring to "meanings, concepts, definitions, characteristics, metaphors, symbols, and descriptions of things" (p. 3). Qualitative research describes what cannot be counted, and the experience of grief and loss is one that cannot be quantified. In each story there is meaning, concepts, and descriptions which help to narrow the field of research to a deeper understanding of how emerging adults experience the loss of a parent and how they cope with that loss. Using qualitative research gives voice to the experience of the participants and shows common themes in participants' experiences. In multiple previous research studies, qualitative interviewing has been utilized in order to obtain the experience and story of those who have dealt with grief (Bagnoli, 2003; Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Cait, 2008; Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998; Schulz, 2007; Tyson-Rawson, 1993).

Sample

The researcher located and interviewed a sample of ten individuals who experienced the death of a parent during emerging adulthood. Each participant met the criteria for the study including the experience of the death of a parent when they were between the ages of 18 and 26, that the death occurred at least three years prior to the interview, and that the death did not occur more than ten years prior to the interview. The participants in the study experienced the death of a parent when they were between the ages of 19 and 26 and the death occurred between three and eight years prior to their interview. The current sample included women (n=7, 70%) and men (n=3, 30%). The sample included Caucasian (n=7, 70%) and Asian (n=3, 30%) participants. Demographic details about the participants are presented in Tables 1 and 2.

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Table 1

Demographics of Interview Participants

Pseudo name	Gender	Current age	Age at parental death	Years since parental death
Sean	Male	26	19	7
Ashley	Female	23	20	3
Jessica	Female	27	20	7
Marie	Female	26	21	5
Julie	Female	29	21	8
Cara	Female	27	23	4
Lindsay	Female	33	24	8
Maya	Female	32	24	8
Jeff	Male	33	26	7
Mike	Male	33	26	7

Note. Pseudo name = Disguised name for key informant.

Table 2

Average Ages and Years Since Death of Parent

Category	Range	M	Mdn
Current age	23-33	27.9	28
Age at time of parental death	19-26	22.4	22
Years since parental death	3-8	6.4	7

Note. This table reflects participants' answers about their eligibility to participate in the study.

Procedures

Recruitment.

The researcher used convenience sampling to find participants for the study. This method of sampling is commonly used when it would be impossible to develop a probability sample of the population being studied (Monette, Sullivan & DeJong, 2008). In the case of this research, the population would include all emerging adults who have experienced parental loss. The researcher hung up flyers (Appendix A) in multiple locations including colleges, universities, coffee shops and churches. The researcher also disbursed flyers (Appendix B) among young adults to pass out

and hang up in locations that they frequent. The researcher placed a request for participants in the St. Thomas E-Bulletin and a church bulletin. Thirteen potential participants contacted the researcher. When contacted by the participants, the researcher sent them a letter explaining the study (Appendix C) and the informed consent (Appendix D) for their review. The participant then contacted the researcher to arrange a time for an interview. Three of the potential participants were not considered for participation; two because they did not meet criteria for the research and one because she contacted the researcher after ten interviews had been scheduled. One of the participants had recently moved out of the area and therefore an interview was conducted with that participant via telephone.

Protection of human subjects.

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic of grief and loss, protection of the participants is of utmost importance. The participants had to be at least three years past the death of their parent before being allowed to participate in the study in order to protect those who are still in the midst of the intense immediate grief following a death. In previous research, there has been little agreement on the appropriate timeframe for conducting interviews about grief experiences. In Johnson's (2009) study, participants were three years past the loss for the same protective factor as is being suggested in this study. In Tyson-Rawson's (1993) study, participants were not required to be a certain amount of time past the loss and the emotionality and vulnerability of the participants who were much closer in time to the death was obvious in the research. These participants brought a different response than those who were more removed from the loss. Additionally, in order to gain information that accurately reflects participants' experiences they must have been within ten years of the loss.

The research was reviewed and approved by a research committee prior to any interviews being conducted. The study was also approved by the institutional review board at the University of St. Thomas prior to any contact being made with potential participants and determined to be a

minimal risk study. The institutional review board helps ensure the safety of participants in the study. In addition, care was taken in the order, wording, and content of interview questions to protect the participants from experiencing strong emotions during the interview. The research committee reviewed questions for sensitivity prior to their use in interviews as well.

Participants were given an informed consent form prior to beginning the interview. The researcher went through the informed consent to ensure that participants were aware of their rights, the voluntary nature of the study, and the confidentiality of the study. Participants were informed that they may experience some discomfort during and following the interview because of the sensitive nature of the topic being explored, as well as their right to stop the interview at any time and right to refuse to answer particular questions in the interview. Each participant was provided with a counseling resource list in case they experienced strong feelings or needs during or following the interview in relation to their grief (Appendix E). For the participant who participated from a location outside of the Twin Cities, the researcher prepared a resource list specific to the area in which the participant lived and sent it to the participant via email prior to the start of the interview.

Participants were provided with a ten dollar gift card to Target for their participation in the research. The participants were also provided with an opportunity to share their own story and may have derived personal benefit from this sharing. The benefits of this research outweigh the risks.

Data collection.

The interviews were conducted in a private setting mutually agreed upon between the researcher and the participant. Most were conducted in private study rooms in libraries. Once the participant signed the consent form, the interviews were conducted. The interview conducted via phone included the review of the informed consent and the participant signing the form. The participant returned the signed consent to the researcher by scanned email.

The researcher recorded the interviews digitally and took field notes during the interviews. The questions were asked in the form of a semi-structured interview using a predetermined list of questions, but allowing for prompts or question elimination if the topic had already been addressed by the participant. The participants answered questions about their current life and then the interview focused on the coping skills and support used by the participant following the death of their parent. A full list of questions can be found in Appendix F. The interviews lasted between fifteen and fifty minutes. Following the interview, participants were provided with an incentive gift card for 10 dollars to Target. Follow-up questions were used to clarify information after the interviews with three participants, all three utilized email and one also utilized phone.

After gathering the data from participants, the researcher transcribed each interview for analysis. To protect confidentiality, the transcriptions and recordings were kept on a password protected computer to which only the researcher had access. The data information was de-identified in order to protect participants and each participant was assigned numbers such as Participant 1, Participant 2, etc. For purposes of the final paper, pseudo names were assigned to each participant.

Reliability and validity.

The questions for the interview were developed from the current literature and the theoretical framework in order to assure content validity. The questions were also reviewed by peer students and the research committee to determine the face validity which is whether the questions asked will provide information which answers the overall research question (Monette et al., 2008). Prior to using the questions in an interview they were reviewed by colleagues to ensure reliability. The colleagues and researcher went through the questions to ensure that they were interpreted in the same way and that the questions were clearly worded. They were also reviewed by the researcher and committee for sensitivity in order to protect the participants.

Data analysis.

The researcher used content analysis when examining the transcriptions. The researcher used grounded or conventional content analysis, which draws themes directly from the data obtained in the interviews (Berg, 2009). These themes were deducted from the interview transcriptions and smaller subthemes were identified as necessary. Most emphasis in the final report will be given to themes that are present in most interviews. Data that falls outside of the norm will be analyzed for any particular reasons it may have been different. The themes will then be compared to the previous literature related to this topic.

Findings

   The interviews resulted in the development of three main themes. The themes rose out of the question areas which the interview touched upon including: 1. participant views and feelings on support following the death of a parent, 2. participant understanding of coping skills utilized following the death of a parent, and 3. the participant experience of moving through the grief process. Within the theme of support there were five subthemes including the support of siblings, support of friends, support of work or school, support of significant others, and professional support. Within the theme of coping there were two subthemes including returning to work or school very quickly following the loss and individual forms of coping. In the theme of moving through grief there were two subthemes including grief taking a long time and grief needing to be done in an individual way. These themes are outlined in Table 3. In almost every area, each participant touched on the topic, but they were not always in agreement on their views of the topic.

