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ISBN: 978-0-494-26583-3

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ISBN: 978-0-494-26583-3

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Role Changes and Birth Order in Female Adolescent Bereavement

by

Jennifer Joyce Evans

B.A. Geography, University of Victoria, 2005

THESIS

Submitted to the Faculty of Social Work
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for

MASTER OF SOCIAL WORK

Wilfrid Laurier University

2007

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Abstract

This thesis reports on the findings of a qualitative research study that explored role changes experienced by female adolescents after the death of a parent, with special attention paid to birth order. Seventeen women were recruited by convenience sampling for this study: nine were eldest daughters, three were middle daughters, and five were youngest daughters. All of the women lost a parent when they were between the ages of 11 and 17, and all were living at home with both parents at the time of the death. The findings were analyzed using a grounded theory method of coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The findings highlighted that eldest daughters tended to take on a more supportive role with their surviving parent after the death, both emotionally and in day-to-day responsibilities. As well, the eldest female adolescent in the home often took on a caregiving role for younger siblings. It appeared that many of the women preserved the memory of their deceased parent through discussion and reflection with their siblings, and the eldest was often relied upon to remember stories of the deceased for younger siblings. Common themes across all birth orders included an increased feeling of independence and need for financial self-sufficiency by the women following the death.

Acknowledgements

There have been a number of people that have helped me throughout the process of writing this thesis. First and foremost, I would like to thank Dr. Cheryl-Anne Cait for all of her guidance and support. Her previous work and interest in this area of study was an inspiration to me. I would also like to thank Dr. Ginette Lafreniere and Dr. Anne Westhues, who were a part of my thesis committee and who took the time to provide me with thought-provoking feedback and encouraged me to do my best work.

Most importantly, I would like to thank the women who volunteered their time to be a part of this research study. I am sincerely grateful that you were willing to share your story, not only with myself, but also with others who will read this research in the future. Your words provided wonderful description and insight into what it was like to lose your parents during adolescence. I was touched by your stories and awed by your ability to reflect on the experience and how it has played out for you today.

Finally, I don't feel that this narrative would be complete without acknowledging my father. As I read through the bereavement literature and completed the interviews, I was able to reflect on my own experience of loss in adolescence. As such, I feel that I have developed a better understanding of this loss. In balance, however, I would also like to thank my mother, for taking on the responsibilities of being a single parent and instilling in me a value for education, compassion, and accomplishing my goals. Writing this thesis has been an exciting process and I am sincerely grateful to all those that helped me along the way.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Parental death for an adolescent is experienced both on an individual level and within the context of family. Parental death can lead to role, relationship and responsibility changes for all members within a family unit (Christ, 2000; Hoogerbrugge, 2002; Nadeau, 2001; Shapiro, 2001; Silverman, 2000; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). Family members adjust to the loss by taking on roles that may once have been held by the deceased or have been necessitated by the loss. This refers to expectations held about certain positions in the family (such as parent, sibling) and the tasks for which each member is responsible. Examples include more tangible roles such as caregiver or disciplinarian as well as roles such as emotional support or expressiveness. While initial research into loss and bereavement focused on individual grieving processes, most researchers now recognize the importance of family in understanding the grief process and in shaping the meaning it holds for the bereaved (Nadeau, 1998; Neimeyer, 1999). For this study, the concept of family will be understood through the dominant discourse, since all of the women interviewed came from homes with a mother, father, and various numbers of siblings. An understanding of loss and parental bereavement through a family systems perspective clarifies how the loss of a parent affects the family unit (Christ, 2000; Nadeau, 1998; Silverman, 2000; Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004).

Existing literature that focuses on individual grief reactions and coping skills (Nadeau, 1998; Shapiro, 2001; Neimeyer, 1999) fails to adequately explore how parental loss affects the family system after the death has occurred (Cook & Dworkin,

1992; Fleming & Balmer, 1996; Payne, Horn, & Relf, 1999; Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004). Children and adolescents are often referred to as a single group in the literature, and research specific to these separate developmental stages is less available (Cragg & Berman, 1990; Harris, 1991; Lewis & Lippman, 2004; Silverman & Worden, 1992; Wass, 1995). Literature that makes reference to gender or birth order in the context of parental loss during adolescence tends to make general statements about the eldest child or eldest female taking on added responsibility following the death, but does not elaborate on new roles allocated to middle or younger children or their perceptions of these roles.

This flexible method exploratory and retrospective study (Anastas, 1999) looks at role changes for parentally bereaved adolescent females and their perceptions of these changes with specific regard to birth order. I have chosen to interview only female participants, since it is likely that male experiences of role changes following parental loss would have significant differences. An inherent strength of using a flexible method approach to explore this research question was that it allowed the research participant to illustrate her own experience with regard to the roles she had to take on after the death of her parent. A flexible method approach allows new ideas to emerge that can add to, build on, or confirm what is known. This research study expands on existing bereavement literature by filling gaps in our understanding about the different impacts of birth order and age on an adolescent at the time of a parent's death. This research elaborates on and provides concrete evidence and examples of role changes suggested by previous authors. It also considered the effects of birth

order on these changes and thus explored the intersection of the two areas of literature.

A qualitative understanding of female experiences and perceptions of role changes can be helpful for social work and social service practitioners that work with adolescents and families who have experienced the loss of a parent. Research findings can provide the reader with an understanding of common experiences for bereaved adolescents. A practitioner may be able to relate the findings to his or her clients, and the bereaved reader may find solace in the validation of or greater insight into her lived experience. The findings may also help parents to recognize the impact, both positive and negative, that role reallocation can have on a developing adolescent. Such research findings may also provide information about possible secondary losses or stressors that can influence/shape the grieving process. Ultimately, it is the task of qualitative researchers "to find a topic that has rich meaning for the people studied" (Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993, p.171).

This research also holds special significance for me in that my father passed away from pancreatic cancer when I was 18 years old. My parents had been separated for seven years prior to the death, and so I also experienced loss when my father moved out of the family home. At the time of my father's death, I was not living at the family home, but rather was away at university, and so I did not experience as great of a shift in daily routines as if I had been living at home. He was diagnosed and admitted to the hospital for three weeks before he died. I came home every weekend, arrived home the day before he died and then stayed for a week and a half before going back to school. This experience has led to my interest in role changes and birth

order as will be explored by this research. I am also interested in speaking to families where there has only been death, and not separation. In the future, I hope to become professionally involved in grief and bereavement work.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

A review of existing literature on bereavement can provide a basis for understanding this research study as well as identify areas that require further study. The following will discuss a theoretical framework for understanding the family structure, and key ideas and perspectives on parental loss will be outlined. This includes a discussion of the interference of parental death on an adolescent's developing sense of autonomy, roles assumed by adolescents after the loss of a parent, roles typically attributed to different ordinal positions in the family, and the relationship between an adolescent and the surviving parent.

Family Systems Theory and Roles

Family systems theory provides a helpful framework for understanding how the loss of a parent affects all members of the family. Adapted from general systems theory, a family system is seen as a system composed of interrelated parts, where each part is associated with change in all others (Nadeau, 2001; Nichols & Schwartz, 2005; Payne, Horn & Relf, 1999; Rothery, 2001). The death of a family member will impact on all members, as well as their relationships with each other. Walsh and McGoldrick (2004) write that, from this perspective, "loss can be viewed as a transactional process involving the ... deceased with the survivors in a shared life cycle that acknowledges both the finality of death and the continuity of life" (p.3). This perspective helps one recognize how a death affects the family, particularly in terms of changing roles, shifting expectations, and making sense of the new family unit, or system.

There are four major family tasks presented by a systemic approach: shared acknowledgement of the reality of death, shared experience of the loss, reorganization of the family system, and reinvestment in other relationships and life pursuits (Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004). These tasks can include such things as active participation in a memorial service, visits to the grave, redistribution of roles, and reengagement in life activities, such as marriage or going to college (Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004).

Nadeau (2001) writes that changes in roles, rules, and boundaries have implications for the family's adaptation to loss. Roles refer to the expectations attached to certain positions in the family; rules refer to "prescriptions for familial responses to a wide range of possible inputs"; and boundaries "delineate the elements belonging to the system in question and those belonging to its environment" (Broderick & Smith, 1979, cited in Nadeau, 2001, p.99).

Family systems theory can explain the shifting of roles in the family after a loss. Roles previously held by the deceased are assigned to other family members, and new roles may be created in response to the loss. Roles can be seen as both positive and negative, and meanings that families make of the loss can be influenced by structural changes in the family (Nadeau, 2001). Examples of role changes in the family could be the added parental responsibility taken on by a father after his partner's death, a sort of spousal role taken on by the adolescent with the surviving parent, or a disciplinary role that an older child may take on when interacting with her younger siblings. Shapiro (1994) writes about the importance of a "systemic developmental perspective on childhood grief [that] considers each child's place in

the evolving relationships over the course of the family life cycle” (p.85). Each member of the family influences and is influenced by the other members.

Adolescence and Parental Death

Unlike young children, adolescents are able to understand the causes and circumstances of death and put their feelings into words. They have the capacity to comprehend the meaning and impact of the death and can respond appropriately to the family’s needs (Corr, 1995; Corr, 2000; Shapiro, 1994; Silverman, 2000; Walsh-Burke, 2006). Although both male and female experiences of parental loss have similarities, significant differences do exist (Shapiro, 1994). These differences can result from family expectations of the male or female adolescent and the role that he or she plays within the family dynamic.

Adolescence is a time when young people are seeking greater autonomy from their parents and families. Parental loss during this time can disrupt attempts to develop a new identity (Bagnoli, 2003; Becvar, 2001; Edelman, 2006). After such a loss, adolescents may feel responsible to take care of the household, take on new roles in the family, and become increasingly drawn into the family structure (McGoldrick & Walsh, 2004; Shapiro, 1994). They may feel guilt or self-blame about previous desires to achieve freedom from parental authority or about the death itself (Becvar, 2001; Corr, 2000; McGoldrick & Walsh, 2004). At a time of loss, family members may turn to an adolescent for emotional comfort, and he or she may be relied upon to help the family maintain emotional stability (Raphael, 1983; Shapiro, 1994). Christ (2000) notes, however, that surviving parents who turned to the adolescent for

sympathy often found that the adolescent withdrew even more, since he or she was so focused on becoming independent.

Adolescents may feel a greater need to distance themselves from their families when the death of a parent threatens his or her developing sense of self (Christ, 2000; Corr, 1995; Lewis & Lippman, 2004). Development of autonomy from parents during adolescence is noted as an important “developmental task” by many authors (Balk, 1995; Cook & Dworkin, 1992; Fleming & Adolph, 1986; Harris, 1991; Perschy, 2004; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). Whereas boys emphasize a separation from their parents, girls tend to focus on a changing relationship with their parents (Christ, 2000). Christ (2000) noted that girls, in particular, are more aware of family dynamics than boys and work to maintain a relationship with both parents, albeit different than the relationship they had as a child. Adolescents at this stage underestimate the importance of relationships with family members, and there is a further push for development of a life separate from the family (Becvar, 2001).

Parental death, however, can interfere with this developmental task, and the adolescent often feels an expectation to behave in certain ways, for example, as “grown up” and as a support provider to his or her siblings and surviving parent (Chase, 1999; Cook & Dworkin, 1992; Lewis & Lippman, 2004; Raphael, 1983). Christ (2000) notes that, during a parent’s terminal illness, adolescents are often fearful that they may miss out on this stage of their development and that their futures may be negatively impacted. Evidence suggests that most adolescents who experience parental loss do become more interpersonally and emotionally mature, with increased development in responsibility and empathy, as compared to adolescents who do not

have the same experience (Balk, 1996; Balk & Corr, 2001; Cragg & Berman, 1990; Fleming & Balmer, 1996; Tyson-Rawson, 1996).

Retreat from family and friends after the death of a parent is frequent, and adolescents may not talk to anyone about their experience of the death; retreat may be used as a coping mechanism in order to avoid the grieving process (Harris, 1991; Tyson-Rawson, 1996; Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004). This retreat has also been understood as part of the grieving process itself, in which the bereaved “oscillates” between confrontation and avoidance of the loss (Stroebe & Schut, 1999). Younger adolescents are less likely to talk about their grief than older adolescents, as they do not want to appear different than their peers (Balk, 1996; Cook & Dworkin, 1992; Fleming & Adolph, 1986; Lewis & Lippman, 2004). They may also feel isolated from their peers and “feel higher levels of discomfort, inferiority, and inadequacy with regard to interpersonal interactions than their peers from divorced or intact homes” (Servaty & Hayslip, 2001, p.325). In distancing themselves, girls may seek closeness through sexual activity or pregnancy, or they may develop eating disorders (Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004).

Role Changes

Family systems theory explains the shifting of roles in the family after a loss. As mentioned above, roles refer to the expectations associated with various positions within the family, such as father, mother, and child (Stryker, 1972). Roles are assigned to each family member and can be both positive and negative. The death of a parent necessitates role reallocation, and family members must take on new responsibilities and address the roles needed to maintain family relationships. This

shift in roles may be stimulated by a realization of the loss of the self that interacted with the deceased (i.e. they are no longer children to the deceased parent) (Silverman, 2000; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). Silverman and Worden (1992) note the importance of involving adolescents in the process of reallocating family responsibilities, as it can help adolescents learn effective ways of coping with crisis and loss.

Roles and responsibilities expected from each family member change with the death of a parent (Silverman, 2000). Oftentimes, females or eldest children are expected and noted to take on the bulk of this added responsibility. This may include household chores, emotional support for the surviving parent, a care giving role, or a disciplinary role with younger siblings (Cait, 2005; Christ, 2000; Corr, 2000; Oktay, 2004; Silverman, Baker, Cait, & Boerner, 2002-2003). Sometimes, children may feel that they need to take on the role of the deceased parent in the family, to fill the space that he or she left (Silverman et al., 2002-2003). In a study on the experience of females whose mothers had experienced breast cancer, an only child “tended to bear more of the burden of her mother’s illness” than a child with siblings (Oktay, 2004, p.26).

In studying terminal illness, Christ (2000) noted that, although some adolescent girls willingly took on the extra tasks required by the family, many came to resent these responsibilities when it negatively affected their peer relationships, or their sports or academic abilities (see also Lewis & Lippman, 2004; Walsh-Burke, 2006). This resentment was aggravated by the fact that their brothers were not asked or expected to take on as much responsibility. Additional household chores required of the girls was also related to more emotional distress for them, as compared to boys

of the same age and experience. Baxter and Stuart (1999) noted that the surviving parent often assigns adolescents to traditional parenting roles: “[m]ales are expected to do yard work, snow shovelling, garbage disposal, minor house repairs, etc., and females are expected to look after younger children, do laundry, cook, etc.” (p.56; see also Bagnoli, 2003; Chase, 1999; Oktay, 2004).

Younger siblings who experience parental death may become dependent on older ones after parental loss, and younger daughters may take “cues from their older siblings on how to behave and what to feel and think” (Oktay, 2004, p.26). Raphael (1983) notes that “rivalry and competition are likely, especially, if they are now enjoying the recently yet ambivalently relinquished dependent intimacies with parents” (p.146). With a sole surviving parent, available attention for each child may be lessened. Younger siblings may find themselves responsible to express the emotions that the family is experiencing, as they often do not feel the same awareness about what is or is not appropriate in various social settings (Shapiro, 1994). For example, a young child may openly discuss their feelings with a stranger. Shapiro (1994) writes that the new role of each child can be understood as filling “a particular psychological position as a means of helping to restore emotional stability for the family” (p.168). Some “younger daughters often found refuge in a surrogate family, usually the family of a friend, and teenagers escaped into organized activities or to the streets” (Oktay, 2004, p.29).

Cragg and Berman (1990), in a study that explored changes in adolescent’s lives following the death of a parent, noted that both parents and adolescents reported household responsibility changes, but their perceptions of these changes were quite

different. While five adolescents in their study felt there was an increase in their responsibility after the death, only one parent had a similar perception. During terminal illness, seven adolescents reported an increase in responsibilities and only one parent echoed this.