Table 3

Themes/Subthemes and Sample Responses

Category	Thematic category	Sample response
Theme 1: Participant views and feelings on support following the death of a parent		
S1	Sibling support	My brother and I, my brother was really close to my dad and I wasn't really close to my dad and so we were grieving very differently, and we still do today.
S2	Professional support	I think that I should have spoken to somebody or dealt with my grief. I was able to go and talk to the psychologist there and she was very open, very willing to just sit and listen.
S3	Work/school support	You could talk to anybody, they were super understanding about just how I was feeling or if I needed time off. . . That was just like a stress free part of life.
S4	Friend support	Sometimes I felt like I couldn't connect with them or they didn't understand. I made a lot of great friends up there that were always there for me, always willing to help me out.
S5	Significant other support	I had a boyfriend that was not supportive at all. He just couldn't understand why I wasn't over it, so I didn't feel like I could talk to him.
Theme 2: Participant understandings of coping skills utilized following the death of a parent		
C1	Quick return to work/school	One of the things I did to cope was to get back, get closer to the usual as much as I could anyways. Try to immerse myself in work and family stuff and I played football at the time, so immersing myself in that. Get along the best I could at the time
C2	Wide range of coping skills	It felt like maybe my old coping mechanisms weren't quite enough.
Theme 3: Participant experience of grief over time		
G1	Moving through the grief process	Grief is a lifetime thing and so you will never really get over it. Life will change, but it will get better and there will be newness and new life and new healing and new things you'll discover about yourself and it's still possible to live and to enjoy life- after.
G2	Grief as an individual process	Don't be afraid to grieve, grieve in your own time. I just know society doesn't allow us to do that.

Note. S= support, five subthemes, C= coping, two subthemes, G= grief, two subthemes

The participants in the study came from varying backgrounds and family situations. They experienced the loss at different ages and at different phases in their school and work lives. Some different factors include whether the participant lost their mother or father, how their parent died, how close they were living to their parent at the time of the death, the occupations or student status of participants at the time of the death, and the relationship between the participants' parents at the time of the death. The different life situations of the participants at the time of their parent's death are illustrated in Table 4 and the characteristics of the participants' parents are illustrated in Table 5.

Table 4

Description of Participants at the Time of Parental Death

	n (%)
Relationship to parent who died	
Mother	4 (40%)
Father	6 (60%)
Participant proximity to parent	
With parent	2 (20%)
On own, nearby	2 (20%)
1.5-6 hours away	3 (30%)
Across the country	3 (30%)
Work/school	
Student status	4 (40%)
Employment status	3 (30%)
Military status	2 (20%)
Caregiver for parent	1 (10%)

Note. This table reflects participants' statements about their life at the time of parental death.

Table 5

Description of Participants' Parents at the Time of Parental Death

	n (%)
Type of parental death	
Extended illness	6 (60%)
Sudden illness	3 (30%)
Accident	1 (10%)
Parent's relationship	
Married	5 (50%)
Complicated/unknown	
marital relationship	3 (30%)
Divorced	2(20%)

Note. This table reflects participants' discussion of their family life and the circumstances of their parents' deaths.

Since the death of their parent, most participants have moved into different phases of their adulthood. Their current situations may impact the way they remember their grief and also the trajectory their life has taken since the loss. The current occupation and relationship statuses of the participants are outlined in Table 6. At least four of the participants in the study came from somewhat to very complicated family situations that continue to impact their family life today. For the purposes of clarification, participants in the study were matched with a pseudo name (Table 4.1) which will be used to better illustrate the multiple responses with each theme.

Table 6

Current Description of Participants

	n (%)
Current occupation/school status	
Employed	3 (30%)
Full-time student	1 (10%)
Student and employed	6 (60%)
Current relationship status of participants	
Married with children	2 (20%)
Engaged	3 (30%)
Significant other	4 (40%)
Unknown relationship status	1 (10%)

Note. This information reflects participants' discussion of their current life situation.

Participant Views and Feelings on Support Following the Death of a Parent

      Sibling support.

All of the participants in the study had one or more siblings, although the circumstances of these relationships were not all the same. For those that talked about grieving with their siblings, seven participants mentioned difficulties with their siblings. Cara mentioned having a brother but made no other reference to him during the interview. Sean talked about his siblings and providing some support for them, but he was living far away and also talked about not being overly connected. Julie stated,

> *It's interesting how you support in your immediate family because you are all grieving at the same time, and how do you support each other and in the different ways that people grieve.*

Four participants expressed this difficulty with grieving and experiencing the loss differently than their siblings. Marie expressed difficulties because she and her brother had different relationships with their dad and thus were grieving differently, *"My brother and I, my brother was really close to my dad and I wasn't really close to my dad and so we were grieving very differently, and we still do today."* She later mentioned that having some family counseling to help them understand each other would have been helpful, but was not something they sought out. Mike saw that the differences between himself and his siblings were more apparent without his dad to help them get along,

> *My relationship with my sisters was not great at that time . . . Realizing that my dad was the buffer between all three of us and we didn't ever actually communicate with each other and we're really different people.*

For the remainder of the participants who had difficulties with their siblings, the reasons were more varied. Jessica talked about the difficulty in using her siblings for support because she did not want to burden them any further, *"I'm sure that I could have called like my brothers or sisters, but they were mourning as well so you don't want to make someone more sad than they already are."* Jeff talked about being the oldest sibling and needing to help provide support for

his siblings, but not being able to use them for support. Ashley was the remaining participant who experienced difficulties with her siblings, and she had a unique situation because she did not have any full siblings that she shared with her mother who died, but did have half siblings. She expressed a need for them to be supportive that they were not able to fill for her and that she wished had been different, *"that's the only thing I would have changed. I wish that they could have been more okay with whatever."*

Two participants discussed positive aspects of their relationships with their siblings. Maya stated that she and her sister spent a lot of time talking and processing the loss together and their relationship has been close throughout the grieving process. Lindsay expressed difficulty in the differences between herself and her siblings, but also stated that following her mother's death, she and her sister were able to support each other in the loneliness they were feeling, even if they were not working on their grief,

> *I think we were both just so sad and so we did things together, just the companionship was supportive, but we didn't talk that much about our grief processes or anything like that.*

Experiences of professional support.

The views of participants on utilizing professional support following the death of their parent ranged from the belief that everyone should go to therapy to the belief that therapy is not helpful. Of the ten participants, five sought out professional support quickly after the death of their parent. One went to see the college psychologist, one to a private counselor, one to hospice grief counseling, and two attended a grief group. Additionally, three participants sought out professional support related to their loss after some time had passed. All three saw individual therapists, one had gotten support from a professional initially after the loss as well, but felt the need for further assistance after a couple of years. The remaining four participants did not seek out professional help either right away or later, of these four, three were the male participants in the study. Ashley expressed a wish for a support group comprised of other young adults that had

lost a parent, *"I had a lot of information about support groups but I just, I didn't feel like going because I had a feeling it was going to be a lot of like 40 year old women who had lost their mothers."* Jessica discussed her wish that someone had been more encouraging of her seeking professional support. She had an advisor who suggested she see the college counselor, but who never followed up,

> *I think if somebody would have checked in, like my advisor had suggested that I see a counselor but I think if he had checked in, reminded me that it's something important that I really should, I might, I probably would have done it.*

For those that sought professional support right away following the death of their parent, there was a common theme that they felt a need to talk about what they were going through and get outside help. In her reasoning for continuing to see a counselor long-term after the loss of her mom, Cara noted,

> *I think if I were to listen to my own advice I just would never deal with it. It think it is good for me to keep checking in with a counselor about it because I don't deal with it and then it will get triggered.*

Ashley described her experience visiting the psychologist as very positive, *"I was able to go and talk to the psychologist there and she was very open, very willing to just sit and listen."* Lindsay used hospice grief services and stated, *"It was fantastic that it is offered and it is free and I really liked her and I felt like it was useful and I would recommend it."* Marie went to a grief support group following her loss, but did not have a positive experience. The college campus pastor recommended that she attend and she attended one time,

> *I didn't really like it. I just don't think that I was ready to start that yet. I think it was too emotional and too overwhelming for me at the time, but it was composed of students and staff members and the pastor had led the group on campus. I attended once and then I didn't go back after that.*

Julie also attended a grief support group, and also only attended one time. In her experience, the group was comprised of mostly older people and was not going to be beneficial for her grief

process, but she then attended a church healing group and found that to be a supportive environment for her in her grief.

Participants that sought out support some time after their loss expressed a need to work through their grief with more assistance because it was still impacting their life. Maya was having recurring dreams that dealt with the death of her mother and went to see a clinical social worker for two sessions, "*basically she helped normalize my feelings. She let me know how to deal with my dreams, and gave me some exercises to work on to help move on.*" Lindsay utilized help from hospice initially after the death of her mother, but then returned to work and her previous life. After about two years, following a physical illness, she started seeing a therapist twice a week and later once a week.

The four participants that did not seek professional help were split in their thoughts about utilizing support. Two of the four stated that they wished they had gotten professional support following their loss. Jessica explained,

> *I think that I should have spoken to somebody or dealt with my grief, but at the time I kind of wanted, I was still putting up a strong front. Maybe I was in denial about it a little bit. I didn't grow up in a family where we talked about our feelings so I just never thought to do it, or I thought about it but I just never did it.*

She also noticed signs of depression in herself and visited a nurse practitioner to get an anti-depressant in order to keep from falling behind in school. Of the remaining two participants, Sean stated that counseling was offered but that he did not feel that he needed that kind of support. Mike had more conflicted feelings about therapy,

> *Part of that is my dad's understanding was- he just kind of ingrained this thing about therapy with a negative connotation towards it, so I didn't seek therapy at all. In hindsight thinking maybe I should have.*

His sister wanted him to see a therapist, but later in the interview he expressed his thoughts that he had worked through his grief sufficiently without professional support.

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Support at work or school.

Most of the participants in the study felt supported by their work or school following the death of their parent. For six of the participants, they primarily felt supported in returning to work and school and receiving what they needed from their institutions. One participant felt both support and the experience of high stress in her return to work. The remaining three participants did not feel supported at work or school. Whether the participant was at work, school, or in the military was not a determining factor in whether they felt supported or unsupported.

Two participants returned to school soon after the death of their parent and felt that they were very well supported. Both were attending small, private, Christian colleges. Julie felt that professors offered her both support for her emotional needs and practical support such as extensions or changes in assignments in order to assist her with her grieving. She also felt that professors had a better understanding of her needs than peers at school, *"I would say that some of the professors were a bit more understanding than peers."* Marie did not seek out particular support from professors, but felt that the school was extremely supportive including help from the campus pastors and her advisor.

Five other participants were employed at the time of their parent's death and felt that they received good support from their employers. For most this included permission to take off as much time as needed, although none of the participants took off extended amounts of time. Jeff stated that work offered, *"more than standard bereavement, it's not very much for bereavement at all, any loss really. So I could have taken it if I wanted to."* Cara expressed that work was an important place of support for her, *"You could talk to anybody, they were super understanding about just how I was feeling or if I needed time off. . . That was just like a stress free part of life."* Coworkers were part of the important support offered to Maya, *"they were very supportive and again it wasn't even so much conversations, it was just the fact of seeing them and being compassionate."* Lindsay started a new job about two months after her mom passed away. Upon

starting that job she formed a close relationship with her supervisor who provided mentorship and support around the loss of her mom. The supervisor had also experienced the death of her mother prior to working with Lindsay, *"We had multiple discussions about our mothers; we were kind of grieving together in some ways."* Mike was in the military and felt that the military was supportive of him following his loss.

Of the participants that did not feel supported in their institutions, two were attending college, one was in a workplace, and the other had just finished basic training in the military. Each of the four felt unsupported for different reasons following the death of their parent. Attending a large university was challenging for Ashley, accommodations were not made to help her finish classes around the time of her mother's death, the school did not find a way to help her apply for financial aid without some information, and she generally felt they did not provide her with the practical support she needed,

> *My dad and I don't have a great relationship. . . That is starting to improve now, but I couldn't really count on him being there for financial aid information. My second semester there they need parents financial taxes and stuff like that and I couldn't get it for them and they weren't willing to work with me for a way around it.*

Although she felt the institution did not provide what she needed, she did find support from peers and from some of her professors. She eventually left the school and started at another school that offered her more support around her needs. Jessica was also in school at the time of the death. She did not seek out much support, but also did not find the school particularly supportive. As mentioned above, Lindsay found support from her supervisor, but also found the workplace to be highly stressful which was not helpful in her time of grief. Finally, Sean was in the military and although he also did not seek out much support, he found the reaction to the death by the military was cold and felt mechanical,

> *They as an institution see a wide array of situations so they have a knee-jerk reaction to everything. They have a set protocol, course of action. So if someone's parent dies or a suicide, they immediately have a response and offer certain things for that situation. It kind of felt cold to me when I look back because it was more like, 'here you go, see the*

chaplain,' and then he gave me a bunch of pamphlets and then just kind of made himself available. So it's good because they give you all that information, but it is kind of knee-jerk and cold reaction.

Support from friends.

Participants in the study overwhelmingly found friends supportive of their grief and loss experience. At the same time, many also felt that friends could not quite understand what they were going through or how to best support them. Friends were a source of distraction, someone to talk to, and also a group that could not understand what they needed.

Eight participants expressed that friendship support was a very important aspect of their life following the death of their parent. Many felt that their friends were helpful in providing someone to talk to about the loss and someone to take their mind off what they were going through. Maya found talking with friends and reminiscing about her mom, whom they all had known growing up, a very important part of her grieving process. She commented on the way her friends would incorporate her mom into their conversations,

> *Gosh, remember when your mom was at the softball game and she was yelling at the top of her lungs. It was good, I think lots of folks would be scared to bring up the name, but for me it was healthy.*

Ashley, in talking about the friends she made at school stated, *"I made a lot of great friends up there that were always there for me, always willing to help me out."* Julie and Cara mentioned the importance of friends providing opportunities to have fun and laugh when they did not feel like doing those things. Lindsay was living away from most of her friends immediately after her mom's death, but felt that they connected with her and sent her care packages and let her know they were thinking about her. Julie also highlighted the importance of one key friendship, one friend who always knew what she needed and was able to sit with her in her grief. Finally, four participants mentioned the importance of having friends who had experienced the death of a parent. They found those friendships were especially supportive during their grief. Lindsay stated,

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"A friend of mine now lost her father and so she's been really, really supportive, just kind of talking about not having one parent."

Although friendship was found to be both supportive and key in the grieving process for most participants, this support was also conflicted for some participants. Three participants discussed the realization that their friends were there and offered to provide support, but that in their grief they did not seek out any support from those friends. Marie, in understanding how her friends viewed the loss stated,

> *I think it was kind of, it is a sensitive topic and I think, I guess kind of from what I understand about the experience is that they wanted to make things better and they couldn't and they didn't know how to approach me and talk about it.*

Lindsay stated, *"All my . . . friends, I think they didn't really know what to say, but they were just, they knew it was hard for me and I felt like I could talk to them. I didn't really."*

Two participants, both in college, talked about their feelings of discontent with friendships during their grief. Julie found that her friends could not relate to what she was going through because they were focused on the future, *"Sometimes I felt like I couldn't connect with them or they didn't understand . . . They were looking for jobs and internships and I was grieving for the past."* Marie felt some resentment towards friends who did not have to grieve. Finally, as having friends who had experienced a similar loss was important to some participants, for Jessica, not knowing anyone that had gone through something similar was very challenging,

> *If I could connect with somebody who had also lost their dad, because like I had mentioned it's so difficult to talk to somebody who doesn't know. Cause they, they recognize that it is a very sad, traumatic thing, but they don't understand how you feel. So I think if there was a way to connect with somebody, anyone, if it's a stranger or somebody that I knew. I think that would be helpful, just to talk about it and have someone really know.*

Support of significant others.