Clearly, in families with both male and female children, gender and age of children at the time of death play a role in determining who will take on certain roles after parental death. Reallocation of roles is also affected by the gender of the deceased and surviving parent. Further, this reallocation may have already begun to take place prior to the death, as is often seen with terminal illness. As well, cultural differences may exist among families that affect role changes (McGoldrick et al., 2004).

Birth Order and Roles

Existing knowledge on birth order and its effect on a child or adolescent's role in the family structure notes some similarities to those roles cited in the bereavement literature. However, this literature goes into further and more specific detail about family roles as they relate to the genders of the children, years between siblings, number of children in the family, and ordinal position. Hoffman (1991) writes that birth order has a significant effect on sibling interactions and family roles.

Eldest female children are most often seen as responsible, dependable, competent and caretakers of their younger siblings (Hoffman, 1991; Mendelson et al., 1997; Pulakos, 1987; Wilson & Edington, 1981). They are the first to do everything and so often feel as though they must "succeed" in their parents' eyes. As well, parents expect them to represent the family and have higher expectations of their

first-born than they do of subsequent children (Hoffman, 1991; Konig, 1958; Mendelson et al., 1997). An eldest sister likes to be in control and aware of what is going on around her. She places importance (a strong sense of responsibility) on “responsibility and power over those people who were entrusted to her” (Toman, 1993, p.168). Wilson and Edington (1981) note, however, that though the eldest girl often takes on a “mother hen” role, she often feels “weighted down with more responsibilities than [she] had ever contracted for” (p.83). She is hardworking, well-organized, efficient, has high standards, is often a perfectionist and may tend toward introversion (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Toman, 1993; Wilson & Edington, 1981). Their role may also include that of a helper and companion (Mendelson, de Villa, Fitch, & Goodman, 1997).

In response to the competition presented by the birth of a second female child, the eldest sister of sisters often strives to be the “good” child in order to please her parents or keep their love (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Wilson & Edington, 1981). She often behaves as a parent or teacher with her younger sister(s) in the way that her mother behaves with her and finds satisfaction in taking on a guide or mentor role (Mendelson et al., 1997). Richardson and Richardson (1990) write that parents most often want a male child and so female first-borns may often feel pressure to fill the role of the oldest boy. As such, she may become a companion to her father. Konig (1958) notes that the “first born person is usually much more attached to [her] parents than the rest of his brothers and sisters” and often tries to “fit in” to the adult world, losing “the carefree mood of childhood much too soon” (p.14; also Wilson & Edington, 1981). There may also be pressure for her to take on socially constructed

female adult roles, such as motherhood and housekeeping (Wilson & Edington, 1981).

Toman (1993) notes with regard to the oldest sister of sisters that “[h]er gravest loss would be that of her father or her elected (male) authority figure according to whose guidelines she has tried to arrange her life” (p.170). Wilson and Edington (1981) also noted that the first born has a tendency toward a close relationship with one of her parents, most often her father, and has difficulty in finding close relationships.

Our society harbors a surprisingly large number of unmarried first-born females whose major occupation is that of being a kind of pseudo-wife to Dad. This is likely to happen when the mother passes away and the oldest daughter stays on to raise the children and take care of Dad. (p.90)

This is similar to “situational matrimony” phenomenon described by Cait (2005) in her article on female identity development following the loss of a parent as well as the concept of “surrogate spouse” used by Harris (1995) to describe the relationship between bereaved adolescents and their surviving parent of the opposite sex.

Youngest children are often spoiled by their parents and hold the role as the “baby” of the family (Wilson & Edington, 1981). The youngest sister is often characterized as cheerful, playful, spontaneous, adventurous, sometimes bratty and someone who loves excitement and change (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Toman, 1993). Youngest sisters of sisters may rebel in adolescence but, as they get older,

become more dependent. With an older female sibling, it is difficult for a youngest sister to stand out and get attention, and so rebellion is her way of being different and doing the opposite of her older sister. As well, she tends to be more defiant if her sister has already filled the role of the “good” child (Richardson & Richardson, 1990). A younger sister may also be characterized by admiration, learning, and respect (Mendelson et al., 1997).

When growing up, youngest sisters feel closest to their mothers, although they may feel dominated by their older sisters (Richardson & Richardson, 1990). They are used to getting their way and have a low tolerance for frustration (Wilson & Edington, 1981). In relation to death, Richardson & Richardson (1990) write:

Deaths in the family are a tragedy for her, especially the death of her father. If her mother dies, she can always turn to her older sisters as fill-ins, but she doesn't like it if her father remarries. The new mother, no matter who she is, will rarely measure up and will be seen as a competitor for father's attention. (p.109)

Toman (1993) also notes that the loss of a father for a youngest sister of sisters is most difficult, as she often fills the role of “Daddy's girl.” He continues that youngest sisters tend to feel more guilt in reaction to a loss, for example, if she feels she did not treat the deceased as well as she could have or talked to him or her enough.

Middle sisters often find themselves competing for their parents' attention with older and younger siblings, sometimes adopting a more grown up role (like the older) and sometimes a more childish one (like the younger) without developing their

own unique identity. They may at times feel like a “third wheel” or left out (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Wilson & Edington, 1981). Birth order characteristics will often develop in response to the sibling that the middle child is closest to in age or spends the most time with. The sex of siblings and the number of years between siblings will play a role in development of characteristics (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Wilson & Edington, 1981). Middle children tend not to be independent thinkers, but have a strong sense of fairness, are sticklers for the rules, have strong peer loyalty (they may lack family loyalty), and long to be needed by and have an impact on others. As well, they are more secretive than other ordinal positions (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Wilson & Edington, 1981).

Though middle children may not be as strong academically as their siblings (and there are not as many expectations placed on them by their parents), they are often more social and make friends easily (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Wilson & Edington, 1981). Middle children may become competitive with their siblings, and may boss the younger ones around. They may also find themselves playing the role of “peacekeeper” in family conflicts or splits and trying to live in harmony with their world, either between parents or between siblings (Hoopes & Harper, 1987; Konig, 1958). Richardson and Richardson (1990) note that “A middle girl who has only older brothers may have to take on much more family responsibility than those older boys do” (p.147).

A female only child is privileged to all of her parents’ attention and often she has “an underlying sense of herself as a special person...and she is often hurt if others don’t treat her that way” (Richardson & Richardson, 1990, p.177). These children

tend to be independent, quietly self confident, and self sufficient. She is often more protected by her parents than a child with siblings is (Richardson & Richardson, 1990). Parents of female only children often give their daughters the same expectations that they would have given their first-born son (Wilson & Edington, 1981). A female only child may try to live up to her parents' hopes and expectations and takes her parents' wishes seriously. These children may also develop an ability to keep their feelings to themselves, in order to please others; some may see this as a lack of sincerity or phoniness (Wilson & Edington, 1981). Richardson & Richardson (1990) write that an only child will find the loss of a parent extremely difficult, with her main concern being how she will manage without them.

In families with two or more children, children may believe that their bad behaviour caused the parent to die.

This could cause a normally rambunctious, or "bad," younger child to become subdued and passive. Or a normally well-behaved older child could just give up trying to be good since "it didn't help," and start misbehaving. (Richardson & Richardson, 1990, p. 203-204)

As such, a death can affect individual behaviour, and family roles may change in accordance with these behaviours. The system is influenced by each of its parts and as the needs of the system change in response to a death, so do the roles that existed prior to the death (Hoopes & Harper, 1987).

Richardson and Richardson (1990) write that, following the death of a parent, siblings may either become closer or grow apart. A sibling may find herself dependent on the others for comfort and support and lose some of the competition that may have previously been present. Siblings that are close in age may comfort each other equally, and a younger sibling may turn to an older one for help and support. Alternatively, changes in sibling behaviour may lead to increased distance between siblings. "The oldest sibling may become more than usually hostile toward the younger siblings, acting out of his or her own anger at death and fear of being abandoned" (Richardson & Richardson, 1990, p.204).

Relationship Between Surviving Parent and Adolescent

Surviving parents may depend on the adolescent to meet a number of needs or to fill a number of roles. In a study on female identity development after parental death, Cait (2005) found:

[C]hanges in the role for the surviving daughter, specifically with care giving and interwoven with that was a heightened sense of responsibility. The other area was the evolving relationship with the surviving parent. Tied to this, was new recognition of the surviving parent and an intensified significance of the surviving parent that I call 'situational matrimony.' (p.92)

Situational matrimony is further described as the shifting relationship between surviving parent and daughter in which the daughter supported the parent by taking on a sort of parental and spousal role, with the surviving parent becoming of primary

importance in her life. Chase (1999) also writes about “parentification” within a family system “in which the child sacrifices his or her own needs for attention, comfort, and guidance in order to accommodate and care for logistical or emotional needs of the parent” (p.5).

There are often pressures and expectations that the eldest child will take on the bulk of added responsibilities after the loss of a parent, and she may be expected to fill the role of the deceased in order to maintain family stability (Raphael, 1983). During their partner’s terminal illness, many parents rely, sometimes excessively, on their eldest daughters for support and comfort for their own grief (Christ, 2000; Harris, 1991; Raphael, 1983). More typical of the relationship between a surviving mother and adolescent daughter, this supportive role played by the adolescent periodically blurred the boundary between parent and child (Christ, 2000).

When the surviving parent is female, findings indicate that children talk more about their reactions to the loss and experience fewer changes in their daily routines (Perschy, 2004; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). Tyson-Rawson (1996) notes that, “Although the adolescent should understand that the parent also grieves, the adult should not expect the adolescent to be the parent’s primary source of support and comfort” (p.168; see also Chase, 1999). She elaborates that it is a difficult, yet important, task for the surviving parent to allow the adolescent to develop his or her autonomy while creating an environment in which they feel comfortable to express their grief.

Christ (2000) notes the significant loss of a gender and social role model in adolescent bereavement. The mother was often the one who kept the family organized and held together, “provided opportunities to be with their friends, and helped them

with their homework” (p.163). During adolescence, the mother had often become a friend and confidant as well as a parent. After the loss of a mother, fathers who do not know how to relate to their daughter may retreat into their work or soon remarry. Oktay (2004) writes that, although some fathers “were in positions to play important roles, most were not able to help their daughters grieve for their mothers... [they] tended to withdraw from their daughters, physically and emotionally” (p.29).

The adolescent’s relationship with the surviving parent might be strained if the parent introduces a new partner too quickly after the death (Baxter & Stuart, 1999). As well, if a housekeeper is hired following the death to help out with household chores or a relative or close friend is invited to move in, the change in routine and symbolic “replacement” of the deceased can be upsetting for the adolescent (Lewis & Lippman, 2004). Adolescent reactions are particularly traumatic when the new family involves stepsiblings and the bereaved adolescent is not ready to accept the change in family structure (Baxter & Stuart, 1999).

Summary

From the existing literature, it seems appropriate that researchers employ a flexible approach in studying adolescent experiences of the death of a parent within the context of the family system. Many researchers have begun to use qualitative methods to study grief when quantitative methods become too restrictive and labelling. Neimeyer and Hogan (2001) question, “whether grief, defined as a *normal* response to profound loss, is most appropriately assessed by measures designed to quantify degree of *psychopathology*” (p.91). They continue to cite the merits of qualitative research in the study of bereavement experiences, more specifically

in generating theory where little good theory exists, in revealing how people make meaning of events, and in moving toward a deep understanding of a particular phenomenon rather than a nomothetic set of causal inferences presumed to generalize across different cultures and settings. (p.105-106)

In this sense, qualitative research focuses less on the “facts” of a given situation but rather on the experiences of those being studied.

Few studies have specifically explored role changes for parentally bereaved adolescents. Discussion with regard to the role of birth order in effecting these changes is further limited. The grief process not only affects family members on an individual level but also affects the roles, rules, and boundaries that existed in the family system prior to the death. Certain questions arise out of the literature, as well as some considerations for researchers who want to understand the experience of the adolescent as an integral part of the family system. How does the gender of the surviving parent affect role changes? How does the gender and birth order of the child and her siblings influence role changes? How might role changes following the death of a parent be influenced by ethnicity, culture and/or sexual diversity?

The purpose of this research study was to explore role changes for adolescent females who experienced the death of a parent, with particular regard to birth order. Participants were between and including the ages of 11-18 when they experienced the death of a parent. At the time of the interviews, they were of the age of majority, which allowed for the participants to describe role changes over a longer period of

time. A qualitative understanding of these experiences will help individuals to effectively illustrate the effect that the death has had for them in the context of the family system. It will also add to the existing literature base and enhance understanding for service professionals.

Chapter 3

Methodology

A flexible methodology can allow the researcher to gather rich description of the processes that occurred for the adolescent following the death of her parent. This method involves narrative data, generated by the participants, which arises from a semi-structured interview. The method itself is in part determined by the “nature and content of the emerging data...as the phenomenon under study becomes more completely understood, the form and content of the data that are sought to enhance that understanding changes” (Anastas, 1999, p.25). As such, the structure of the interviews can change in accordance with the recognition of new ideas or concepts that emerge from data previously collected. In this study, the questions that were asked in each interview were very similar and based on the interview guide. Some questions were omitted if I felt that the participant had already addressed it adequately in another response. Also, if I needed more clarification around something that was said, I asked additional questions to the ones on the guide.

“Identifying the philosophical framework that underpins the qualitative study is the first criterion for internally consistent and meaningful research” (Drisko, 1997, p.186). This research is understood through a fallibilistic realism perspective. Other authors refer to this approach as heuristic or realistic fallibilism (Anastas, 1999; Westhues, Cadell, Karabanow, Maxwell, & Sanchez, 1999). This approach sees the purpose of research as a way to help understand and describe certain phenomena, which are viewed as being complex structures within the real world (Anastas, 1999). The concept of an objective reality is that a reality exists separate from the knower;

however, individuals can only approach this reality through the meanings that they make of their own experiences (Westhues et al., 1999). Fallibilistic realists also understand that “the relationship between the researcher and participant is both interactive and independent, with the researcher deciding when to share in defining the process” (Westhues et al., 1999, p.140).

Fallibilistic realists posit that it is important to outline any perspectives that guide the proposed research (Anastas, 1999). As well, in order to increase the credibility of any qualitative study, a researcher must explicate potential biases towards the study, which can be limited through self-awareness (Drisko, 1997).

As noted above, my experience of the loss of my father undoubtedly played a factor in my choice of topic on which to write a thesis. When my parents separated, no clear arrangements were made as to the amount of contact or involvement my younger sister and I would have with my father. He did not move too far away, and so we saw him fairly regularly (for me, one to two times per week, my sister, more) but he was no longer a part of our day-to-day life. Consequently, my mother took on the role of primary caregiver, although my father did maintain some parenting responsibilities. My father did not always support my mother in matters of parenting, which sometimes disempowered her in her role as a parent.

The passing of my father was especially upsetting for my sister, since she no longer had someone to call when she was frustrated with the way things were at home. Likely a combination of the separation, her personality and teenage hormones made her somewhat difficult to live with (she is three years younger than me), and my mother would sometimes ask me for help in understanding, helping and “dealing”

with her. After the separation and then the death, I felt that I took on a supportive role for my mom and would tend to stay around the house.

Our relationships became divided: my sister prided herself on being “daddy’s girl” and wanted to keep him to herself, and my mother and I became, in a sense, best friends. Even today, people comment on how alike my mother and I are and how different my sister is. For three months after the death, my sister wore my father’s jacket to bed; I still had my mother, but she no longer had her “partner” within the family. I did not perceive it to be this way but, even today, I get along better with my mother and sister when I spend time with each of them individually, as opposed to the three of us together. Keeping myself aware of my own experience while I conducted the interviews and recognizing it as unique helped me to listen to each participant’s story and hear what their experience of parental loss meant for them.

Sample

The sample in this study consisted of 17 female participants who experienced the death of a parent (father or mother) between and including the ages of 11 to 17 years old. For this study, I chose to focus on female experiences of loss, since male experiences would likely have had significant differences, particularly with regard to roles. At the time of the interview, all of the research participants were at least 18 years old. The participants were living at home during parental illness (if illness was a factor) and after the death for as little as two months to over ten years. Attempts were made to include all birth orders: first-born, youngest and middle children. There were nine eldest children, three middle children and five youngest children that participated in this study. No only children volunteered to participate in the study. Six of the

participants had only female siblings, four had only male siblings, and seven had both male and female siblings. The participants all came from homes where both parents were living together before the death, and all participants were living at their family home at the time of parental death. As such, this study did not explore the double loss associated with separation or divorce and subsequent death.

In this study, adolescence refers to those between the ages of, and including, 11 to 18 years old. All of the women interviewed were living at home with both parents at the time of the death. Study participants were of the age of majority (18) when the interviews were conducted, which eliminated issues of parental consent. As well, since this research study was interested in role changes over a period of time to more fully understand the change in family system dynamics, it was appropriate to interview females after adolescence, as the passage of time would have provided them with a broader understanding of the time leading up to and following their parent's death. Of note, however, is that the study ultimately relied on the memories and recollections of these women about the time before and after the loss of their parents in adolescence.

The participants in this study were recruited by convenience and snowball sampling from Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Waterloo, and the University of Guelph. Participants were students at the above named universities or referrals from students. This sampling method was chosen because participants were able to identify themselves for the study as meeting the selection criteria and were easily available (Anastas, 1999). Some were also able to identify siblings or other female friends who had experienced the death of a parent in adolescence. If this was

the case, the participant was encouraged to pass along my contact information to the identified individual. If this individual was also interested in being a study participant, she contacted me to schedule an interview.

Of note was that four of the women interviewed were in social work and three others were in helping professions, such as teaching and youth work. This was likely due in large part to the way the sample was collected, through word-of-mouth, as I am in social work. As such, the way in which the sample was collected can be seen as a limitation of the research study. However, it is possible that these individuals were more willing to share their experience and/or had processed it more. It could also be that women who experience parental death at a young age are more likely to go into a helping profession.

This research study was reviewed, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, the Research Ethics Board, University of Guelph, and the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. In order to recruit participants for the study, posters were placed in highly visible places at various locations on the three campuses (see Appendix A). Permission to put up posters was obtained from the respective universities. As well, a request for volunteers was placed on a website maintained by Career Services at the University of Guelph and a notice was placed in a volunteer binder maintained by Career Services at Wilfrid Laurier University (see Appendix B). Six of the participants in the study contacted me in response to these advertisements and eleven were recruited through word-of-mouth.

An attempt was made to recruit a diverse sample by advertising at a variety of locations on each campus. The majority of participants were Caucasian, which is generally representative of the makeup of the student population at the universities. Though samples can be small and relatively homogeneous, it allows the researcher “to focus on key characteristics of interest. Thus efficiency in yielding useful data rather than statistical ‘representativeness’ is the issue in sampling design” (Anastas, 1999, p.64; see also Rosenblatt & Fischer, 1993).

When contacted by email or telephone, I screened potential volunteers to ensure that they met the requirements of the study. The contact phone number and email address of participants was confidential to myself. Inclusion criteria included: the participant must be female, her parents must have been married or common-law and residing in the family home at time of parental death, she must have experienced the loss of only one parent (mother or father) during adolescence, she must be over the age of 18 at the time of interview, parental death must have occurred when she was between the ages of 11 and 18 years old, and she must have lived in the family home at the time of parental death. When contacted, I informed the participant of the format, subject matter and duration of the interview. At this time, any additional information about the study was provided to the participant at her request. Participants did not know the interview questions prior to the interview except for one woman who asked to see the interview guide prior to consenting to participate.

During the process, I screened out one male that contacted me with an interest in the study and one female who was in her early twenties when she experienced the loss of her parent. If the participant met the study requirements and was still

interested in volunteering for the study, I obtained her name, phone number and/or email address. The participant and I then decided together on a time and place to meet for the interview that was convenient for the participant, such as her home or one of the campus libraries.

Two consent forms were given to the participant at the first interview: one was read and signed in front of me and the other was given to the participant. This form also included the participant's consent to audiotape and/or use quotations from the session (see Appendix C). Permission was also obtained from the participant to contact her after the interview if more information was required. I provided the necessary audiotaping equipment for the interview. In consideration of ethical issues, I allowed participants to decline to answer any questions that they chose, however, this did not occur. Also, I provided all participants with a list of resources following the interview. This included phone numbers for counselling agencies, the Internet address for Bereaved Families of Ontario, and titles and authors of books that may be helpful.

Data Collection

Prior to completing the first interview that would be analyzed for the study, one pilot interview was conducted with a colleague who met the study criteria but with whom I had a personal connection. The purpose of this was to help me get an idea of the length of the process as well as to indicate where changes were needed to the semi-structured interview guide. Each interview was between one and two hours in length, and the participants were informed of this upon initial contact with myself.

On the consent form, it was noted that each interview would last for approximately one and a half hours.

I conducted each interview in a location that was convenient for the participant. Since most participants were students at Wilfrid Laurier University, the University of Waterloo, or the University of Guelph, it was assumed that they possessed a student card, which is also a bus pass, and so I did not pay for travel costs. One participant had a child, and so I went to her home and conducted the interview there.

At the beginning of the interview, I introduced myself and told the participant about the study being conducted and the structure of the interview guide. I then reviewed the consent form that pertained to the interview, audio taping of the session, and the use of quotes from the session. If any questions arose regarding the form or information provided, they were answered at this time.

The participant was also informed that her involvement in the study was voluntary: she retained the right to decide not to participate at any point during or following the interview. She also had the right to decide which questions she would like to answer and had the ability to 'pass' on any question that made her uncomfortable. None of the participants chose to "pass" or decided not to participate in the study after she had volunteered. I informed the participants that any names mentioned in the interview would not be used when I wrote the thesis, nor would they be used in any subsequent publications. Some women chose their pseudonym for the write up; for those who did not specify, I chose an alternate name. Identifying data that was used included the participant's age when interviewed and age at parent's

death, birth order in the family, the number and gender of siblings, which parent died, their parent's age at his or her death and the cause of the death.

All records of the interview were kept in a secure location and were only accessed if I was present. All information obtained from the participants was kept confidential to my faculty advisor and myself. If the participant wanted to clarify or add to any of the information provided at the interview, she was given my contact information and was encouraged to contact me either by phone or email or to arrange a second meeting, if necessary. I also asked the participant for permission to contact her by phone/email after the interview in the event that I needed clarification on anything that was said. I did not speak further to any of the participants following the initial interview.

I did not have a personal connection with any of the participants prior to the first meeting. If social work students who met the study criteria came forward as potential participants, I allowed their involvement so long as our relationship was no more than acquaintances so as not to affect, positively or negatively, the qualitative data provided. A semi-structured interview guide was used (see Appendix D) that focused on roles that the participant took on after the death of her parent as well as her perceptions of the roles adopted by other family members. In designing the interview guide, consideration was given to the reviewed literature in order to provide a foundation from which to ask questions. Information collected in the interview provided me with a clear idea of the context of the loss and how the participant perceived the event.

I gathered demographic information from the participants and then continued with further questions and prompts, as outlined in the interview guide (Appendix D). The initial demographic information collected included the participant's name, age at death, current age, deceased parent and his/her cause of death. As the interview progressed, other demographic information was obtained with regard to sibling names and ages, ordinal position, educational background, religious affiliation, and prior experiences with death.

The interview schedule followed guidelines outlined by the "long interview" format described by McCracken (1988). Most of the questions in the interview guide were open questions, so as not to restrict or limit participants' answers and to allow her to respond to the question fully. The purpose of having questions and an interview guide, however, was to provide some structure to the interview and control the amount and kind of data collected and to ensure that participants were asked the same questions (McCracken, 1988).

Beneath these numbered questions, other questions, or prompts, were listed in italics. McCracken (1988) refers to these as "planned prompts". He writes that the purpose of the planned prompt is to "give respondents something to 'push off against.' It is to give them an opportunity to consider and discuss phenomena that do not come readily to mind or speech" (p.35). These prompts were supplied to the participant if she did not bring up the topic area in response to the first question.

Areas that were explored during the interview included: circumstances of the death, familial factors, including a description of each member and his or her place in the family, familial relationships and familial roles. If new ideas emerged from the

participants as the interviews were being conducted, further questions were added in the spirit of flexible method research. In some cases, I asked the participant questions during the interview that were not explicitly on the guide, but were important to help her clarify meaning or expand on a statement. I also periodically asked participants if there was anything they felt would be important to add and had not been covered by the interview questions. All of the interviews were audio taped and transcribed by myself.

Since the topic and focus of the interview understandably brought up a number of emotions for the participants, they were welcome to discuss their feelings with me as they arose and as time allowed. I also provided participants with information about counselling services offered at the universities and other community resources, should they feel that they would like to discuss their experiences further.

Data Analysis

I audiotaped and then fully transcribed each interview following the meeting. Audiotape can offer a number of advantages to the researcher, as it can record verbal data as well as pace of speech and tone of voice (Anastas, 1999). Although transcription of the data from the audiotape was time consuming, the transcribed data allowed me to easily scan the information and allowed for “accurate and direct use of the material in the text of the final report of the project” (Anastas, 1999, p.68). Audiotape equipment was provided and tested prior to the interview to ensure proper functioning.

After the interview, I tried to journal/log my experience of the session and note any reactions that I had to the information gathered during the interview. I tried to not let my experience guide the questions that I asked but also made efforts to ensure that my questions were direct enough to address the issues under study (Anastas, 1999).

A grounded theory method of coding was used to analyze the data, which means that the theory was developed inductively from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Oktay, 2004). “[T]he goal of the method is to ensure that theory is adequately grounded in ‘reality’ or empirical data, particularly in the complex, contextual data that are generated by flexible method research” (Anastas, 1999, p.423). Analysis and coding of the collected data began and continued while the other interviews were being completed. This is referred to as constant comparison, and it was carried out throughout the research process to identify similarities and differences found in the collected data (Strauss, 1987). Categories, or codes, came directly from the interviews and were created from the data, which was assessed to find similar responses (Neimeyer & Hogan, 2001). Codes and categories were not only created for those areas of interest to myself, but also for all of the information presented by the study participants. As such, I made note of any information that was not consistent with other data collected, or the “negative case” (Anastas, 1999, p.429).

Data analysis began with open coding, “in which the analyst ‘opens up’ the data by assigning provisional codes to all the indicators discernible in the data” (Anastas, 1999, p.424). I identified possible codes for the data and then made a written description of the category. Open coding continued until all of the data had

been sorted, which helped me to move towards theoretical analysis (Anastas, 1999; Berg, 2004). I also made notes throughout the process with regard to chosen codes and highlighted parts of transcripts for visual identification of categories.

Axial coding was the next step in the data analysis, in which I selected one category and worked intensively to identify the specifics of a category. This sometimes required that the category be divided, or that subheadings be created within the category. "The grounded theory method assumes that a core category will emerge from the coding process and becomes the major focus of the analysis" (Anastas, 1999, p.424). At this stage, selective coding will be used to analyze the collected data and focus on the core categories that are identified (Anastas, 1999).

An example of how I employed this method of coding the data can be seen through my identification of financial independence for many of the women as a result of their parent's death. Initially, I created a category based on the question, "How do you feel that a change in roles following the death affected who you are today?" From this question, the women identified a number of ways that the death presently affected them, one of which was an increased sense of maturity and independence (selective coding). Within this category, the women discussed their self-sufficiency in taking care of themselves, their ability to get tasks done on their own (e.g. get their car fixed), and their ability to support themselves financially (axial coding). This idea of financial independence from their surviving parent pertained to the costs of their social activities while they were in the home and for their education when they had moved out of the home.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

Qualitative researchers need to consider the principles of trustworthiness and credibility when gathering data and reporting the findings. Trustworthiness in qualitative studies must give attention to “issues of reliability, or the reproducibility of observations or results under the same or similar conditions” (Anastas, 1999, p.415). It poses the question of whether another researcher with the same data would develop similar categories or have the same research findings. Credibility refers to “the defensible assigning of meaning to what was observed” (Anastas, 1999, p.415).

There are a number of ways that I attempted to ensure trustworthiness and credibility in this qualitative study. When reporting the data, I tried to portray it in such a way that it conveyed to the reader the true meaning that the study participant had intended when providing the information. “Interpretations [of the data] must be authentic and accurate to the descriptions of the primary participants” (Drisko, 1997, p.191). In order to achieve this authenticity and accuracy, Drisko (1997) and Rosenblatt and Fischer (1993) write that, when reporting their findings, researchers must document extensively the exact words of the participant, so that the reader can assess for him or herself how accurately the data has been interpreted and presented by the researcher. As such, I have tried to provide context for and have included large pieces of data so that the reader can assess the accuracy in interpretation of the data. Data reported reflects the participants’ lived experience and was “complemented but not reshaped by the researcher’s interpretations and summarization” (Drisko, 1997, p.192).

As a researcher, I also attempted to “report enough data to illustrate how they formulated codes” (Drisko, 1997, p.190). This can allow the reader to determine whether he or she would have generated the same codes from the data or have interpreted the narratives in a similar fashion. I identified the context within which the data was presented and acknowledged what has and has not been included in key codes and how the coding system was developed (Drisko, 1997). When developing codes and interpreting the data, I consulted with my thesis advisor on occasion to determine whether she would generate similar codes from the collected data. This also allowed me to discuss any personal bias or reactions I had in response to the data gathered or the codes identified. For example, I found it interesting to consider the emotional reaction of participants, as some had a large reaction to the interview questions whereas others had almost none. Self-awareness and identification of potential researcher bias is important in limiting researcher bias when conducting a study (Drisko, 1997).

The purpose of this study was to explore role changes for females who experienced the death of a parent during adolescence. A flexible method approach allowed participants to tell their stories in their own words and helped me understand what these women’s experiences meant to them. Results of the study will be valuable to professionals who deal with grief and bereavement issues, as it will help them to further their understanding of the effects of parental loss on both families and individuals. As well, this research will add to the existing literature on parental loss in adolescence as a separate developmental stage. Most importantly in any study, however, the research can allow for an understanding of individual realities as they

have been shaped by individual experiences. It is significant to recognize the uniqueness of each situation and listen to the participant's story with openness and appreciation of her experience.

Chapter 4

Findings

Analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the interviews yielded a number of interesting patterns with regard to role changes following the death of a parent. Some of these changes seemed to occur for most or all of the females interviewed, whereas other changes were more apparent for certain groups of females. In this study, particular attention was paid to birth order in categorizing and analyzing the data. However, it is important to note that these findings are specific to this group of 17 women, five of whom are youngest daughters, three of whom are middle children, and nine who are oldest daughters. I have tried to speak about the experiences of each birth order, however, have kept in mind that these results are specific to this sample. In the analysis, I have focused more heavily on role changes for eldest daughters, since nine of the 17 participants were eldest daughters.

Demographic Characteristics

The participants in this research study were between the ages of 11 and 17 when their parents passed away. At the time of the interview, participants were between 18 and 39 years of age. The age of the parent at the time of the death ranged from 37 to 54 years of age. Cancer was the cause of death for nine of the parents, heart attack/complications for three of the parents, two were in a car accident, one died from asphyxiation, one died from a brain aneurysm and one cause of death was unknown to the participant. All of the girls had been living at home at the time of the death and all were biological daughters to the deceased parent except for one

daughter whose stepfather passed away. The majority of participants were of Christian or no faith and most were of Caucasian background.

One factor to keep in mind when reading the findings and discussion is the age of the adolescent at the time of the death. For example, an oldest daughter could have been 11 years old at the time of the death or 18 years old, and so daughters were expected to take different responsibilities based on their age and respective level of capability. Christ (2000) differentiated children's responses to death based on their age and not their birth order. It is also interesting to consider which children were living in the home at the time of the death. For example, in some cases, the daughter was a middle child, yet she was the oldest female living in the home at the time.

Below, the findings have been grouped into a number of categories that emerged from the data in which role changes became most apparent. These are: the individual's relationship with her surviving parent, her relationship with her siblings, her new roles within the household, and changes that were noticed in relationships with friends. Since nine of the participants were eldest children, common themes were easier to identify from this larger group. As such, the sections below tend to contain more information and quotes from eldest daughters, though youngest and middle daughters are also included. The subheadings denote the birth order of the research participant, however, some experiences that are described by eldest daughters below were also felt by youngest and middle daughters, as noted, and vice versa.