In discussing the impact of support of significant others during their grief, participants fell clearly into one of three categories. Three participants did not mention any significant other

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present at that time in their life. Three participants found their significant other very supportive and four found their significant other very unsupportive. For those that found their significant other very supportive, one was engaged, the other would become engaged in the month following the death of his dad, and the third was in a long-term relationship that continues today.

For the four participants that did not feel supported by their significant other, the relationship often seemed to be another barrier in the grieving process. Mike articulated the difficulty of managing a difficult relationship with his grief,

> *The problem was just the difficulty of trying to manage that aspect of that relationship with my dad's death. That was really a difficulty, if there was a thing that was the most difficult. Looking back I was feeling completely broken, at that verge, it was that relationship that really strained me.*

Maya experienced the end of a long-term relationship around the same time as the death of her mom which amplified her grieving with compounded losses. Two other participants discussed the selfishness of their significant other who did not attempt to provide what they needed at that time. Jessica discussed the impatience of her boyfriend for her to move forward, *"I had a boyfriend that was not supportive at all. He just couldn't understand why I wasn't over it, so I didn't feel like I could talk to him."*

Support conclusion.

The participants in this study all talked about different support that they experienced following the death of their parent. The areas of support that were discussed most frequently by the participants included the support of siblings, professional support, support from work or school, support of friends, and support of significant others. The experiences of support were as unique as the participants in the study, but each had stories to tell of the most supportive moments they had in their loss and the moments when they did not feel as supported. Some participants actively sought help and support from those around them while others either did not want to ask or were unsure how to ask for support. Participant experiences of support were unique to each

individual, but most participants felt supported in some aspects of their grieving and also experienced difficulty with parts of their support.

Participant Understandings of Coping Skills Utilized Following the Death of a Parent

        Quickly returned to work or school.

A main theme in the interviews with participants was the discussion of moving back into their work or school life quickly following the death of their parent. Eight out of the ten participants talked specifically about the transition back to work or school being very quick. The other two participants did not talk about this aspect of their experience. How this quick return impacted the participants varied. For all the participants that discussed this theme, they believed that working or attending school and being busy was one of their coping mechanisms following their loss. Sean stated, *"I think the biggest coping mechanism in my life is just keeping myself busy and kind of burying myself in my work and studies."*

Four participants found their quick transition back to work was not helpful for their grieving process. They described it as something that they felt they wanted and needed to do, to get back to normal, to be busy, but that it was not helpful. Ashley welcomed the distraction of her quick return, *"I tried to stay busy as much as I could, otherwise I would start dwelling, "* but pointed out that she was not able to begin grieving completely until she took a break from school. Jeff felt that the return to work was positive for him, but that his work may have suffered. In discussing what she would have changed about her grieving experience Lindsay stated,

> *I would never have gone back to work . . . I feel like I did everything wrong as far as what I know now helps people who are grieving . . . I would have just traveled or just, I don't know if it would have been best to stay at my parents house, but like working at Starbucks and relaxing with family instead of trying to push myself back into my old life. I think I did that too soon.*

Four other participants talked about returning to work quickly, but felt that this was a positive part of their coping process. The same ideas of wanting to return to some normalcy and be busy were also present with these participants. The idea of getting away from the loss, or

distraction, also came up with Marie, *"I really kind of wanted that, I wanted to go back there and get away from here, kind of start my life again."* Sean talked about the distraction of being back in the military, *"It was a good forced distraction and honestly if that wasn't there it might have bothered me a little bit more."* The ability to be part of something that had been there before the loss was important for Jeff. It was seen as a survival technique, but one that was helpful for his coping,

> *One of the things I did to cope was to get back, get closer to the usual as much as I could anyways. Try to immerse myself in work and family stuff and I played football at the time, so immersing myself in that. Get along the best I could at the time.*

Wide range of coping skills.

In discussing coping skills and mechanisms used following the death of their parent, participants varied in the number of skills they believed they had used. Some participants believed that the only coping they utilized was avoidance through working, friends, or school. Other participants had long lists of activities or skills they used to help them through their grief. Although there was some overlap in the skills that participants mentioned, they were also quite varied by individual. Julie and Maya talked about the need to try new things following their loss because continuing what they had done in the past was not working. Maya stated, *"It felt like maybe my old coping mechanisms weren't quite enough."*

Five participants talked about using physical activity as a coping mechanism. For two of the male participants this included involvement in sports, Jeff played football and Mike coached wrestling, *"Wrestling's always been there, but also having that outlet, wrestling was that . . . they understand to give you I guess, physical activity."* The three women that talked about physical activity talked more in terms of working out. Julie talked about using yoga and walking as means of coping. Marie stated *"I actually went to the local YMCA and begged them to give me a one month membership. And I went and I exercised almost every day."*

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Four participants talked about faith or religion as an aspect of their coping. Sean discussed being very Catholic at the time of his dad's death and that this served as part of his coping following the loss. Lindsay talked about her family having a religious tradition that was important to her family during the illness and death, but she did not specify this as something that was important to her. Two participants talked primarily about their faith as a means of coping and growing following their loss. Julie was part of prayer groups and found deep importance in turning to faith in the time of loss, *"My faith grew a lot stronger actually after my dad died.*" Mike was volunteering as a youth director at a church when his dad passed away. The church had always been important in his life and he found it to be a healing place for him. He stated,

> *I think the primary one just being faith . . . how important a personal faith was, it has been key- the church, because even if your family, if your family can't cope because that loss is so traumatic to them too, to know where there are people that will be willing to go through the process with you, that can kind of be with you.*

The remaining coping skills mentioned were less common. Two participants talked about reading about grief and loss as part of their coping. Two participants talked about being with other people as important in their coping. Julie talked about recreation with others including walks, dancing, movies, playing ultimate Frisbee, and traveling in Europe about a year after her dad died. Mike talked about using rituals and Ashley talked about partying more than she had before the loss. She viewed this as a more negative coping mechanism. Two participants talked about developing other coping mechanisms a few years past the loss including Julie who began painting and Lindsay who found yoga and meditation very helpful,

> *Yoga continues to be really important . . . I find that like when I'm thinking about my mom a lot I have grief responses in yoga, like sad, and things come out and I work through or think through things.*

Coping summary.

Participants in the study used multiple methods of coping following the death of their parent. Most participants used a return to work, school, and friendships as the primary means of

coping. This coping mechanism provided a distraction from the feelings of grief, a sense of normalcy, and return to life with friends and coworkers. Participants also used individual coping skills that fit their own personalities and needs ranging from reading, to physical activity, to faith. Participants looked for ways to feel normal again in the midst of their loss while also using multiple methods of coping with their feelings of grief.

Participant Experience of Grief Over Time

  Moving through the grief process.

   Moving through the grieving process has been a long process for most of the participants in the study. Nine of the ten participants discussed the length of their grief, while Sean felt that he did not experience a grief reaction that has required work over time, but that his loss was integrated into his life. Cara felt that she was still in the process of working through her initial grief because she had not done so until fairly recently in her life. The remaining eight talked about their loss in terms of coming to a new normal in their life following the loss. The time this took ranged from six months to seven years or longer.