Table 1: Summary of Themes

Category	Birth Order	Role Changes
Relationship with Surviving Parent	Eldest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reliance on eldest daughter to carry out parental responsibilities: decision-making, parenting younger siblings, completing housework • Emotional reliance on eldest daughter • Inability to discuss grief with surviving parent • Protection of surviving parent from emotions • Seen as more of an “adult” after the death
	Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried about parent’s ability to cope with loss • Surviving parent kept emotions from middle child • Felt upset when family routines could not be maintained by surviving parent
	Youngest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Worried about parent’s ability to cope with loss • Tried to cheer up surviving parent • Inability to discuss grief with surviving parent • Felt more adult responsibility after the death
Relationship with Siblings	Eldest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental role with younger siblings: caretaking, rule-setting, disciplining, advising/guiding • Attempts to pass on values of deceased to siblings • Expectation that she would take on caregiving role • Younger siblings depended on her as they may have depended on deceased parent • Pass on stories of deceased to younger siblings
	Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parental/advisory role with younger siblings • Preserves memory of deceased for younger siblings
	Youngest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attempted to cheer up family members • Would look to older siblings for advice/guidance • Would talk to older siblings about the deceased
Roles in Household	Eldest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Took on deceased parent’s responsibilities, e.g. cleaning, cooking, gardening, caregiving, organizing • Tried to be like deceased parent • Feeling of responsibility for family stability
	Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New added responsibility, e.g. cooking, cleaning, chores, caregiving • Felt as though had to act like an adult after the death • As oldest female in home, took on “mother” roles
	Youngest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tried to cheer up family • Added responsibility for household chores • Took turns with siblings fulfilling spousal role

Role Changes in Life (A Broader Sense)	Eldest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chose academic path based on practicality • Attempted to be financially independent • Supported family like deceased would have • Other people confide in them • Increased maturity and responsibility • Loyalty to family • Increased independence and self-sufficiency
	Middle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chose academic path based on what she could afford independently • Felt more freedom to pursue dreams after parent passed away • Felt better able to help others deal with difficult life situations
	Youngest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Felt a need to be independent: self-sufficiency, financial independence • Increased maturity and responsibility

Relationship with Surviving Parent

Following the death, each daughter's relationship with her surviving parent shifted. Although each had a different experience of this shift, there were some common themes that emerged. Youngest and middle daughters tended to worry most about their surviving parent's ability to cope with the death and the new responsibilities that this entailed for this parent. Many daughters commented on an inability to speak about their grief with their surviving parent, since they did not want to burden them with more emotional strife than this parent was already experiencing. Oldest daughters tended to speak more about their surviving parent's reliance on them to take on parental responsibilities that were previously the deceased's (some of these will be discussed further in the next section.) As well, surviving parents tended to share more of their feelings with oldest daughters as well as tell them more details about the death.

Eldest daughters. Rachel was 13 when her mother died in a car accident and 23 when interviewed. She has two younger brothers. Her relationship with her mother had been rocky prior to the death, but her mother had known the details of Rachel's day-to-day life. Rachel's parents were living together at the time of the death, but they had been separated for a short period prior to the death. During the separation, Rachel and her brothers lived with their mother. Rachel stated that her feelings of independence and an increase in responsibilities had already begun with the separation. After the death, Rachel said that her father, her aunt and her grandmother were present and wanted to be supportive, but she felt unable to talk to them about her feelings.

I always felt like I didn't want to push my stuff on them because they were also grieving, you know, the loss of their daughter, their sister and their granddaughter, you know, it was no, um, I mean, it was, it was also very hard for them, I mean very hard for me, but I never wanted them to feel like they had to take on my stuff along with their own.

Dalia, who was 11 when her mother died of ovarian cancer and 39 at the time of the interview, stated that she sometimes kept things from her father if she was unsure as to how he would handle them. Shortly after her mother's death, she felt unable to talk to her father and began to use drugs and spent time with "crappy people," who, she said, "just led me down a real path of, almost a path of

destruction.” She tried to keep this from her father, and some of this reservation in sharing with him has continued into her adult life. She said:

And even now, Charlene and I are part of the high-risk cancer clinic, the hereditary high-risk clinic, and so we get monitored every 6 months. I don't actually think my dad knows that, he may know that...It was all my initiative [to go.] And so he may know, but it's definitely not something we talk about and we go for cancer screening every 6 months. But we just don't talk to him about it, and I think, I think it would be too much for him to deal with. And now, actually, you know what, now it's like the shift has changed where we or I am trying to protect him. He's 72 this year and so I think him thinking about his daughters possibly having cancer, like so. And when I hit 36, when I passed the age that my mother was when she died, it was like this big, like, feeling of oh my god, I'm older now than my mom was and she seemed so old then, so that was something.

Jem was 14 when her father died from lung cancer and 19 when interviewed.

She has two younger sisters who were seven and five years old at the time of the interview.

She spoke about her mother's new view of her as an adult, and less so as a child, after her father's death. An oldest child, her mother came to rely on her in much the same way that she would have relied on Jem's father, had he been alive.

She definitely recognizes me as an adult now. Like there are some decisions that she just wouldn't make without discussing with me first. But on the other hand, I, you know, tell her about everything, like what happened at school today, the classes I went to and everything...It was just like after my father passed away, it was just things that, um, decisions that um, that she usually discussed with my father, and things that she couldn't decide alone, like you know. And she figured that I would definitely be able to advise her and give her suggestions, so, um, that's when she sort of...and I guess when, and at, even at 15, I was like a really mature 15 year old, so, and I was like just really aware of things, so. Like she definitely knew I had that, like you know, I was really mature, and I knew like, um, I knew things right. So she definitely knew that before but I guess since after my father wasn't there anymore, so, it was then...And like a lot of things, you know, like, my father, things like investments and stuff, there were things that I discussed with my father all the

time, so she knew I had some understanding of that, so,
ya.

Abigail, also an oldest child, was 13 when her father died of a heart attack and 18 at the time of the interview. She has a younger brother (middle) and a younger sister. She stated that she had difficulty speaking to her mother after the death, but now the two have a better relationship in which they can share their feelings with one another. She also spoke of a similar trust granted to her from her mother after the death.

My mom's told me, I've always acted older than my age, especially after all this, and so my mom and I, I don't know, kind of, she confides stuff in me like this where I'm like oh, I guess normal people wouldn't, not normal people, but we've got this level, her and I, where she does forget sometimes that I'm younger, so she treats me as an adult, so we have discussions where I'll be like okay, but like my siblings don't know certain things.

Abigail also talked about her mother's appreciation of Abigail's ability to keep the house going for the year following the death. Abigail said:

And apparently according to my mom, and whatever, according to my mom she's really grateful for it, but apparently I ran the family that year and made sure we were good. But I'm always like, ok, if you say so. I

really have no idea. And she's always very adamant about it, going I don't know how we would have survived that without you'. And I'm always going, I'll have to take your word on it. Cause I don't know what happened.

Lisa was an oldest child, who was 15 when her mother died of breast cancer and 25 when interviewed. She has three younger siblings, a sister and two brothers. Lisa stated that her father depended on her emotionally, but that this was not reciprocal. Lisa stated that she sometimes worried that she and her sister were "too emotional" for her father and that he did not know how to deal with that, particularly around the time immediately after the death.

I'm his soundboard. I'm like the person he tells everything to so that's when like you don't, you see your dad, like I think it was right after my mom passed away really, I saw my dad more as an equal, like adult than...Actually I have to say that happened when I moved away to [university] and I came back and I kind of learned more about who I was when I went away and then I came back and realized, you know, cause every time I'd come home, he'd always like start talking to me, it wasn't like he was listening to what I was saying, but he just needed someone as a soundboard.

Lisa stated that her father would also talk to her sister, but that most often she was the one he turned to, since her mood tended to be more stable than her sister's. Other eldest, middle and youngest daughters also spoke about protecting their surviving parents from their emotions, and this was particularly present with surviving fathers.

The eldest daughters that participated in this study spoke about being a support for their surviving parent, both emotionally as well as day-to-day support with household chores and decisions. A number of daughters also spoke about wanting to protect their surviving parents and resisted sharing their feelings with them so that they would not feel overwhelmed.

Middle daughters. Sydney was 11 when her mother died of lung cancer and 22 when interviewed. Sydney is the second youngest of five children: a younger brother, then an older sister, then an older brother, and then another oldest sister. She too stated that she worried more about her father after the death than she did about herself or her siblings. Sydney spoke about her fears immediately after the death:

I felt relieved that she was out of pain and scared because I didn't know what would happen to our family. You know, my dad was the primary moneymaker, my mom babysat, so it was, it was scary for me, I knew, you know, this, this wasn't good, and the biggest thing, I was always closer to my dad, I was like daddy's little girl. So my biggest fear was I was worried about him and what would happen to him, you know, even though at 11 I don't think you understand

love either but at the same time you have an idea, right, so I, I felt really awful for him that he had to lose the love of his life more than thinking about myself that I lost my mom.

Sydney stated that she felt closer to her father than her other siblings and that the family always joked that she was her father's favourite. She stated that she spoke to her father almost every day after the death and would even call him from school to check in, not because he asked her to, but because she wanted to. Sydney said that if she goes "a day without talking to him, he either thinks like something's happened to me or...you know, cause I always call." Likely because of this special bond, Sydney's and her father were able to talk about things that were on each other's minds. Sydney stated that she feels closer to her father since the death and has encouraged her siblings to depend on him emotionally in the way that she has and has found helpful.

Kate was 11 when her father died of a brain aneurysm, and 25 at the time of the interview. She is a middle child, and has an older and a younger brother. She said that her relationship with her mother changed after the death. Like many of the other women interviewed, she spoke about not wanting to add strain to the family, particularly to her mother. Kate said that she felt as though her emotional connection with her mother was lessened after the death.

My relationship with my mom before, I mean we were very, we were close, we are close. Like, if I had a problem, we would talk about it...I often wonder now

because she had to take on a new role, or a very overwhelming role, that she became so independent and so strong that sometimes it's hard to talk about emotional things, because it's such of, like a role of I have to take care of the family, I have to do this, I have to do this and very, I don't know. That to go back to being the emotional person is a little challenging I think....I think she could have [taken the time for the emotional piece], it was just, I think there was also a guilt piece, as well, as a child, you see how much strain is on the family and so you don't want to contribute more to it, so you go maybe to outside sources like my cousins. So I don't want to bring more issues to the family.

Kate said that her older brother had always been the serious one in the family and that, after her father's death, he helped her and her mother with big decisions, such as those to do with finances. Kate did not describe a greater emotional connection between her mother and oldest brother, but it would be interesting to have his perspective on the years following the death. As described, Kate felt that she did not want to burden her mother with her emotions. Kate said that her mother did not talk to her about her own grief. The fact that both Kate and her mother spoke less about emotional issues after the death may have served to create some distance between the two.

Miya stated that her mother became depressed after the death, which had an effect on Miya's relationship with her. Miya said that her mother was busy with other things, such as work, and so did not have as much time to put into the household or the children as she did before the death. Miya said that she missed regular dinners after the death and she and her mother would argue about this. Miya said that she felt cheated in some ways by her father's early death. Miya said that it was only when her mother met her current partner that she seemed to be herself again. Middle children may have felt less of a connection with their surviving parent since it seemed to be the eldest child that this parent depended upon. Where eldest daughters may have felt purposeful in supporting the family and their surviving parent, middle children did not have such a role. For Miya, the death of her father caused her relationship with her mother to change.

Youngest daughters. Sarah was 13 when her mother died of breast cancer and 19 when interviewed. She has an older sister. She stated that she worried about her father's mental health after the death and felt afraid not to be happy all of the time for fear of what might happen to her father and her family. Sarah also developed anxiety about the possibility of her own death, not about what it would do to her, but the effect that her death would have on her family, particularly her father, and the sadness and grief that this would cause. She did not think her father would be able to handle another loss, since she had seen how he had reacted to her mother's death, and she worried that her death might make him lose his mental state completely.

So, ya, and then he started getting really quiet and he was depressed for a really, like a few years. And like

really really grumpy and I would always try to like cheer him up and like make him laugh and like be, like I had to change my personality completely to accommodate for him being so upset all the time.

Sarah stated that this constant cheeriness took a toll on her ability to keep it together outside of the family home.

I'd be like, hi dad and he'd be like hi, have a good day at school, you know, and then I'd come home and he'd say like, how was your day? Fine, and that was about it. We'd eat dinner and he wouldn't say anything, it was months of just eating silently at a dinner table and like watching television together silently or, like everything, pretty much it was just like have a good day and good night and whatever, like he really didn't have anything to say...I started having like breakdowns at school. Ya, it was really really hard to not have anybody to talk to anymore, ya, I didn't have anybody so that was pretty rough...I just had a really hard time keeping control of my emotions and everything was extremely overwhelming. I had a really hard time concentrating. I used to cry a lot in the bathroom.

Sarah stated that her father had seemed better able to cope with the death when her older sister, Nicola, still lived at home, who was more of a support to her father. But

when Nicola moved away to university a few months after the death, Sarah said that her father's coping strategies went downhill. Many of the females interviewed voiced a feeling after the death that they did not want to burden their surviving parent with their feelings since their parent was already dealing with their own grief.

Sadie was 16 when her father died of a heart attack and 20 when interviewed. She has two older siblings: one sister (middle) and one brother (oldest). She stated that after her father died, her relationship with her mother shifted and she felt unable to talk to her mother about things that were bothering her.

Like for a few years... I found it hard to go to her with anything. Cause I just felt like she was going through so much already. So, ya, like I didn't feel comfortable taking my problems to her or, you know, asking her for help or anything, cause it just seemed so evident to me that she didn't, like she didn't need that as well.

Sadie recounted that her mother busied herself with commitments in the community, as she found it difficult to be home. However, this also meant that Sadie did not feel that her mother even had the time available to talk to her.

Leah was 14 when her stepfather died and 21 when interviewed. She has an older brother and, when her stepfather lived in the home, had a younger stepsister live with the family for half of the time. Leah stated that her brother had a learning disability and so often she felt more responsibility for things, even before the death. She spoke about how her family dynamic changed after the death and her mother

began to turn to her for support on matters that she would have discussed with Leah's stepfather.

Before I guess I felt like the older sibling, even with my brother included, and after I felt a little more like a parent I guess...before it was kind of like there were rules and there were parents and then after it was a little more like things were up for discussion and like my mom would discuss even, like, other issues with me that maybe she had discussed with my stepdad before like, ya, I guess more personal stuff for her, or things about like money or, like, now if she gets a cheque or if she's doing something with the house, it's like our money and our house and stuff, so, she includes me a lot more like that.

As noted, common themes emerged with respect to a changing relationship between an adolescent and her surviving parent. There were a number of similarities between birth orders, but some differences did appear. Eldest daughters tended to speak more about being an emotional support for the surviving parent, helping them with household decisions and providing a sort of stability for this parent. All of the birth orders spoke about a resistance to share too much emotion with the surviving parents because the parent was perceived to be dealing with so much already. Youngest daughters appeared to experience the most anxiety over the surviving parent's ability to cope with the loss and the changes that this entailed for the family.

Relationship with Siblings

The shift in family dynamics after the death required that each family member adjust to the loss as they saw appropriate. Older siblings tended to take on a parental role with younger siblings: some stated that this was asked or expected of them and others said that they came into this role naturally. Younger siblings tended to be the ones in the family who wanted to talk about the deceased and sought support from their older siblings.

Eldest daughters. When Lisa's mother died, she felt compelled to take on many, if not all, of the roles her mother had and try to keep the house running in the same way that her mother did.

Well I'm definitely more motherly with my youngest brother and my sister is like that too. Like my youngest brother used to like, he'd make mother's day cards for us too, so, it's really heartbreaking, actually, but ya he, well you know, I was nine when he was born, so I've been looking after him since he was a baby too, so. Ya, he's the baby of the family, he still is, and he's 16 now.

Lisa talked about how her youngest brother came to depend on her in much the same way that he would have depended on her mother, had she been alive.