   Understanding that grief will last a lifetime was a theme that developed for some participants. Julie stated,

> *Grief is a lifetime thing and so you will never really get over it. Life will change, but it will get better and there will be newness and new life and new healing and new things you'll discover about yourself and it's still possible to live and to enjoy life- after.*

Lindsay also expressed an understanding of grief as a lifetime process and that coming to terms with that part of grief was important in her own process and life,

> *You grieve the person in small ways constantly throughout your life. They were really important to you, so having this final end doesn't seem as though it's ever going to happen. But coming to a place where I've accepted that feels great.*

   Three participants felt that grief had made them stand still while the world continued to move forward. They noticed that they felt stuck in their grief while people around them were doing just what they had always done. Maya stated,

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Society was kind of moved on and I was stuck and I've heard that from other people who have gone through the grieving process and lost a loved one. It feels like the world is moving but you are standing still. That is weird, it is surreal.

Marie had a similar experience of feeling that she was stuck or standing still when she returned to college following her dad's death, "*I felt like the world had just continued where I felt like the world had stopped, so going back down and seeing everything had changed and updates with my friends and I think that was hard.*"

Describing what moving through grief looks like was important for two participants. Mike described his life as needing to become "life-giving" again before he would feel he had moved into a new phase,

> *A storm had hit my life and it just took forever to finally get all the waves and things to kind of settle out. It was at least, it was really, almost a three year process before I, I don't think, in a lot of ways I don't think it was until my second year of seminary that I felt like life had really settled and things were kind of back to a place where things were life giving.*

Jessica was able to see changes in her life and knows that things are different for her now because she is able to talk about her loss without falling apart,

> *I would say after about a year it started to really hit me that he's gone. . . So there was a turning point for that and then, I don't know when it happened, but I also got to the point where I could finally talk about it, like I can with you and not be a big, blubbering mess. Again I think it was just a product of time, I needed to, I just needed to be removed from the situation for awhile before I could talk about it.*

Grief as an individual process.

The participants in the study emphasized the need for individuals to grieve in the way that works best for them. Six of the participants discussed the importance of feeling comfortable with however an individual needs to grieve without judging what it should look like. Julie stated, "*I think just giving yourself time and grace and not judging yourself . . . but just allowing yourself to be weak and to be vulnerable.*" Understanding personal feelings and being with those feelings was also brought up as important. Cara stated, "*If you feel sad, just sit with it and let*

yourself feel that for as long as you need to." Ashley also expressed the need to be open to

whatever feelings come up, *"It's okay to cry, it's okay to withdraw from people a little bit. It's*

okay to yell and scream and be angry." Jessica has learned how to be with her feelings since

losing her dad. She describes what this looks like in her life now,

> *I think I just take, if I feel like I need to cry, I let myself cry. I'll take some time for myself to feel the grief and cry if I need to or think about whatever is making me sad. I think that's about it, I just take the time to feel what I feel instead of pushing it to the back of my mind.*

Another aspect of grieving individually involves giving oneself the time needed to grieve. Maya

pointed out that this is not common in our society, but that taking time to grieve is important,

"Don't be afraid to grieve, grieve in your own time. I just know society doesn't allow us to do

that." Finally, Sean brought up his thought that any reaction to the loss is okay even if there is not

a reaction, because that is how that individual is feeling at that moment.

Grief summary.

Most of the participants in the study expressed increased insight into their experience of

grief and loss as time has passed. For the participants who lost their parent more than five years

ago, they expressed continued changes and adjustments in their life over the years since the loss

with some sense of a new normal returning after many years. Participants who lost their parent

more recently were able to express changes in their lives, but did not seem to have attained the

sense of peace of those who were further from their loss. Additionally, each participant went

through the grieving process in their own way and expressed the importance of allowing each

person to have that experience. Grief and loss changed the life of most participants in the study;

their experiences impacted how they view grief and loss both for themselves and for others.

Summary

Participants in the study explored many aspects of the support and coping they utilized

following the death of their parent. There were a handful of themes in which the participants

agreed upon the support available to them or the coping skills that they utilized. The remainder of the themes included varying responses which reflects the unique individuals who shared their personal understanding of their grief experience. Grief is a unique process to each individual, which was emphasized in this research, but it also contains threads common to the emerging adults interviewed.

Discussion

The research examined the experience of parental loss for emerging adults through a lens of support and coping. The participants in this study both supported and deviated from the current literature on grief and parental loss. This section will examine the consistencies between recent studies and the current findings from this research as well as the differences and emerging themes that presented during the research. The themes from the study will be further examined in relation to the literature review.

Understanding the participants and their personal experience of loss impacts the findings. Although this research was undertaken with the presupposition that systems play a large role in the grief process for individuals, most individuals in the study experienced and understood their grief from a more individual viewpoint. Many discussed the interplay between themselves and others as they navigated their grief, particularly the people or systems that made their grief more difficult, but most did not discuss the impact of systems on their grieving without prompted questions from the researcher. The other conceptual frame of the study was developmental theory which was supported in some ways by the participants in the study. At the time of the death of their parent, all the participants were in the emerging adult age range, and most were living early adult lives such as attending college, serving in the military, working in a first job, and navigating friendships and relationships with significant others. Alternatively, some participants in the study appeared to have already moved into more of an adult identity prior to the loss of their parent, perhaps indicating they were no longer in emerging adulthood. Thus, their experience of their parent's death may have been different than adults that would more clearly be identified as emerging adults.

The characteristics of the participants are important to note in understanding their responses to questions. It can be noted that seven of the ten participants were women which may indicate a social understanding that women are more likely to share about their lives and

experiences. The participants had a variety of family situations including parents that were happily married, complicated marriages, losing a dad and having an alcoholic mother, divorced parents, losing a single mother, and situations of childhood abuse. This range of situations led to very diverse experiences of grief among the participants and yet, themes still emerged. Eight of the ten participants in the study are currently working in or are training to work in caring professions. The participants may have been drawn to these professions after experiencing their own loss, and they may be more likely to share in research because they value helping others with what they need. Most participants explained that when they saw the flyer or announcement about the research that they wanted to participate because the death of their parent had a very significant impact on their life.

Participant Views and Feelings on Support Following the Death of a Parent

Participant experiences of support were unique to each individual, but most participants felt supported in some aspects of their grieving and also experienced difficulty with parts of their support. In past studies, participants have discussed the role of immediate family in their support network (Balk, 1997; Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998; Schulz, 2007; Tyson-Rawson, 1993). Unlike this past research, in the current study most participants did not emphasize their family as a main source of support. For many participants, they would elaborate further on family support if prompted by the researcher, but few offered this information freely. This may be a reflection on the varied family situations of the participants. Multiple participants did not view their family as support at all, and others did utilize them as a support, but not in the way that past research has indicated. A few participants utilized their remaining parent as a main support and a few participants talked about wonderful support from extended family, but not from immediate family. Two participants were living at home at the time of the death. One participant moved out about two months later and the other about four months later. No other participants returned to live at home within the first few months after the death of their parent. The same two participants

did return home at some time between the death and the interview. Research has indicated that emerging adults may struggle to identify if they should reenter their family of origin or continue forming their own adult identity following a loss (Johnson, 2009; Peterson & Rafuls, 1998). With the exception of one participant in this study who discussed being at home to help her mom with day to day tasks and caring for her younger siblings, no other participants identified with this struggle of managing family identity in the midst of the loss. This need to remain independent coincides with the identity formation and individuation which occurs during emerging adulthood (Arnett, 2000).

The one aspect of family grief that was discussed frequently by participants was the experience of sibling support. Most of the participants in the study experienced difficulty in their sibling relationships following the loss. Very little previous research has examined deeply the relationships between siblings following parental loss in adulthood. In Tyson-Rawson's (1993) study, it was found that 14 of the 20 participants felt they had stronger relationships with their siblings following the loss of their father. This study also found that conflict sometimes resulted in families where members perceived having low support from other family members (Tyson-Rawson, 1993). Research done more broadly on changes in families following loss has found that with a loss comes family change which can lead to both new relationships and new conflict (Bagnoli, 2003; Johnson, 2009; Kaltreider & Mendelson, 1985). These findings are consistent with the experiences of the participants in this study; many perceived having low support from their siblings which in turn may have caused the conflict that they discussed. Other participants discussed the new relationships that they were forced to form following the loss which also led to increased conflict. Conflict may result when siblings expect understanding from one another because no one else should understand what they are going through better, and then they respond very differently to their grief. Other factors which may contribute to sibling conflict include the ages of the siblings, the developmental phase of each sibling, the dynamics of the family,

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proximity to one another, and the relationship prior to the death. A cultural finding in relation to this subtheme was that the participant who had parents from the Philippines expressed the inability to talk about the loss with her siblings because in their family it was important that they not make life more difficult for each other.

Professional support was widely used and upheld as positive among the participants in the study. This finding contrasts with previous research on emerging adults utilizing professional support following a loss. In three studies, few participants sought professional support, and those that did were mostly disappointed with the help they received (Balk, 1997; Balk et al., 1993; Janowiak et al., 1995). The gender breakdown on this subtheme was significant as none of the men that participated in this study sought professional support and six of the seven women did seek out professional support. The one woman that did not seek professional support made statements wishing that she had done so around the time of her loss. This may be a reflection on the acceptability in society of seeking help and talking about problems, in that it seems to be more acceptable for women to utilize this form of support. It may also be a reflection of the help that different genders perceive they will receive from talking about problems. Additionally, all seven women but only one of the three men in the study are working in or studying helping professions. Those in the helping professions may place a higher value on seeking therapy or counseling. The experience of participants with grief groups was less positive. Ashley wanted to be in a grief group, but wanted to attend with others her age and did not find a group that met those requirements. Julie and Marie both attended grief groups soon after their loss, but each only attended once. Marie felt that it was too early and Julie did not feel that a group of older people would be beneficial to her. Their feelings are similar to previous research. In the Janowiak et al. (1995) study, there was difficulty recruiting participants for grief groups on a college campus. Most potential participants did not want to be vulnerable in front of their peers, which may have been part of the concern with Marie. In Julie's case, the group was not a good fit with her

experience of loss, but she did find a better fit in a more general faith and healing support group. The varied views of participants on the importance of seeking professional support are also supported in grief theory (Worden, 2009).

Participants in the study confirmed what other studies have indicated about the support of institutions such as work or school; having this support is very important and lacking this support can be a detriment to grieving (Balk, 2001; Johnson, 2009). Previous research has done little work on exactly what kind of support institutions should offer, but from this study there is indication that acknowledging the loss, providing practical support such as flexibility with coursework, financial aid, leaves as needed, and providing empathy and compassion are helpful in assisting grieving emerging adults. It can be noted that the participants who found their institutions the most supportive were primarily involved with small institutions such as small colleges or small workplaces. These participants clearly identified the support they felt in their return to work or school. This may be because smaller institutions are able to provide more individualized responses to student and employee needs. This was echoed by two participants who worked at large institutions. They felt they received a cold or mechanical response which was detrimental to their grief. Larger institutions may have to work harder to provide the support that each person needs and may need more consolidated grief services such as those suggested by Balk (2001) in his assessment of bereavement assistance on university campuses.

The participants in the study found friends supportive and unsupportive at the same time. Tyson-Rawson (1993) examined the need for those that experienced grief to be vulnerable with friends in order to receive support. In that study, this vulnerability was seen as somewhat rare and very challenging for the bereaved. That theme was also evident among participants in this study. Most talked about friends being available if they needed help but that they did not seek help or talk about their feelings with their friends. In previous studies, the impact of feeling that friends did not understand them or their experience led to feelings of isolation among emerging adults

(Balk et al, 1993; Johnson, 2009). Only one participant in this study talked about feelings of isolation, but a few participants also talked about not knowing anyone who could really understand what they were going through because other friends had not experienced the loss of a parent. For those that knew another person their age who had experienced a similar loss, they talked about deeper sharing and understanding with that friend. This is a reflection of the death of a parent being an off-time loss for people in emerging adulthood (Puterman & Cadell, 2008). The need to know others who have also lost a parent was emphasized in the literature as something very important to children who experienced the death of a parent (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011).

Emerging adulthood is a time for developing an understanding of one's self, friendships, and also romantic relationships (Arnett, 2000; Arnett, 2004; Balk et al. 1993). Although seeking love and being involved in romantic relationships is a significant part of emerging adulthood, previous studies have not examined how this part of emerging adulthood impacts grief during the same time period. An emerging theme in this study is the impact of romantic relationships on the grief experience. As with institutions, it appears that having a supportive significant other can greatly help the grieving process, while having an unsupportive significant other can be a detriment to grief. It can be noted that the three participants in the study who found their significant other very supportive following their loss are still in relationships with that person, two married and one in a long-term committed relationship. They may have had very solid relationships prior to the loss and the loss may have brought them closer together because they experienced a life crisis as a couple. For those that had unsupportive significant others, their experience was often painful but also helped them recognize that the relationship would not work long term. Although this was helpful for most, it compounded the losses they were experiencing early in their grief.

Participant Understandings of Coping Skills Utilized Following the Death of a Parent

Participants looked for ways to feel normal again in the midst of their loss while also using multiple methods of coping with their feelings of grief. Coping is a very individual process and this was made clear by the participants in the study who all dealt with their grief in unique ways. In previous studies on emerging adults, little research has been done specifically on coping methods and understanding coping, but previous work with adults and children indicates that emerging adults utilize many of the same techniques as others grieving the loss of a parent.

The quick return of participants to work and school was a clear theme among respondents. The actual speed of the return ranged from a few days to a few months, but each participant that mentioned this theme perceived their return as very quick. A need to feel that the world could still be normal following a loss was also a theme in other research on emerging adults and parental loss (Johnson, 2009). In that study, returning to normalcy quickly was seen as very important. Emerging adults are still forming their own identity; therefore it may be important to maintain certain parts of their identity such as work or school while other parts are changing (Arnett, 2000). They may see the loss of a parent as a change in their own identity. In other studies keeping busy was utilized as a coping mechanism among those experiencing bereavement (Balk, 1997; Umberson, 2003). Returning to work and school was helpful for the grieving process for some participants and a detriment to grieving for others. Depending on how they utilized available support at their institution and how much they utilized this method of coping as a way to avoid their grief rather than deal with how they were feeling both seem to have impacted their perception of the situation.

The coping mechanisms utilized by participants in the study were varied, but mostly participants emphasized the positive skills they used. Two exceptions included those that avoided grief by returning to their "normal" life quickly, and one participant who mentioned increased drinking and partying. The use of qualitative interviewing may have decreased the comfort level

of participants with sharing negative aspects of their personal coping, or they may not have utilized less constructive coping mechanisms. Some common coping methods used by adults in other studies included thinking about positive memories of the deceased, participating in religious practices, and crying (Balk, 1997; Umberson, 2003). Children who lost a parent had wider ranging coping skills mentioned in previous research including physical activity, creative activities, connecting to faith and religion, and a sense of humor (Brewer & Sparkes, 2011; Hope & Hodge, 2006; Shultz, 2007). The participants in the current study mentioned each of these activities, although the ones that were most prevalent included physical activity and faith and religion. A few methods utilized by participants in this study were not mentioned in other research including utilizing yoga and meditation, reading books about grief and loss, and using rituals.

Participant Experience of Grief Over Time

Grief and loss changed the life of most participants in the study. Their experience of loss impacted how they view grief and experiences of loss both for themselves and for others. As indicated in grief research, grief is a unique and individual process and it requires an adjusted understanding of the world in order to move forward (Aiken, 2001; Worden, 2009). Although the bereaved may move into a new sense of normal following the loss, the experience of grief can continue throughout life and the person that died becomes part of life in a new way, but sometimes grief feelings reemerge around life events or changes (Worden, 2009). The participants in this study would confirm many theories and concepts on grief process and also give voice to the unique experience of parental loss during emerging adulthood.