When Jem's father died, her sisters were very young (1 and 2 years old) and so she said that she began to take on a parental role almost immediately. Even now, although Jem has moved away to attend university, she still sets rules for her sisters and talks to her middle sibling frequently on the phone. Jem stated that her mother

also relies on her to speak to her sister's teachers about their schoolwork and progress, a role that her father would have had if he were alive.

Since I'm so much older than them, like I take on a lot of the parent roles. Like I go to, I'm the one who communicates with their teachers and everything and, um, and...

[Interviewer:] Your mother doesn't do that or?

Well she just thinks I would know better like what things to focus on and that type of thing. Like she still knows their teachers and she talks to them on a daily basis but when it comes to like their performance in school, um, I'm the one who discusses that with the teachers. Um, and so ya, and I set rules for Shannon, and you know, there's sometimes when like I'm not a sister and I have to punish her and things like that.

Jem stated that her father placed a lot of importance on her academics and so she tries to do the same with her sisters. Although she does not feel that she does it as well as her father, she tries to use the same methods of instruction with them as he did for her. In this way, it is almost as though her sisters have a chance to be with the deceased and maintain a connection with him, through Jem's actions and the way that she interacts with them. Jem stated that she had a lot of respect for her father and wants to possess many of the qualities that he had. Dalia reported that there was a family expectation that she would take a protective, parental sort of role over her

younger sister, but her experience is somewhat different than other eldest siblings in that she grew very much to resent this role. She remembered how two of her relatives told her privately after her mother died that she now had to take care of her father and her sister, which scared and overwhelmed her. In speaking about her sister during their growing up years, she said:

I remember just not really liking her very much. And it was probably when I was younger but again that was, maybe now as an adult, I'm thinking it was just sort of sibling sort of stuff. Like I didn't want her to talk to me when we were out because I was too cool, and, you know, if my friends saw me talking to my little sister, and I did end up having to look after her a lot. So that was probably a bit of a bone of contention for me.

Dalia stated that her father often continues to expect her to take care of her sister in some ways. For example, when they fight, he expects her to make amends first.

And there are still times when Charlene and I will fight, and he'll say to me, oh, you know, she's just younger, and just leave it and just make up and phone her and stuff and I just think what, she's the one that started this fight, I'm not just going to give in. So I know that he wants me to continue to look after her, ya, caretake and just, and be, he always says you're the big sister, you're the older one, and I'm the one that's stamping my feet

saying well but, but, but, I'm sick of always giving in to her. So I think that he expects me to continue with that role regardless of what's going on in my life, he expects that of me.

Erin was 17 when her mother died of breast cancer and 23 when interviewed. She has a younger sister. She echoed Lisa in that, as the oldest, her younger sister depended on her to remember what it was like to have their mother around. In this way, Erin also connected her younger sister to their deceased mother. Since her younger sister felt that Erin would have a better understanding of the way their mother would have thought about or approached different situations, she will ask Erin to provide her with the guidance that she would have asked her mother for.

I think she sees me as somebody who has, um, had more time with my mom and has absorbed more of like sort of the politics that my mom had and, uh, I don't know. So I think that she sort of looks at me as a sort of like a conduit to the values that my mom would have taught her if she had been older. Cause, my sister was so, like really, immature when my mom died. So like they didn't ever talk about like how the world works and like, you know, how am I supposed to feel about this topic or this topic so I think my sister sort of sees me as that and she still always will like call me for advice on things, you know, if she's going to an

interview, what should she say, that kind of stuff. And I also know a lot of the people she's friends with, so she'll call me up and be like "I like Geoff, What do you think of Geoff?" and then "Ya, he's a good kid, go date him", so ya. But I don't do that with her and I don't usually care as much what she thinks about what I do or whatever so I think I still maintain that older sibling...

Lisa spoke about how her youngest brother relied on her to tell him stories about her mother, "I remember when he was like, oh, 10 years old, and he came to me and my sister and he wanted to like tell us stories about mom cause he was starting to forget her." In this way, Lisa was able to preserve the memory of her mother for her youngest brother and other siblings. As such, Lisa helped her brother maintain a relationship with their deceased mother by sharing stories with him about her experience growing up with their mother.

Increased expectations of maturity appeared to be placed on eldest siblings after the death and many seemed to step into this role out of necessity. Most of the eldest daughters spoke about being in a caretaking or an advisory role with younger siblings. Eldest daughters also appeared to help younger siblings maintain a connection to the lost parent by sharing stories with them and telling them about the deceased as well as being like the deceased. This sharing likely also helped the eldest daughter to maintain her memory of the deceased, as fourteen of the daughters noted that their discussion about the deceased with their surviving parent was limited.

Middle daughters. Kate stated that she did not feel that she had a parental role with her younger brother, but rather an advisory role, in which he will sometimes turn to her for guidance. When interviewed, Kate stated that her family did not talk about the death in emotional terms and rarely in factual terms, but that her younger brother has begun to share with her his feelings around missing his father. She said:

My younger brother is much more open too, so he will ask me questions about his girlfriend and like oh, what should I do about this and it's much more of like a, I don't know, advisory kind of role that I have with my younger brother. Cause he's always, like if he has any questions or concerns or if he has a fight with my mom or if he has a fight with his friends or, like I'm sort of the person he turns to so that's sort of my relationship with him...He was only five at the time [when my father died] and now like when he goes off to school or when he does certain big events, he'll come to me and talk to me and be like I really miss the fact that he's not here and didn't get to see me do whatever.

As discussed above for eldest daughters, Kate also appears to be preserving the memory of their father for her younger brother.

Youngest daughters. Four youngest siblings also spoke about trying to cheer up others in the family, either through jokes or discussions with family members. Sarah, described earlier, talked about the important role that her older sister, Nicola,

played in her life. Sarah said that she and Nicola would often fight when they were younger but have now become very close and Sarah is able to talk with Nicola about their mother's death.

Nicola's become a bit of a mom figure to me. Like I just always, report to her like things, you know, like, if I'm ashamed of something that I did, or something, I'm like dating someone she won't like, I'll be like Nicola, I'm dating this person and she's like, oh, why. I'm like, because! Or like if I'm really happy about something, I'm like Nicola, guess what! Like I was applying for this job like with an organization she used to work for and I was like really nervous so I called her, went through all my questions with her and you know like, I just, ya, she's just become a really close person in my life, like I don't even know what describes her best, like a parental figure, like a sister, a friend, like she's just this person that I'm really lucky to have. Otherwise I don't think I would have made it through it, through everything.

With regard to relationships with siblings, many of the daughters spoke about preserving a memory of the deceased through their siblings. This took the form of an advisory role to younger siblings by elder ones, as they would often give advice similar to what they thought the deceased parent would have. As well, eldest siblings

tried to be like their deceased parent, for example, by organizing household activities or teaching younger siblings like the deceased parent would have. A number of participants described their siblings as the ones that they would talk to about the deceased and felt that they could best understand their own feelings, as they had shared a similar experience. Rather than discuss their memories with their surviving parents, siblings tended to be the ones that they turned to when remembering the deceased. This was particularly true of younger siblings turning to older ones.

Roles in Household

Role changes within the household affected day-to-day life for all of those interviewed. In cases where the deceased parent was ill for a period of time before the death, many of these dynamics had already begun to shift. This included an increase in chore responsibilities for each child, which often meant that more time was spent at home than before the death. Some daughters, most often the oldest child or the oldest female living in the home, attempted to fill the missing space left by the deceased parent, particularly when it was a mother that died. In cases where the father died, many daughters commented on the way their oldest brothers took on many of the roles that were previously their fathers.

Eldest daughters. Lisa spoke about the sense of responsibility she felt to hold the family together: "Like I became, like the glue was lost and then I was trying to like pick up the pieces and re-glue, you know." She felt compelled to take on many of the responsibilities that her mother had before the death. For example, she continued to maintain her mother's garden and remembered her mother through the work that she put into it. She worried tremendously about what would happen to the family when

she moved away to university and would clean madly when she returned home every weekend. Many of these responsibilities were taken on when she was in high school, and she would become frustrated when her family did not hold the household together as she did, and her mother did, when she was away.

Lots of people say, like my dad used to say Lisa, don't be upset about it, like you know, it's not like I expect you to do all this, cause I'd be upset if they didn't do their part and then I'd be like doing it for them, and just being really pissed off about it and you know, he'd always say, like who's asking you to do this, why are you doing this, like, you know. And I said well that's not what I want to hear. And I'd be like well, and then I realized like, if I want it clean then, you know, I'm just going to have to do it myself or get aggravated trying to get them to do it. Like I felt like a mom in some respects in that way. And like my siblings and my dad gave me a lot of respect and trust, cause he realized that, that I was doing a lot and doing a lot for the family before myself. And he obviously could see that I was a lot more responsible than my siblings at that time, like there were football fields between me and my sister in maturity levels and my sister went into depression and got into the wrong crowd and got depressed, felt very

guilty after my mom passed away and blamed everything on me and my dad, or everything in her mind. That was a hard, hard situation...I didn't realize it at the time but I did do a lot when I was in high school at home and I don't know how I did everything...Cleaning and cooking and gardening and looking after my brother, looking after my siblings, the rest of them too, and then doing all my school, extra-curricular activities, like I always did a lot....

[Interviewer:] Was it hard to leave wondering about how things would be taken care of [at home]?

Big time, big time. I was like excited, but I think probably like the first three months of being there I was so homesick. And like I'd always go home every two weeks, I'd always go home up until my fifth year. ...I know [my dad] missed me and he looked forward to me coming home. And I think he took a little bit of advantage of it too. I know my sister said that cause he like wouldn't force the boys to clean up as much. Like it was like a break for him when I came home basically you know, and but then he'd hear about it from me because I'd be like crying and ranting and raving about

the mess and no one swept the floor in like two weeks since I've been here.

Emily also spoke of her efforts to essentially "replace her [mother's] presence in the house because it was such a big presence." Emily was 14 when her mother died and 22 when interviewed. She has a younger brother, Kevin.

She was extremely organized as far as we knew what we were having for dinner every night. Dinner was always at five thirty. Like, things were always done exactly the way she planned. And so I tried to do that...I definitely tried to do things like that, and um, I tried to organize dinners. And of course that didn't work. Um, I don't know, I just tried to replace her presence. I probably bossed Kevin around a lot. I don't remember. But I'm sure I did. Um and I, part of the reason our relationship really started to go downhill, besides from the pot and the alcohol, um, was because I tried to replace her presence unsuccessfully. And I think that's part of the reason he really resented it... I couldn't get things as organized, and the execution wasn't the same at all.

For Emily, her attempts to replace her mother's presence for her father and her brother did not work and her brother eventually distanced himself from her. She said

that even at the time of the interview, she and her brother did not talk and she would only hear about her brother if her father happened to mention something about him.

For daughters who tried to replace the deceased parent's presence or whose surviving parent had relied on them as they had relied on the deceased, they found it difficult when their surviving parent began a new relationship. Six of the surviving parents (five of oldest daughters) began a new relationship at various lengths of time following the death. Some daughters had difficulty with the introduction of this new person into their lives, and others saw the new person as a helpful addition to the family unit. Especially for those daughters who tried to replace the presence of the deceased, this introduction of a new person to the family may have threatened their new role. Dalia said that her father began a new relationship over ten years after her mother's death. At this time, she felt that she had separated herself from her family and so saw her father's new relationship as a positive thing. However, she said that her younger sister, Charlene, took a bit more time to come around.

We both like her. I think [Charlene] has a little more, I think she's a bit more emotionally involved again because she spends a lot more time [at our father's home]. And it's almost like Charlene's place was displaced at home because I wasn't living, like I moved out when I was about 21 or 22 and so I didn't have the time there when she was there. So when they got married, by the time they came back from their

honeymoon, I'd already moved out. I think I was already not living at home. And so I never had to live with her and Charlene was still living at home and I think her position as the female in the house was displaced and so I think she's had a harder time dealing with that even though they get along, she's a fantastic woman. Like my dad asked us before he got married, and I think Charlene, again I don't really know, but I think Charlene was a little more hesitant, but I was like, yes, like do it, because it means that we don't have the responsibility of looking after him anymore and he needed company, you know...he needed someone other than us to be looking after him. And she is a really nice nice woman, she cares for him and she looks after him and she cares about us and she never came in trying to be our mother, that was really important, she never ever came in trying to be a mother to us. She's always just wanted to be a friend and love us that way. So that's been, that's been very cool.

Rachel spoke about her relationship with her stepmother. She stated that her two younger brothers seemed better able to adjust to the introduction of a new person to the family than she was. This may be because she had adjusted to being the only

female in the home and had been the one to carry out a number of motherly roles, such as taking care of her younger brothers when her father was at work.

She and I still have struggles...Um, but it took me a fairly long time I would say [to adjust to her presence]. She still gets frustrated with me for being closed off to her. But she's very like...it's hard for me because she'll say, like if people will call, she'll be like, um, and they'll ask for me or like, you know, whatever and if I'm not there, like say it's someone calling, you know, like someone from my work or like people who don't know what I'm doing, she'll be like oh this is her mom and that bothers me because I can't...she hates being called a stepmom, but I can't, I don't know, like I'm not, I just feel like it's too confusing. Like I'll say that she's my stepmom because she is my stepmom. That doesn't mean that I don't love her, it just means that she's not my biological mom who even though she's dead, she still exists for me, you know, like I think that, I don't think that's unreasonable, but she doesn't, like that's very offensive to her. So we have a hard time over that. Um, I get that to some extent she fills that role for me. Um, I don't know, like I don't know, I have no idea, if my mom were alive what kind of

relationship we would have, whether we would have a relationship, whether it would be the worst relationship ever, I honestly have no idea. Um, but I can't, I've never been able to let Cindy into that role. I mean, I'm not holding her at arm's length by any means but, you know, it's hard for her too, so.

Rachel's parents, unlike other daughters interviewed, had been separated for a period of time before the death but had been living together when her mother was killed in a car accident. Because of this, Rachel said that she felt that even if her mother had not died, she still thinks that her mother and father would have eventually divorced and her father would have met and married her stepmother.

For other daughters whose parents often fought, they may have felt that their family would eventually dissolve in some way or another and so the beginning of another relationship was not as difficult. Rachel said that she felt that her father would have eventually met and married his second wife, whether or not her mother had been alive. Daughters who described their parents as always getting along and, as Sarah described her family, "perfect" found it very hard to have a piece of the whole missing.

Middle daughters. Miya was 12 when her father died of a heart attack and 24 when interviewed. She has an older sister and a younger brother. She stated that changes in the amount of household responsibility per child were very apparent after the death. The changes seemed to be quite abrupt, and Miya felt as though she suddenly had to take on adult roles that were not previously hers.

I was responsible for a lot more after the death. Before I don't think I was really responsible for anything, my mom did everything. Ya, cooking, cleaning, all the chores, like all that, she took on all the responsibilities around the house. And my dad did the manly things, my mom did the motherly things, so I didn't really have...I guess my only responsibility was sometimes just to watch my younger brother is all I can remember from before. After there was a lot more like cleaning and all that household stuff was pretty much me and my sister, watching my brother after school. So like it was just within like, it was like a change from day to day, like it wasn't like a gradual change, it was like okay, one day my mom took care of everything, the next day I have to act like I'm 25 and do all the chores kind of thing, like it was a day to day change, so it was, it did affect us a lot I think, cause it was a sudden change, not a gradual one.

Sydney also spoke of additional household responsibility following her mother's death. She stated that she and her middle sister, Candace, took on most of the "mother" roles following the death, particularly when her father was still working full time. Her oldest sister was not living in the home at this time. Candace and Sydney became responsible for cooking and cleaning and the day-to-day

responsibilities that had been their mother's. She spoke of how she and Candace became mother figures to her youngest brother, Jeremy.

And in that time, me and my sister were the mom and, you know, that was really hard...And it was really hard because at 15 and 11, you don't know how to be a mom, it's like, okay, do what you want, like I don't know. Um, but no, we, we got it together, we, um, you know, made sure he was fed in the morning and I think it killed my dad to know that he had to leave us, you know, and go work. But we pulled together as a family, you had to, you have to pull together and stay strong and do it.

Sydney felt a responsibility to her family and talked about how close her family still was at the time of the interview and the underlying understanding in the family that each of them would always be there for the others, regardless of circumstance. However, she acknowledged that she did become overwhelmed by this responsibility.

We had a breaking point when I was probably 15 because I was tired of doing all the housework and, you know, I'm like I want to be a kid, this is ridiculous, I'm not staying home doing laundry for all of you and, you know. And I went through a lot when I was a teenager dealing with that, um, you know, feeling that I missed

out on being a kid because I was forced to grow up so fast, but, um even my friends now call me like the mom.

Sydney stated that her father retired two years after her mother's death, at which time he turned into "Mr. Mom" and she felt comfortable leaving him to take care of many of the household responsibilities that she and her sister had taken on. Sydney described her father as "one of [her] best friends" and stated that he was eventually able to take on as a single parent most of the responsibilities that had been allocated to two parents before the death.

Youngest daughters. Molly was 17 when her father died in a car accident and 20 when interviewed. She has two older brothers. Molly described the various personalities within her family and discussed the way that she often tries to cheer up the family. She described herself as the "joker" of the family, and the one who is always singing and dancing around the home, making the others laugh.

I'm pretty much the joker of the family, like if people are being serious, I'm always singing around the house and like singing stupid songs or saying stupid things, and like I was, almost like the distraction of serious things, kind of thing. But, ya, like I'm just, when people are stressed, I'm always joking around kind of thing.

Sadie talked about the closeness that was created within her family after the death and the strengthened understanding that each would be there for the others in times of need. She spoke about daily chores, how the children traded off shovelling

snow or raking the leaves, but also how the children always made sure that there was someone looking after their mother, since their father is no longer around to have that responsibility.

And we're just, we look out for each other on a broader scale as well, like, we're not just oh I'm here for you, it's like, okay, do you need, like if you're going through a crisis, like do you need me to drive you somewhere or. Like if it's about my mom like we make sure that one of us is always taking care of her. Or, you know, like last year she had to be in the hospital for, like overnight, just cause she was having trouble breathing. I don't...it turned out to be nothing, but like I stayed with her that night because I didn't have class the next day, but we always made sure, you know, like one of us was always home and stuff like that, so ya.

With regard to household roles, all of the daughters noted that they experienced added household responsibility after the death and some stated that they felt that they had more responsibility than other children their age. Eldest daughters appeared to have the most difficulty when their surviving parent began a new relationship, likely because this new adult in their lives may take on many of the roles that they had taken on after the death. As such, they may have felt unappreciated when their roles were taken away or may have felt that the new family member did not carry out these roles in the same way that she or her deceased parent did. Youngest children spoke more

than the other birth orders about trying to keep the family happy and cheerful. Some youngest daughters said that they felt these efforts were, at times, unsuccessful, but yet they continued to try and maintain the family's happiness.

Role Changes in Life (A Broader Sense)

The daughters in this study also spoke of how the death changed some of the life decisions that they made, due to the change in their family dynamic. Some also spoke of how the death affected their groups of friends and the role that they played within these groups. As well, some women stated that the death of their parent affected their academic and career paths. A common theme that arose in all of the interviews was a need felt by the girls to increase their self-sufficiency after the death, either because they did not want to make more work for or add more stress to their surviving parent or because the surviving parent simply was not there, either physically or emotionally, to foster dependence. This sense of self-sufficiency also appeared to influence their identity, which in turn affected the choices that they made with regard to academic and career paths and emotional independence.

One theme that emerged in almost every interview was a feeling from the daughters that they had to mature quickly and become much more self-sufficient than they had been prior to the death. Many of the girls spoke of being financially independent from their surviving parent and many talked about being emotionally independent as well.

Eldest daughters. Jem felt an expectation from her mother that she would choose her school based on the practicality of the job that her university education would get her once she had finished. She stated that, had her father been alive, she

thinks that she would have pursued math or engineering out of personal interest. Rather, she and her mother decided that she would go into accounting, where she knew she could do well and could find a secure job to be able to support herself and her family once she was done.

It was, when my father was alive, um, well I had this belief that, you know, I could do anything, but like it wasn't so much, like, I could do anything in terms of what my father defined as being good and like being a good choice and everything and I guess after he passed away that feeling has started like, slowly gone. And I'm just, you know, I look at things more pessimistically that type of thing, and ya, I think, and I'm a lot more realistic about my abilities than I was before, ya.

Jem stated that once she finishes her degree, it is likely that she will move to a major city to find a job, and her mother and sisters will move in with her. Jem also spoke about wanting to make enough money to try and give her sisters opportunities that she did not have after her father's death, such as attending the university of their choice or participating in music lessons.

Erin, described above, stated that even though she has not asked for it, many of her friends have confided in her for difficult things, since she has experienced the loss of her mother.

For some reason, and this is something I've just started thinking about lately, people like to tell me all about

things that are wrong with their lives and like will confide in me these things that I'm not really sure why. Everyone seems...and I'm not somebody who's all like empathetic and, you know, I don't really like get into things with people and feel I need to cry when they cry and things like that, but I think that, just not a lot of things faze me cause like, I have been through a lot of stuff, so with friends, I think, they know they can just say things to me and I won't be shocked by anything they say at this point so I think they find that comforting in some way...but I don't know why and I feel like it must be something to do with...I don't respond to people the way people that responded to me when I had something really bad happen to me. So I don't do the whole like 'Oh I'm so sorry, I can't imagine how terrible it is for you.' So I guess that has probably, I think that has changed the way I interact with people, in a good way.

Lisa, described earlier, said that the experience of losing her mother helped her to realize her own strength and her ability to help others cope with difficult times. She stated that this realization drew her towards peer helping programs both in high school and university.

I was always the person who, I was more of a quiet, sensitive individual, so I always turn to people that want to talk about things, because I'd actually want to fix it, and so I was already that type of person. And I went to peer helping, because I wanted to help others too, because I found new like strength in myself after dealing with such like a traumatic experience... And I knew I was a strong person, I needed to like show it, show myself that I was a strong person, not just at home, and so I did it in high school.

Lisa went on to describe how the death affected her in terms of maturity and her outlook on life. Following the death, she felt a greater sense of responsibility and loyalty to the remaining members of her family.

[The death] affected me in a lot of ways and it's changed me in a lot of ways too. Like, I was always really responsible, I matured really fast, even before she passed away, when she got sick and stuff. And, um, I think I became a little more wise too and realistic and a, ya, a little more of a homebody too, because I like to keep things together.

Claire was 15 when her father died of cancer and 27 at the time of the interview. She is an eldest daughter and has a younger sister. After the death, she felt an expectation that each family member would step up to take on whatever roles and responsibilities

were needed to get the family through the difficult time. She spoke about the importance that the family has placed on independence and self-sufficiency following the death.

Independence is like, for all three of us, my mom, my sister, and I, a big deal. And it's, what I've noticed about the family is that it's, for me, that it's been harder to be vulnerable or something, I guess sort of the expectation, like you just, you know, like you have to get through, that's what you do and that sort of the sadness piece can only go so far, cause my mom's mom was also depressed for most of her adolescence and I know that that's had an impact so I know that's part of where that comes from.

Middle daughters. Kate, a middle child of three who was 11 when her father died of a brain aneurysm and 25 when interviewed, stated that she and her brothers both chose their college based on what they could afford, since her mother was unable to support three children's education. As well, she felt that the death required her to strive for more independence so that her mother was relieved of some of that financial and care giving responsibility.

That's sort of how we all chose our universities because Kyle and I both went to a school where you could do co-op, so every four months you're earning money to

pay for your tuition and so you don't really have, again the independence, you don't have to ask for financial help in any way, so both of us were able to pay for school independently and then Lucas goes to [Royal Military College] where they pay your tuition, they pay you for your stay and they give you a salary, so he's okay too.

Miya stated that her father placed a lot of importance on academics, getting a good job, and being practical about future goals. Miya stated that she moved away from home for her first two years of university but, when she was unable to get a student loan, returned home to complete her last two years at a university that was closer to home. At the time of the interview, she stated that she would be going abroad for teacher's college, but thought that she would not have made this decision had her father still been alive.

If my dad hadn't have died, I probably wouldn't have gone away to school, I probably wouldn't have gone to Japan, I wouldn't be going to England. I probably would have gone straight from high school to university, done my four years university, gone to teacher's college right away. My marks probably would have been a lot better than they were, cause he would have pushed, he was that kind of a push for education. My mom cared about it too, but my dad was...and I'd

show him my marks. Whereas my mom didn't care too much about it, she cared, but not as much as my dad.

Many of the middle daughters also spoke about how the death enabled them to be more supportive to friends who also experienced difficult things, particularly death. Sydney said:

I think I've become so strong. Most people my age, like, you know, haven't gone through something like this, at all. And, um, I think in a way it's a blessing, because I can help anyone through a problem. Or like if they're dealing with it, I remember one girl at my work, she's in her mid-30s and she lost her dad and, you know, I went into her and just said, you know, if you ever need to talk I'm here and I understand, and I'm actually going through it with another friend as well, her dad's really sick and it's just nice to know that I can help someone, so it's affected me that way, I'm glad that I can, you know, help, you know, because that has happened to me.

Youngest daughters. Conversely, Betty stated that she was not comfortable with death and found it to trigger her emotions and make her upset. Betty was 11 when her father died suddenly from heart problems and 36 when interviewed. She has an older brother and an older sister. Betty is a social worker and so has come across people dealing with grief in her practice as well as in her personal life.

I know I don't deal with death very well at all and I try to stay away from it as much as possible...I'm not comfortable with it. Um, I know I'm not comfortable with it. I know I can break down in tears, depending on the day and I think that's because I see other people going through grief- it triggers all those feelings that I had when my dad died. And I keep going, you know, I can't be there for someone else if I can't keep myself together and I know that there's different opinions with that, but I'm not comfortable with showing emotion, so... I try to stay away from it.

Betty echoed similar sentiments to those described above by Claire and Lisa. She said that after her father died, she worried about her mother's ability to take care of the family and so she said that she did not rebel during her adolescence. She said that she decided to work in her teen years so that her mother did not have to worry about supporting her financially.

I think that because my mom always felt that she had to be strong and independent, I always felt that I had to be

strong and independent. I always felt that I had to be self-sufficient and not be the type of person who relies on someone else, and if you do then they have to be the type of person that you pay, like you pay someone to fix your car.

Molly, a youngest daughter, also talked about her financial independence from her mother, "See I pay for everything myself, like everything, I'm totally financially independent from my mom, so like I pay for all my schooling, rent and all that. So I see where the money goes kind of thing, like I know how much it costs."

With regard to broader role changes, all of the birth orders spoke about an increased feeling of maturity after the death and stated that they felt a need to be more self-sufficient. Many daughters stated that they did not want others to have to worry about them and so they took care of themselves. Many said that this feeling continues to play out for them, and a number of girls spoke about a general need for financial independence from their surviving parent. A number of daughters, mostly middle and eldest, stated that they felt better able to help others through problems after dealing with the loss of their parent. It appeared that such a life event left these women feeling better equipped to deal with other difficult things that came their way.

Chapter 5

Discussion

The purpose of this research study was to explore role changes for females who experienced the death of a parent during adolescence. Within this study, particular attention was paid to birth order and the effect that this had on the role changes that occurred following the death. Certain questions arise when considering the impact of parental death on female adolescents with regard to role changes and birth order. These include such questions as: how does the gender of the surviving parent affect role changes? How does the gender and birth order of the child and her siblings influence role changes? How might role changes following the death of a parent be influenced by ethnicity, culture and/or sexual diversity? This study used a flexible method approach to gather information from the participants about their lived experiences and attempted to shed light on some of these questions.

Loss of a parent for the women interviewed in this study had a significant effect on each of their lives. Some were able to speak very matter-of-factly about their experience of the loss, whereas for others the process of sharing their story was more difficult and spurred a more emotional response. The women noted changes in a number of areas in their lives and described how the death affected their place within the family dynamic and the path that their lives have taken as a result. Below, I have separated the discussion into sections based on birth order: middle, eldest, and youngest. Within each of these sections, I have identified the core categories that emerged from the data with respect to role changes that the women experienced as a result of parental loss.

Role changes in this study were understood to be changes that occurred for the adolescent in their lives as a result of the death. So, this refers to things that an adolescent would likely not have had to do had the parent not passed away. These roles may have been ones that were previously held by one of their parents or were necessitated by the loss. Some women stated that there was a family expectation that they would take on these roles whereas others felt that taking on added responsibility and new roles was something that they wanted to do and just felt natural. Most viewed these changes as an adjustment to the loss, albeit good or bad, and something that needed to be done to maintain family stability and hold the family together. In this research study, focus was placed primarily on role changes as they occurred for the adolescent within her family unit, however, it was apparent that many of these girls came to integrate these new roles into their identities. For example, many of the women who spoke about taking on mothering roles with younger siblings after the death also spoke about being the “mom” within their group of friends.

Middle Daughters

For this research study, only three of the women interviewed were middle children. Miya and Kate were both in the middle of two boys and lost their fathers and Sydney was the second youngest of five children and lost her mother. All described a different and unique experience of parental loss. In order to allow their voices to be heard without essentializing their middle position or trying to simplify differences, references have been made to their experiences in other sections as they have been relevant to other thematic discussions. For these women, their experience of role changes would have been affected by both the sex and number of siblings as

well as the number of years between siblings (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Wilson & Edington, 1981). It seemed as though middle children who were the oldest child in the home at the time of the death took on roles more similar to those of eldest daughters. Middle children who had an older sibling at home at the time of the death described themselves as acting as almost a “buffer” between the two and staying fairly neutral in their middle role. At this point, due to the small number of middle children that participated in this study, it is difficult to comment further about this birth order position.

Eldest Daughters

A number of the eldest daughters in this study tried to replace the lost parent’s position in the household. This took on a number of forms, for example, by organizing the household the way their mother had, or helping their mother with household decisions, as their father had. However, many daughters came to feel that even though they tried to fill this position, they were unable to fill the missing gap, and consequently felt badly about this. This was especially seen in cases where daughters tried to do all of the things that their deceased parent had as well as maintain a life and participate in activities of their own. Lewis and Lippman (2004) noted that, “Older siblings may sometimes assume the role of caretaker...In this way they merge with the deceased parent, comforting themselves by identifying with the lost parent, by becoming the parent” (p.20). Many daughters talked about trying to replace their mother’s presence in the house and/or acting and being like the deceased parent. In the literature, Silverman et al. (2002-2003) noted the tendency of children to fill the space left by the deceased parent. In linking this to eldest children, Raphael

(1983) wrote that an expectation tended to be placed on the oldest child in order to maintain family stability.

For some daughters, maintaining the duties and roles in the household previously carried out by the deceased parent seemed to be a way of holding on to memories of him or her and honouring his or her life. An example of this was Lisa, who spoke about maintaining her mother's garden after she died almost as a sort of memorial to her. Lisa described her hard work in keeping the house running as her mother had. It was only after her family psychologist encouraged her to leave for university and let the family try to function without her that she made the difficult decision to leave for school, at least during the week. However, Lisa stated that coming home on the weekends was difficult and would bring her to tears of frustration, disappointment and anger when her family had not kept the house running in the same way that she and her mother had. Three other participants also spoke of receiving formal help to work through grieving, although this help seemed to be most supportive for Lisa and important in her grieving process.

Many daughters seemed to feel a sense of responsibility to the home, their siblings, and their surviving parent even after they had moved away. For Lisa, she decided to move back to the family home after she completed her university degree and continue to take care of the things that her mother had when she was alive. When eldest daughters did this, it seemed to provide a sense of stability for their siblings so they could leave home and pursue their identities. Previous authors have noted that families may depend on an adolescent for emotional comfort and may rely upon her to help the family maintain emotional stability (Raphael, 1983; Shapiro, 1994). In her

study on identity development for parentally bereaved adolescents, Cait (2005) wrote about how some women felt a shift in family roles to that of being a “caregiver with the added responsibility” (p.100). She further noted that:

From a systemic perspective, in families where the deceased was a primary caregiver, the family system needs to rebalance and stabilize itself. This is done through the surviving children/child taking on more responsibility and care-taking functions. Instead of allowing the family to experience a period of destabilization after the death, the new role of the surviving daughter is accepted and instituted and balance restored. (p.100)

This statement is supported by my findings and applies particularly to eldest children. Oktay (2004) noted that some younger daughters may be more inclined to find “surrogate families” after the death; for two of the youngest daughters in this study, this appeared to be true, as they spent less time at home where they found the family situation to feel unstable due to the surviving parent’s ability to cope with the loss.