The participants in the study spoke eloquently about the process of their grief over time and how they moved through their grief. They spoke very clearly about coming to a place of understanding that grief would continue throughout their life, but that they could live fulfilled lives in the midst of that grief. Seven of the participants in the study experienced the death of

their parent seven or eight years ago, the remaining three experienced the death three, four, and five years ago. There appeared to be a marked difference between the understandings of moving through the grief process as experienced by those who were a few more years removed from the loss. They had a longer view of their grief and many felt that they had only recently come to a place of peace about the loss, or a place of new life. Of the three that were more newly bereaved, one felt that she was only beginning to work on her grief, the other two were more confident in having moved through their grief, but their statements about grieving and life were not as developed as those with more time between them and the loss. This may indicate that although working through tasks of grief (Worden, 2009) may happen over some time, returning to life and feeling fulfilled takes a significant amount of time and perhaps many years. It may also become easier to integrate the loss into an adult life once a more secure adult identity has been formed, such as when the bereaved has left emerging adulthood.

The individual nature of grief was also present as a theme in the current research. Participants emphasized that they would encourage people who experienced a similar loss to grieve in the way that works best for them and to take time to express their grief. Many expressed their own deeper understanding of their emotions and regulating their own emotions following the loss because they learned to sit with their sadness and deal with their anger in productive ways. Previous work on grief has emphasized that it is personal and individual in nature and that it can be experienced successfully in many different ways (Aiken, 2001).

Strengths and Limitations

This qualitative study examined in depth the experience of parental loss for emerging adults through a lens of coping and support. The experiences shared by the participants were rich in their understanding of how they managed grief in their own life. The knowledge gained through this research has helped to enrich the understanding of parental loss for emerging adults and an understanding of how to best support emerging adults around their loss.

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Utilizing qualitative method is a strength of this study because it allowed the participants to openly share what they experienced. In contrast to a method which utilizes quantitative data, this method provided participants with a chance to ask clarifying questions and emphasize the parts of their story that they felt were most important. Additionally, the participants came from very diverse family situations and expressed very unique experiences of loss which added depth to the understanding of this topic. Another strength of the study is the participation of ten participants. Although this is a small number, for a study done in a short amount of time it is a testament to the importance of this topic. With small amounts of recruitment in one urban area, thirteen people volunteered within a three week time frame to participate in the study.

There were multiple limitations of this study, including that the sample size was still very small in relation to the number of people who have experienced a similar loss. Participants were self-selected which can indicate that they have given the topic discussed more reflection and thought than the general population of emerging adults who have lost a parent. The small sample size and convenience sampling eliminate the ability to generalize the information found to a larger population. Additionally, the participants had diverse family situations and grew up in both rural and urban areas; seven of the participants were Caucasian. The remaining three were Asian. This lack of cultural, racial, and socioeconomic diversity impedes further the generalizability of the study and the understanding of cultural issues in reference to parental loss.

The use of qualitative methods is a strength of the research, but it may also have impeded some sharing by participants as they were sitting face to face with the researcher. Additionally, it may have been useful to ask participants specifically about coping mechanisms they used that were not helpful in their grief. Only one participant mentioned a coping mechanism that was not helpful, and others may have given more information about this topic had the question been asked directly. Although it is also a strength of the study, the diversity in experiences of the participants may be a limitation because no particular experience was able to be analyzed more thoroughly.

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Finally, the study is retrospective in nature; therefore it is the participants' memories of their experiences of support and coping and not a capturing of the actual support and coping used at the time of the loss. The use of a qualitative interview captures the memories of participants at the time of the interview and therefore the information included in the study is representative of what the participants stated, but they may have had additional or different experiences that were not shared during the interview.

Recommendations for Future Research

The areas of parental loss and grief during emerging adulthood are still relatively understudied, thus, any further research on these topics would benefit those that experience loss in this formative time in their life. It would be beneficial to focus more qualitative research specifically on the experience of the different groups represented by the participants in this study. Some of these groups may include emerging adult children of divorced parents that experience parental loss and emerging adult children from more complicated family situations. The ones indicated by this study include childhood abuse or neglect and parental drug or alcohol use. Additionally, there has been some research conducted on the grief experience of women, and as this study confirmed, it is easier to recruit female participants, but research focusing specifically on emerging adult men who experience parental loss would have significant benefit (Cait, 2008; Shultz, 2007; Tyson-Rawson, 1993). Another area for research that emerged from this study is the impact of romantic relationships on the grief of emerging adults. Further research in this area would be helpful for greater understanding of the support needed around romantic relationships. Another area that could use specific research would be the group of emerging adults who experience parental loss outside of college life. Much of the previous research on grief during emerging adulthood has focused on college students (Balk, 1997; Balk, 2001; Balk et al., 1993; Janowiak et al., 1995; Severty-Seib & Taub, 2010; Tyson-Rawson, 1993; Wrenn, 1999). More than half of the current study met this criterion, but focusing specifically on both the emerging

adults who do not attend college and experience parental loss and the emerging adults who have finished college and experience parental loss would be helpful. Focusing research on participants who are from varying socioeconomic and racial or ethnic groups would be helpful in identifying cultural or group differences that professionals may need more knowledge of in their work with people.

In general, because more information is needed about parental loss during emerging adulthood, it is useful to continue utilizing qualitative methods to increase knowledge. Conversely, it may be useful at this time to undertake a larger quantitative study that can look at wider trends and larger groups of people and thus be more generalizable. This was done on a larger scale with adults of all ages that experienced parental loss, and provided information that helped inform further research on the topic (Marks et al., 2007; Umberson & Chen, 1994). In terms of more negative personal experience, such as the coping skills utilized that were examined in this study, participants may be more open to sharing honestly if they are non-identifiable and are not sitting face to face with the researcher.

Implications for Future Social Work Practice

Social work practice can be enhanced through greater understanding of grief and loss and how this impacts individuals, families, and systems. The importance of social workers having a good understanding of bereavement and its effects was emphasized again in this study. The participants quickly reintegrated to their "normal" life and returned to work and school. They were dealing with their grief in the midst of the rest of their life. Only one participant sought out grief specific counseling from hospice while the rest of the participants sought help from private therapists, college counseling, or not at all. Thus, clinical social workers can encounter bereaved emerging adults in many settings and may encounter them dealing with issues that they see as unrelated to their grief such as relationship issues with significant others, relationship issues with siblings, or trouble at work or school.

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Social workers should also be aware of the individual nature in which emerging adults appear to deal with their grief. A minority of the participants in the study sought out and utilized others to help them with their grief or viewed providing support as the role of families and friends. Previous research also showed that emerging adults are in the midst of identity formation which can lead to a need for independence (Arnett, 2004). Understanding emerging adults from this perspective would be important in working with the population around issues of grief and loss. The emerging adults may need assistance in seeking and utilizing support, but they also may wish to be supported in their individual grief.

Implications for Future Policy

Social workers are ethically obligated to advocate for those in need and attempt to make changes to the system to better help those they serve. In the context of grieving emerging adults, social workers can advocate for more supportive response systems at large institutions including employers, universities, and the military. A common issue for participants in the study was that large institutions were unable to meet their needs in terms of support. Additionally, programs that provide age specific grief programs, such as education, support groups, mentoring or peer relationships with others who have experienced a similar loss, and counseling could be helpful. Emerging adults may deal more openly with grief and practical support issues if the support is geared specifically to them. Organizations that already serve the grieving or emerging adults such as hospice or churches and schools may be encouraged to provide support specifically to this population

Conclusion

The current research added new information to the literature on grief in emerging adulthood and specifically the participants' experiences of support and coping following parental loss. This research found information that was reflected in previous literature including the support needed from work or school, the support found in friends, the quick return of participants

to work and school, the different coping mechanisms utilized by participants, the understanding of grief taking a long time, and seeing grief as an individual process. The subtheme of professional support was found to be in contrast to previous literature. The subtheme of support of significant others was an emerging theme in this research.

The experience of grief and the loss of a parent are very personal and individual processes undertaken over time. Dealing with this loss during emerging adulthood, a time of searching for identity, love, and purpose, can be even more challenging because there is a desire to continue working on identity formation within the framework of the loss. Additionally, other emerging adults may not understand fully the impact of such a loss or how to provide the best support to a grieving friend or significant other. The participants in this study developed ways of getting support and dealing with their grief internally, but there were challenges for many of them in their grief as well. In grief theory it is understood that finding ways to receive support and deal internally with the emotions surrounding the loss are important in moving forward and that at some point after the loss, the individual will be able to integrate the loss and the deceased person into their life in a new way. Many of the participants in the study appear to have worked through their grief in this way, but they did so in ways that were unique for those in their life situations. The systems in each of their lives, including their families, friends, work, and school, also interplayed to impact the way that they grieved. Understanding an individual emerging adult in terms of the systems they are a part of will help social workers assist them with their grief and provide them with appropriate interventions to seek support and cope with the loss. It is also important that emerging adults are understood from their need for individual identity and identity seeking. The lives of many of the participants in the study were changed by experiencing a profound loss at an early age and they anticipate grieving throughout their life for the relationship that was lost, but they also see hope and new life emerging from their loss.

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Appendix A: Letter to Potential Participants

Dear (Name),

Thank you so much for contacting me regarding my research study. I am a graduate student in the School of Social Work at St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas. I am writing a clinical research paper on the topic of early adults and the death of a parent. I will be interviewing individuals who experienced the death of a parent between the ages of 18 and 26. I will be asking about your life around the time of the death, coping skills utilized, and support that was available and utilized following the death.

The interview is completely voluntary. Participating will provide you with a chance to share your story about this experience in your life. You will also be given a $10 gift card to Target as a thank you for your participation. I am including a copy of the consent form that you would need to sign if you decided to participate in my study. The form goes into more detail about what I am asking of you as a participant. Please review the form and contact me to arrange a time for the interview.

Sincerely,

Christina Newton

newt1003@stthomas.edu

CONSENT FORM

UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS

The Use of Support and Coping Skills among Emerging Adults Following Parental Loss

IRB Tracking #280957-1

I am conducting a study about the support and coping skills used by emerging adults following the death of a parent. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you experienced the death of a parent during emerging adulthood (ages 18-26). Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Christina Newton, a graduate student in social work, and supervised by Kari Fletcher, ABD, LICSW, MSW from the St. Catherine University/University of St. Thomas School of Social Work.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to examine the use of coping skills and support following parental loss during emerging adulthood.

Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things: participate in a 1-1.5 hour in person, digitally recorded interview about your experience of parental loss. Interviews will take place in a private location determined with the researcher and interviewee; this could include a private work office or a pre-reserved group study room at a library.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

The study has some risk. You will be asked to share information that is personal and may be potentially uncomfortable to revisit. I will provide you with a list of counseling and support resources for people experiencing grief and loss. Please note that you (or a third party payer) will be responsible for the cost of any subsequent treatment.

You will be provided with a ten dollar gift card to Target for your participation.

Confidentiality:

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. The types of records I will create include digital recordings, handwritten notes, and typed transcriptions of the interview. The handwritten notes and any printed transcriptions will be kept in my home in a locked file cabinet that only I will have access to. Any data with identifying information will be shredded before June 1, 2012. The digital recordings and typed transcriptions will be stored on my personal, password protected computer that only I have access to. All identifying information will be removed from this data. Data without identifying information will be kept indefinitely.

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with St. Catherine University or the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until one week following the interview. Should you decide to withdraw in that time frame; data collected about you will not be used. You are also free to skip any questions I may ask.

Contacts and Questions

My name is Christina Newton. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at_____. You may also contact Kari Fletcher, research advisor, at 651-962-5807. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 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. I am at least 18 years of age.

_____   _____
Signature of Study Participant   **Date**
_____
Print Name of Study Participant
_____   _____
Signature of Researcher   **Date**

Research Participants Needed

Participants are needed to share their story for research being done in conjunction with the St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work about parental death and early adulthood. Approximately one hour long interviews will be conducted with people who meet the following guidelines:

- Death of a parent between the ages of 18 and 26
- The death occurred at least three years ago
- The death did not occur more than ten years ago

Participation is completely voluntary and will be kept confidential. A $10 Target gift card will be provided in appreciation for your time. You will be asked about your own experience of the death of a parent and the coping and support that you used during that time.

For more information or to participate, please contact researcher **Christina Newton at newt1003@stthomas.edu You may also pass this information along to others who may be interested in participating.**

Research Participants Needed

Participants are needed to share their story for research being done in conjunction with the St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work about parental death and early adulthood. Approximately one hour long interviews will be conducted with people who meet the following guidelines:

- Death of a parent between the ages of 18 and 26
- The death occurred at least three years ago
- The death did not occur more than ten years ago

Participation is completely voluntary and will be kept confidential. A $10 Target gift card will be provided in appreciation for your time. You will be asked about your own experience of the death of a parent and the coping and support that you used during that time. For more information or to participate, please contact researcher **Christina Newton at <u>newt1003@stthomas.edu</u> You may also pass this information on to others who may be interested in participating.**

Research Interview: Christina Newton newt1003@stthomas.edu

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St. Thomas Email News Bulletin

Participants are being sought for research in conjunction with the St. Catherine University/ University of St. Thomas School of Social Work. The research is being done about parental death during early adulthood. Approximately one hour long interviews will be conducted in which you will be asked questions about your experience of the death and the coping skills and support that you used. Participants must have experienced the death of a parent between ages 18 and 26, the death must have occurred at least three years ago and must not have occurred more than ten years ago. Participation is completely voluntary. You will be provided an incentive $10 Target gift card in appreciation for your time if you are selected to participate. If you meet these guidelines and are interested in learning more or participating in the research, please contact researcher Christina Newton at newt1003@stthomas.edu.

Community Resources:

Center for Grief, Loss and Transition

651-641-0177

http://www.griefloss.org/

Crisis Connection

612-379-6363

http://crisis.org/

Interprofessional Center (If you are not currently a St. Thomas student)

651-962-4820

http://www.stthomas.edu/ipc/

MPSI Psychotherapy Center (Low-Cost, Sliding Fee Scale)

612-824-3800

http://www.mpsi-pc.org

Walk-In Counseling Center (Free)

612-870-0565 x100

http://www.walkin.org/

If you are currently a student at a college or university, you may contact the counseling department at your school. The researcher, Christina Newton, can assist you with accessing the phone number to the counseling department if you would like that assistance. You may contact Christina at newt1003@stthomas.edu

Demographic Information:

Gender _____   Ethnicity_____   Current Age _____

1. Current Experience
    - Tell me about yourself- Family, location, jobs, school
    - How would you describe your current social support system?

2. Emerging Adult Identity
    - What was your age at the time that your parent passed away?
    - Tell me about your life at that time.

3. Coping Skills
    - Tell me about any challenges you faced in relation to the loss.
    - What helped you cope with the loss?

4. Support from Others
    - Describe the support that was available to you and that you used during your time of grief.
    - What institutions were you a part of at the time of the death (school, work, military . . .)? What kind of support did they offer, if any?
    - Did you seek any professional help such as counseling, therapy or support groups? Describe this experience.
    - What would you have changed about the support you had following the loss?

5. Resilience and Strengths
    - When did you feel you had moved through your initial grief? Was there a turning point?

6. Conclusion
    - What do you think would be helpful for other people to know that are going through this experience?
    - Is there anything else you would like to share that I haven't asked about?
    - Is there anyone else you know that I could contact about participating in this research? How can I contact them?