Many of the eldest daughters spoke of a felt responsibility toward the home and family structure (Walsh & McGoldrick, 2004; Shapiro, 1994). Shapiro (1994) noted that children who lose a parent will often move to support the surviving parent in response to his or her level of emotional stability. Jem described her future plans to have her mother and two younger sisters move in with her so that she could support them financially. She said that she chose to pursue accounting in university, rather

than her original dream of math. This was based on the practicality that the academic background in accounting would provide the financial security that she and her mother decided that they needed. Prior to her father's death, he was the one who provided the money for the family. Jem said that she hopes to be able to give her younger sisters some of the wisdom that her father gave her and be able to pay for them to do what they want to do, since Jem was unable to do this. In this way, she wants to give her father and who he was to her younger siblings and preserve the memory of him for them.

Other daughters also spoke of giving their younger siblings what the deceased parent no longer could, thus preserving the parent for the younger sibling and helping them to maintain a connection to the deceased. As well, by acting like the deceased or telling stories of the deceased to younger siblings, it helped the children to remember the parent. Most of the women spoke about being able to discuss the deceased with their sibling, which was preferred to discussing this with their surviving parent. Silverman (2000) noted that children may refrain from sharing their feelings with others out of a fear that they may "make other people sad or burden their parents" (p.100). Because they are aware of the impact that the death has had on the surviving parent, they become sensitive to what they feel they can or cannot share based on how they think that the parent will react. In this way, siblings can play a special role.

After a parent dies, individuals will often maintain a connection to the deceased or create a new relationship with them. Klass, Silverman, and Nickman (1996) wrote that "remaining connected seemed to facilitate both adults' and children's ability to cope with loss and the accompanying changes in their lives"

(p.xvii). As indicated by the participants in this study, siblings played a key role in helping them to maintain this connection. As such, this may have increased their coping abilities in dealing with the loss and adjusting to change. From this, it would be interesting to investigate the differences in coping ability between children with siblings and only children. It is notable that a connection with the deceased may also be sustained in other ways, such as Lisa's maintenance of her mother's garden, as noted above.

Although it was common for daughters to take on the roles of the deceased, it was not always a willing transition. Some eldest and middle daughters felt that an expectation was placed on them to assume some of the roles that their deceased parent had, particularly when it was a mother that died, and they came to resent this; similar cases have been expressed in the literature (Christ, 2000; Lewis & Lippman, 2004; Walsh-Burke, 2006). Raphael (1983) noted that adolescents "may be expected to be 'grown up' and to comfort other family members, especially the surviving parent and [her] younger siblings" (p.151). Some daughters even recalled being told by members of their extended families that they now had the responsibility of taking care of their surviving parent. For Dalia this was worrisome, as she was only 11 years old at the time – a heavy burden for a girl at such a young age. Understandably, she felt scared by this responsibility but did not feel able to say that she was uncomfortable with the task that she was being given.

Whereas many of the daughters stated that they felt somewhat tied to the home, Dalia said that she rebelled in her adolescence and wondered how those years would have been different had her mother been alive. A number of authors have

noted that the loss of a mother and the consequent expectations placed on an adolescent to take on the deceased's roles threatens her developing sense of self (Christ, 2000; Corr, 1995; Lewis & Lippman, 2004). In this example, Dalia tried to distance herself from her family through rebellion. Dalia spoke about how she began to use drugs by the time she was 13 years old and her early experimentation with her sexuality. She said that she shared her experience of the loss of her mother with her sexual partners, not because she wanted to, but rather because she wanted to create closeness. Walsh and McGoldrick (2004) also noted that adolescents who experience the death of a parent feel a need to create closeness outside of the family when it is no longer available within the family unit.

In her article on identity development for parentally bereaved adolescents, Cait (2005) wrote about "situational matrimony". This term is used to explain the relationship between the surviving parent and adolescent, in which the two become extremely close, as if they were partners. This also refers to an emotional closeness between the two. All of the women interviewed in this research study reported a changed relationship with their surviving parent after the death. A relationship similar to the concept of "situational matrimony" tended to occur with the oldest daughter, or the oldest daughter living in the household. In cases where the mother passed away, daughters tended to take on an emotionally supportive role with their surviving fathers. This relationship, however, did not tend to be reciprocal in that the daughters could depend on their fathers in the same way. In cases where the father passed away, eldest daughters tended to take on more of a practical, decision-making type of role, in which the surviving mother would consult them for financial advice or household

decisions. It is notable that these are more traditionally “male” roles that were taken on jointly by the mother and eldest daughter.

Some daughters stated that they felt a sense of importance and value because of their surviving parent’s reliance on them, whereas others felt that the reliance was overwhelming and added stress to their lives. Previous authors have noted that many parents rely, sometimes excessively, on their eldest daughters for support and comfort for their own grief (Christ, 2000; Harris, 1991; Raphael, 1983). Christ (2000) said that this reliance was more typical between surviving mother and adolescent daughter. In this study, it appeared to be the fathers who found the task of being a single parent overwhelming and were thus less able to cope on their own. Ten of the participants in this study lost their father, and seven lost their mother. Leaning on their eldest adolescent daughters for emotional support was one manifestation of this reliance. Leah described that her relationship with her mother changed after her stepfather’s death: where before there had been clear distinctions between parents and children, these boundaries no longer seemed to exist and she felt that she was now seen as an adult within the family. Christ (2000) wrote about how the parent-child boundary can become periodically blurred following a death.

Wilson and Edington (1981), in their book on birth order profiles noted that after the loss of a mother, many eldest daughters become “pseudowives” to their fathers. A number of eldest daughters as well as one middle daughter described the way that they tried to organize and run the family just as their parent had, particularly in cases where a mother was lost. Consequently, surviving fathers came to rely on their daughters to carry out these roles in much the same way they had relied on their

spouses. Emily even stated that at times where she and her brother would have an argument, both would state their point of view and, most often, Emily's father would side with her. Emily said that her father would try to avoid dealing with problems between the siblings and would leave the job of sorting things out essentially up to Emily. This shifted Emily's relationship with her younger brother, as he did not like her behaving as if she were a parent to him. However, other daughters who described a motherly relationship with younger siblings spoke of a positive relationship with them, in which younger siblings relied on older ones in much the same way they would have relied on a parent. The writings of Oktay (2004) support this finding:

The oldest daughter...may have tried to take on some of mother's roles, "mothering" her younger siblings. If the siblings accepted her mothering, it may have proved to be a satisfying yet burdensome role...In some cases, the mothering gestures were rejected, leaving the daughter feeling like a failure, helpless to prevent the family from falling apart. (p.29)

A number of daughters acknowledged feelings of upset and disappointment around their attempts to carry out motherly roles in the same way that their mothers did, as they viewed these attempts as unsuccessful. Raphael (1983) presented a similar finding: she said that some adolescents may feel that this role provides them with "a sense of usefulness and a positive role in the face of helplessness. But [she] may have great doubts about [her] ability to fill such needs when [she] feels so childlike and

frightened [herself]" (p.151). These feelings of not being able to live up to the roles of the deceased parent may have a negative influence on their self-esteem.

Prior to the death, mothers tended to be the parent who knew more about the children's day-to-day life and were more involved in their daily activities, such as school or other organized events. Lewis and Lippman (2004) also noted that mothers have traditionally been the ones "responsible for running the household" (p.11). As such, when a mother passed away, surviving fathers were described to feel more of a loss when trying to take over the daily parental tasks, in which case oldest daughters stepped in. Some described that they "stepped up" to these responsibilities, whereas other described that it was more of an expectation of them by their family. This expectation that the oldest female would take on additional parenting responsibilities did not seem to be as apparent for older male siblings. The fact that these women in many ways mothered their younger siblings is interesting, since the task of mothering is one that has been socially constructed as women's work.

Many authors have outlined mothering as the expectation that women will display nurturing and caring qualities towards other people (Arendell, 2000; Forcey, 1994; Grimshaw, 1986). Whether or not a woman actually has children of her own, it is often assumed by society that she will utilize these qualities to care for others, for these women, their younger siblings. Further, it has been noted that the task of mothering has often prevented women from achieving goals of their own and that the responsibility of mothering can be burdensome (Grimshaw, 1986; Oberman & Josselson, 1994). Hays (1996) describes motherhood as being time-consuming, child-centered, and emotionally involving. Such responsibility can be large and

overwhelming for a woman at any age, let alone an adolescent. By nature of being female, it seems that there is an expectation that the oldest daughter will mother younger siblings after a mother is lost.

The act of mothering has also been described as the devotion of oneself to the care of others. In many ways, this devotion is self-sacrificing and focused on needs other than those of the individual herself (Grimshaw, 1986). A number of the eldest daughters interviewed for this study described a feeling that their lives had become devoted to the family and their younger siblings following the death of their parents. In some ways, this could be seen as an impingement on their identity development but can also be understood as a factor in shaping who these women ultimately became. McMahon (1995) noted that the act of mothering reinforces a woman's gender identity, and Forcey (1994) describes mothering as one of the primary avenues through which women develop their identities.

For adolescents whose mothers had been ill for a period of time before the death, some of these parental responsibilities had already been taught and then given to them (Christ, 2000). For example, Emily talked about the way her mother did "fast-forward" parenting with her, teaching her about adult issues like sex and menstruation before she was really ready because her mother knew that she would not be around at the time that these issues came up for Emily. Lisa also talked about the way her mother had taught and role modeled to her how to take care of the family and the house. In these examples, it was likely that their mothers worried about not being able to be there to teach their daughters about these aspects of life when they were at the appropriate age and stage and so taught them before they passed away. For other

daughters, though they were not mothers, it is likely that they “learn[ed] to think maternally...because they were daughters” (Grimshaw, 1986).

All of the women interviewed for this research study stated that they felt an increase in household chore responsibilities after the death. This finding is supported by Shapiro (1994), as she noted that children who experience the death of a parent will step into new roles to maintain family stability, including added household responsibility. They related that some of these added responsibilities were taken on through their own initiative and desire to help out and some were an expectation. For example, Claire said that she became responsible for a lot of the cooking after her father died and, even at times when she did not feel like cooking, it was expected by her mother and sister that she would prepare the family meals. Many of the chore responsibilities that were taken on by the women after the death were gender specific (Baxter & Stuart, 1999; Bagnoli, 2003; Chase, 1999; Oktay, 2004). For example, the women spoke about their brothers having to learn chores like cleaning the eavestroughs, while they had to do the family laundry. Some daughters, whose parents died suddenly, said that they felt that the switch came almost overnight and they were thrown into the new responsibilities immediately.

Remarriage was another issue following the death, particularly for eldest daughters whose mothers had died. Oftentimes, the daughters found this new relationship to be too quick a transition. It could be that they felt their role as the female head of house was threatened, or perhaps they were upset that their surviving parent had moved on and “replaced” the deceased. Lewis and Lippman (2004) described this introduction of a new family member: “the children resent not only the

replacement of the mother but may also dislike the different habits, rules, and household management of the caretaker, who is seen as an intruder” (p.13). An exception to this was Dalia, as she described her younger sister as having more difficulty with her father’s new relationship. This is likely because Dalia was not living at home at the time, and Dalia said that it was almost as if her sister’s place had been replaced in the home. Previous authors have noted that the introduction of a housekeeper or the remarriage of the surviving parent, if introduced too soon, can be upsetting for the adolescent (Baxter & Stuart, 1999; Lewis & Lippman, 2004).

Youngest Daughters

As described above for eldest daughters, youngest daughters also experienced a change in their relationship with their surviving parent following the death. Harris (1995) writes about a “pseudofriendship” that develops between the child or young adolescent and surviving parent that “is not based on mutuality or reciprocity or shared interests, rather it is based on the child’s implicit knowledge that his or her survival depends exclusively on the remaining parent” (p.70). As such, Harris (1995) writes that the child will attempt to care for the surviving parent however she can, so as not to risk an unhappy caretaker. In this study, youngest daughters seemed to feel a greater responsibility for being the happy one in the family so that the seriousness of the death would not be all-consuming for the other family members. Silverman (2000) also noted that children may be resistant to share their feelings of grief in an effort not to burden their surviving parents. Four out of the five youngest daughters described themselves as the light-hearted ones within the family that could be counted on to cheer people up. Literature pertaining to birth order roles also tends to

characterize youngest children as cheerful (Richardson & Richardson, 1990; Toman, 1993).

Sarah provides a case example of how a new relationship can develop with a surviving parent after the death: she saved all of her available energy to be positive and upbeat around her father at home, since his grief had pushed him into a state of depression. Though she reflected now that her efforts did not make much difference on her father's mental state, she could not let herself stop trying to improve his mood. She said that her mother was able to keep her father sane and moderate his moods; she tried to do the same thing but became upset when she felt unable to help her father in the way that her mother would have. She spoke about the way that his continually depressed mood was a source of anxiety for her. She worried tremendously about his mental health and experienced extreme anxiety around the possibility of her own death, not for what it would do to her, but rather feared that her father would be unable to cope with another loss. This is a large burden for an adolescent to take on. Shapiro (1994) noted that children will often monitor their emotions after the death in response to what they feel the surviving parent is capable of handling. Tyson-Rawson (1996) also noted that "children talk more about their feelings regarding the loss when the surviving parent is female," (p.168) which may have been a factor in Sarah's inability to talk to her father about her emotions.

Youngest children have been described as carrying the emotional expressiveness for the family (Shapiro, 1994). In this study, youngest daughters described themselves as being more interested in talking about the death than their siblings. Younger siblings tended to turn to older ones for advice, guidance, and

assistance with problem solving. Erin said that she feels as though she has shaped many of her younger sister's world views that otherwise would have been shaped by their mother. Erin said that she and her sister now talk about their mother and what she may have thought about things. In this way, Erin has become a sort of "family historian" (Oktay, 2004; Edelman, 2006). Other daughters also spoke about preserving a memory of the deceased through their siblings. By being able to speak with their siblings about their memories, this appeared to help the daughters and their siblings maintain a connection to the deceased.

Common Themes Across All Birth Orders

For most of the daughters, the death of one parent meant that the values, attitudes, and beliefs of the surviving parent tended to guide the family. Some daughters noticed a change in that there was less of a balance between two viewpoints (mother's and father's) and the family tended to move toward what the surviving parent deemed to be appropriate and acceptable for the family and children. Miya, a middle child, provides an example of this: she felt that her father's death allowed her to explore different opportunities than she would have, had he been alive. She acknowledged that the lack of money due to the death meant that she could not complete her undergraduate degree at her university of choice but rather had to live at home for her last two years. However, she stated that if her father had been alive, he would have emphasized practicality in her academics and career choice and would not have allowed her to take a year to travel and try out different career paths.

It was interesting that most of the women who spoke about financial strain and a feeling that they needed to support themselves were part of families in which a

father died. It seemed that the death heightened their awareness of financial responsibility and guided them in their future decisions, for example, how they chose to finance their university education. This may be due to the typical gender roles that characterize men as being the “breadwinners” and the ones who support the family financially. Because of the parent’s death, this financial piece became particularly important for these women and may not have happened had the parent been alive. Tyson-Rawson (1996) made a statement with regard to financial responsibility that indicated, “Role reallocation within the family is required when the death of a parent occurs. Not only must other members take on the responsibility of providing for the family financially...” (p.165). This statement, however, does not address which members take on this responsibility or how it is reflected in the family unit and the meaning that it holds for family members. However, she did go on to note that financial difficulties might be more apparent for adolescents who come from families in which fathers died.

Many women spoke about how they had to “grow up fast” and became responsible for things that they had not been responsible for before the death. Others said that they felt different from their friends at this time that did not have the same worries. Silverman’s (2000) work supports this finding in which it is noted that, “Bereaved children often talk about feeling older than their peers...One of the stresses that they experience at this time is the lack of understanding by their peers that something has changed in them” (p.33). Other authors have also noted that adolescents who have experienced the death of a parent tend to have an increased level of maturity (Fleming & Balmer, 1996; Lewis & Lippman, 2004; Tyson-Rawson,

1996). The women seemed to grow in their independence and self-sufficiency after the death and required less direction from a parental figure. They quickly learned this self-sufficiency when they realized that the support that they had received living in a two-parent household was no longer there. For example, Betty felt that she needed to get a job shortly after her father died, since she did not want her mother to have to worry about supporting her social activities when she was a teenager. Kate, Molly, and Miya described their university choice was based on what they could finance themselves.

It has been noted that adolescents who experience the death of a parent often become more interpersonally and emotionally mature than their peers (Balk, 1996; Balk & Corr, 2001; Cragg & Berman, 1990; Fleming & Balmer, 1996; Silverman, 2000; Tyson-Rawson, 1996). All of the women interviewed spoke of a newfound strength and maturity following the death. They said that they felt different from their peers, as they had been through much more than their peers at that particular point in time. In essence, their loss forced them to “grow up” and confront the difficult reality of parental death.

A number of the women of all of the birth orders stated that, now, many of their friends feel able to confide in them because their experience dealing with loss has increased their ability to cope with other difficult things and provide support in trying situations. This has been noted because the maturity that developed for the adolescents within the family dynamic appeared to also be applied to relationships outside of their families. Some authors have noted that individuals who lost a parent in their adolescence have increased development in empathy (Balk, 1996; Balk &

Corr, 2001; Cragg & Berman, 1990; Fleming & Balmer, 1996; Tyson-Rawson, 1996).

The majority of the women, and particularly those who took a motherly role in the household, stated that they felt happy that they were able to help people through difficult situations, particularly death, and wanted others to know their strength. Other women stated that they tended to keep their experience of the death to themselves and still found it difficult to cope with death. These women, however, also stated that they took a care giving and/or listener role in many of their relationships outside of the family.

Implications for Practice

This research can help social work practitioners to further their understanding regarding the inevitable shifts in the family system after the death of a parent and how this loss can have an impact on the lives of the adolescents. An important factor that should be considered when working with families, adolescents and children who have experienced the loss of a parent is the impact of this loss on the family dynamic and family functioning. As described by the participants, the loss of one of their parents had a large impact on their lives at the time of the death and has continued throughout the years following.

Some things to consider when working with bereaved individuals and families may be the role that siblings can play with each other in helping to remember the deceased. As well, a practitioner may be able to help adolescents understand the need that they may feel to be like the deceased parent. A therapist may want to help the family to balance the new roles and responsibilities between its members, so that one does not feel burdened with responsibility with no way out and no one to talk to.

Surviving parents may benefit from individual therapy or a support group so that they are able to speak about their feelings with other adults, when they no longer have their spouses to talk to. Adolescents can be supported in their developing independence by connecting them with community resources, such as loan programs or skill-building programs.

Conclusion

The findings of these qualitative interviews suggest that certain factors in each case will have uniquely affected how the death impacted on the adolescent. For example, the nature of the woman's relationship with the deceased and surviving parents, whether it was the mother or father that died, the cause of the death, the nature of their relationships with their siblings, and cultural factors. As well, the nature of their parents' relationships also played a role. Due to the small numbers of participants in each birth order, it was difficult to make definitive statements for each birth order, but rather patterns could be identified within each group.

Many of the findings in this study support and build on concepts identified by other authors. However, the description provided by the interviews provides insight as to the unique and individual experiences of these women. One new theme that emerged from the data that has not been discussed in the literature is the role that siblings can play in helping to preserve a memory of the deceased. This may take the form of sharing stories about the deceased, acting like the deceased, or passing along the wisdom of the deceased. It has been noted in the literature that maintaining a connection to the deceased is important in coping with the loss (Klass, Silverman, &

Nickman, 1996), and this research indicates that siblings can be instrumental in creating and sustaining this connection.

Another finding that was further developed in this research was the need that the individuals described for financial independence from their surviving parent, particularly their mothers. Tyson-Rawson (1996), in her chapter "Adolescent Responses to the Death of a Parent," quoted one young woman who described having to work through school due to low family income (p.166). However, this financial strain was not expanded upon to describe any life choices or decisions that were affected by this, such as choice of school or feasibility of going on trips.

In interpreting the results, there are a number of other factors that should be considered that likely affected each woman's experience of parental loss. These include the age of the individual at the time of the death, the age of the siblings at the time of the death and the number of years between them, and the gender and number of siblings. The financial situation and stability of the family prior to the death would also play a factor in the women's feeling of uncertainty with regard to family finances following the death. As well, diversity issues may also be a factor, in cases where adolescents were raised with varying cultures and norms. A topic that could be further explored would be the experience of individuals who were raised by parents of the same sex and then lost a parent.

Future research on birth order and role changes that focused on males would be complementary to this study, as some of the roles may be similar, whereas other roles may be different based on birth order and gender, among other factors. Currently, there is very little research on males who experience the loss of a parent

during adolescence, which may be attributed to less of an interest in sharing their experience as compared to females. As well, it may be useful for researchers and practitioners to have larger samples of each birth order or to separate the sample based on the gender of the parent that died. In particular, further research into the experience of middle children would broaden the literature on parental loss. Another interesting avenue to pursue would be the experience of individuals who experienced parental separation or divorce and then the subsequent death of one parent to determine the impact of this double loss.

This study supports a number of concepts that have been presented in past literature pertaining to adolescent bereavement and expands upon these ideas. The qualitative interviews that were conducted for the purposes of this study allowed for the participants to share their unique stories and describe what the loss of their parent was like for them. Their narratives will undoubtedly be helpful to practitioners that work with bereaved individuals and families, as the data not only provides information about the role changes that may occur for female adolescents after parental death but also details the impact of this change on her life in general.

For me, I feel that the loss of my father has definitely had an impact on the person that I am today and the life decisions that I have made. In researching this topic and interviewing the women who so graciously volunteered their time for this study, I have been able to further my own understanding of grief and the meaning it holds for those affected by parental loss. As well, I have become more comfortable with the process in which one deals with the life changes that occur as a result of such a loss. As such, this experience will be (and in fact already has been) beneficial to me

as I continue to practice in the social work field, and I hope that other practitioners can feel equally inspired in the work that they do.

Appendix A

Experiences with the Loss of a Parent

**Faculty of Social Work
Wilfrid Laurier University**

I am interested in meeting with you so that you can help me to understand *role changes in your family following the death of a parent*.

I am looking for female volunteers who experienced the death of a parent between the ages of 11 and 18 years old.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that would be approximately one and a half hours in length.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Jennifer Evans
Faculty of Social Work
at
(519) 504-1859 or
Email: *evan1145@wlu.ca*

This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, the Research Ethics Board, University of Guelph, and the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo.

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Appendix B

EXPERIENCES WITH THE LOSS OF A PARENT

Faculty of Social Work

Wilfrid Laurier University

I am interested in meeting with you so that you can help me to understand *role changes in your family following the death of a parent*.

I am looking for female volunteers who experienced the death of a parent when they were between the ages of 11 and 18 years old.

As a participant in this study, you would be asked to take part in a one-on-one interview with the researcher that would be approximately one and a half hours in length.

For more information about this study, or to volunteer for this study, please contact:

Jennifer Evans
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This study has been reviewed by, and received ethics clearance through, the Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, the Research Ethics Board, University of Guelph, and the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo.

Appendix C

**WILFRID LAURIER UNIVERSITY
INFORMED CONSENT STATEMENT****Role Changes and Birth Order in Female Adolescent
Bereavement**

Principal Investigator: Jennifer Evans BA (evan1145@wlu.ca)

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Cheryl-Anne Cait Ph.D. (ccait@wlu.ca)

You are invited to participate in a research study. The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of parental death in adolescence on role changes for females, with specific regard to birth order.

INFORMATION

For this study, you will be asked to participate in one interview that will be approximately one and a half hours in length. The focus of the interview will be the death of your parent during adolescence and family roles. The interview will be structured like a conversation, so that you can describe, in your own words, what your experience of losing a parent was like for you in adolescence. By agreeing to participate in this study, I am also asking that you agree to be contacted after the interview process if I need additional information.

Participants selected for the study will be females over the age of 18 who experienced the death of a parent between the ages of 11 and 18 years old. At the time of the death, participants must have been living with both parents in the family home. For this study, 20 participants will be interviewed. Each interview will be tape-recorded and then fully transcribed by the researcher.

RISKS

One risk that may be associated with participation in this study is that the subject matter may bring up a number of emotions for you. As such, you are able to decline to answer any question or withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw, you can have the data you have provided up to that point included in the study, returned to you, or destroyed immediately. We may also explore available resources that might be helpful to you.

BENEFITS

One benefit that may be associated with participation in this study is that some people find it helpful to discuss their experience with others and reflect on the loss of a parent during adolescence. As well, others may benefit from hearing your story and that can be very validating for people.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Information that you provide for this study, including all tapes and transcriptions, will be kept confidential to myself and Dr. Cait. All of the information that you provide in the interview will be kept in a secure location and no one will have access to any information without your permission. Once transcribed, this audio data will be destroyed. Transcriptions will not include any identifying information and will be destroyed once the research has been completed. In any publication or public statement based on the study, which

may include quotations, all names or other potentially identifying information will be omitted or changed.

CONTACT

If you have questions at any time about the study, you may contact the researcher, Jennifer Evans, at evan1145@wlu.ca, and (519) 883-9799. This project has been reviewed and approved by the University Research Ethics Board at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you feel you have not been treated according to the descriptions in this form, or your rights as a participant in research have been violated during the course of this project, you may contact Dr. Bill Marr, Chair, Research Ethics Board, Wilfrid Laurier University, (519) 884-0710, extension 2468. This research has also been reviewed by and received ethics clearance through the Office of Research Ethics, University of Waterloo. If concerns such as those noted above arise, participants may contact Dr. Susan Sykes via email (ssykes@uwaterloo.ca) or phone (888-4567 ext.6005).

PARTICIPATION

Your participation in this study is voluntary; you may decline to participate without penalty. If you decide to participate, you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty and without loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you withdraw from the study before data collection is completed, you may choose to contribute the data that you have provided up to that point in the study. Alternatively, you may choose to have your data returned to you or destroyed. You have the right not to answer any question(s) you choose.

FEEDBACK AND PUBLICATION

The results of this research will be used to write a thesis as part of the degree requirements for the Masters of Social Work program at Wilfrid Laurier University. If you would like to receive a written summary of the results at the conclusion of the study in approximately April 2007, you may inform the researcher of this at any time.

CONSENT

I have read the above information and have received a copy of this form. I agree to participate in this study.

- By checking this box, I indicate my agreement that the interview will be tape-recorded and used for the purposes of the research.

Participant's signature _____ Date _____

Investigator's signature _____ Date _____

Appendix D

Interview Guide (as in flexible method research, it is possible to make changes to the guide as the research progresses)

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

1. Current age:
2. Age at parent's death:
3. University attending? Position at university?
4. How did you happen to come to this university?
5. What are you majoring in?
6. Where are you from? (area of origin)
7. How would you identify racially/ethnically?
8. Religious affiliation?
9. Which parent died: mother/father?
10. Date and cause of the death:
11. Parent's age at death:
12. Was this your first experience with someone close who died? If not, who else who you've been close to has died?

FAMILY DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

(complete family genogram with participant)

1. Who else is in your family and what are their ages?
2. At the time of death, how old were they and were they living at home?
3. Mother's name and age?
4. Was she your birth/biological mother?
5. Was she married before?

6. What was your mother/father's level of education? Did she/he work outside if the home?
7. Father's name and age?
8. Was he your birth/biological father?
9. Was he previously married?
10. Has your surviving parent remarried since the death?
11. Parents' religious affiliation?

CIRCUMSTANCES OF THE DEATH AND RELATED EVENTS

1. Can you tell me about your parent's death?

Was the death anticipated or sudden?

If the death was anticipated and your parent was ill over a long period of time, were you involved in the care giving process?

Where were you when you found out?

How did you find out about the death?

Who told you?

2. How did you react when you found out?

Reaction of the surviving parent?

Was s/he comforting?

Reaction of brothers/sisters?

3. What do you remember most about the time of the death? (when you found out and the time right afterwards)

Specific events you remember (funeral, wake)?

Feelings, thoughts, behaviour (how you acted)?

Did you want to talk about the death? If so, who did you talk to about the death?

4. Anything else that you think is important around this time when you found out about the death?

Any other influences (cultural, racial, ethnic, sexual orientation) that have effected your understanding of the death?

FAMILIAL FACTORS

Parental Description

5. Can you tell me what your mother and father are (were) like? Has this changed since the death? Since you entered university? How so?

What was important to her/him?

What did s/he like to do?

What were some of his/her values/beliefs?

How did your parents get along?

6. Can you tell me what your brothers and sisters are like? Has this changed since the death? Since you entered university? How so?

What was important to her/him?

What did s/he like to do?

What were some of his/her values/beliefs?

How did you and your siblings get along?

FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS

7. Who was most important in raising you? (before death, after death, and at present)

Who else was important to you in your family when you were growing up?

If you had a problem, who would you go talk to in your family?

Which of these people did you most want to be like? Have you become like any one of them in any way? Are you a product of your family and how are you different? What is your position in the family?

Other people (in or outside of the family) who have had the most influence on your life and who you are today?

Cultural influences on your life and who you are (gender, class, race/ethnicity...)

8. What was (is) your relationship like with your mother/father before the death and after the death (for surviving parent)?

Were you close to your mother/father? How so?

Could you talk to them about personal matters? Academic/task oriented matters?

Did you disagree with him/her? If so, how would you resolve the disagreements?

Did you do activities with them? If so, what?

What role do you think your parent has played in who you are?

9. What was (is) your relationship like with your siblings before the death, after the death and since college?

Were you close to your brother/sister? How so?

Could you talk to them about personal matters? Academic/task oriented matters?

Did you disagree with him/her? If so, how would you resolve the disagreements?

Did you do activities with them? If so, what?

What role do you think your siblings (or lack thereof) have played in who you are?

FAMILIAL ROLES

10. How would you describe your family to others?

What are three words to describe yourself, your parents, each of your siblings?

11. How do you understand your role in the family (before and after the death)?

Were you closer to one parent than the other?

How did you act?

Where did you spend most of your time? At home? With friends? In activities?

What role did you play with your siblings (e.g. caretaker, baby) and with your parents (e.g. supportive, focus of their attention)?

12. How do you understand your surviving parent's role in the family (before and after the death)?

What kinds of things was s/he responsible for?

What changes did you notice after the death?

13. How do you understand your deceased parent's role in the family (before and after the death)?

What kinds of things was s/he responsible for (emotional expressiveness, situational matrimony)?

What changes did you notice after the death?

What was missing? What space needed to be filled?

14. How do you understand your sibling's role in the family (before and after the death)?

What kinds of things was s/he responsible for?

What changes did you notice after the death?

15. How do you feel that a change in roles following the death affected who you are today?

Has your outlook on life changed? How so?

Has it influenced the choices you have made in terms of your education or career?

16. How do you feel that a change in roles affected the relationships within your family (before and after the death and now)?

Your relationship with your surviving parent?

Your relationships with your siblings?

17. How do you feel that a change in roles has affected your relationships outside your family?

Your relationships with friends?

Your relationships with colleagues, supervisors, co-workers?

18. Is there something I haven't asked or something that we have not discussed when you think of how your parent's death has affected who you are?

Appendix E

Bereavement Resources

Wilfrid Laurier University Counselling Services
(519) 884-0710 x2338

University of Waterloo Counselling Services
(519) 888-4567 x2655

University of Guelph Counselling Services
(519) 824-4120 x53244

K-W Counselling
(519) 884-0000

Catholic Family Counselling Centre
(519) 743-6333

Guelph Community Mental Health Clinic
(519) 821-2060

Guelph Community Mental Health Centre
(519) 821-5363

Bereaved Families Online
www.bereavedfamilies.net

Books:

Motherless Daughters by Hope Edelman
The Loss that is Forever by Maxine Harris

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