THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL LOSS THROUGHOUT ADOLESCENT STAGES OF
DEVELOPMENT

by

JADE B. SPIELMAN

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Major Professor
Anthony P. Jurich, Ph.D.

Abstract

Throughout this report, I focused on the effects that the loss of a parent has on an adolescent during the various stages of adolescent development.   Drawing upon research already completed on divorce during adolescence, I speculated on the similarities and differences between losing a parent through divorce or death during the adolescent stages of development.   Loss by any means is tragic and life altering. However, as I attempted to illustrate, it was even more defining when encountered during the period of adolescence.

Table of Contents

Dedication

My mother, my best friend, and my confidant is the person who lies at the root of my enthusiasm for this subject. I always wanted to be just like my mom. From the very first memory I have, I remember wanting to be just like her because she was successful at everything she did. My mom was a real estate agent for Century 21 Realty and one of the top-producing agents. She wanted more and became a broker, opening up her own real estate office, "A Perfect House Realty". A Perfect House became one of the largest real estate offices in Iowa; reason being that my mom was phenomenal. She was not only a businesswoman but a businesswoman who cared about not just the business but her customers as well. To my mom, being able to help a couple or a family find the PERFECT home for them was not only her job; it was her zeal in life. Her passion shined through in her work, illustrated by her success. She was proud of what she did but only when a customer got exactly what they needed and wanted…their *perfect home*.

Five years ago, my mom was taken away from my family through a tragic car accident. Our family was put to the test together. We passed…and then we failed…and then we passed…and on and on. Witnessing first hand how my family could be affected by a tragic loss fueled my fire to work within the field of grief and bereavement. In a sense, I feel that the loss of my best friend and mother, made me who I am today, and brought me to where I am. It was watching her enthusiasm and passion throughout life with her work and our family that made me appreciate the importance of being passionate about your work. Though not here with us physically, my mom has found her *perfect home,* just as she deserved. However, she remains

with me both professionally and personally, reminding me that without passion, you are without

victory.

Acknowledgements

CHAPTER 1 - Introduction

Case Study

To begin, I would like to use the words from an adolescent herself, Kayla. In both my personal and professional life, I have learned much from the words and experiences of adolescents and it my personal belief that only someone who has had the experience for themselves can truly capture the depth of the incident in words.

"I was 12 years old when my first boyfriend broke up with me. I remember that day like it was yesterday. June 27, 2002. It started out just like any other lazy summer day. I waved goodbye to my mom that morning as she backed out of the driveway. Little did I know that it would be the last time I waved goodbye to my mom. Later that day, my mom's little white neon collided with an eighteen-year-old driver. The driver walked away. Later that day, when I arrived at the hospital with my Grandma, the doctors told us that mom was in surgery and that they were doing all they could. "It's ok", I thought, people get in car accidents all the time. It will be fine. Minutes later the doctors came to our private waiting room. I will always remember the look on that doctor's face when he told us that she fought hard but that she was just hurt too badly. "She didn't make it", they said. 'We just couldn't save her…'

This could not be true! It was a nightmare and I was going to wake up any moment. There was no way this could happen to me. The doctors led me into the room to say goodbye to her. The sight of my mom lying there was overwhelming. I kissed her cheek and her hand, half expecting her eyes to flutter open at my touch, bringing us all back to reality. But that didn't happen. I looked at my Dad, who had finally arrived. His face screamed a type of grief that one has when they realize their wife, the person they were meant to spend forever with, was gone.

As for me, I didn't even get to tell her about the break up. There was a lot I would not get to share now.

I'm sixteen years old now. It's been almost five years and I still get the same looks from people, the same comments like, "Oh honey, hang in there", from people I don't even know. I still shudder at the sight or even just the mention of a car accident. And I still cry at the happiest and saddest times, when all I need is for her to be there. I went to my first prom this year. She wasn't there. I have one more year before college. She can't help me choose my school and she can't come to my high school graduation. She is not here physically….but I know she is with me everyday."

Adolescent Demographics

As I begin, it is important to ask the question of, "what is adolescence?" What is this time period of being an "adolescent" or a "teenager"? This is where it starts to get tricky. The term 'adolescence' is derived from the Latin room of 'adolescentia', which is the process or condition of growing up. The modern use of the word 'adolescence' is the period in the life cycle between childhood and adulthood. It is the in-between period.

Adolescents encounter death. They may encounter death involving grandparents and parents; neighbors, teachers, and other adults; siblings; and friends; pets and other animals; celebrities and cultural heroes with whom they identify; and even in some cases their own children. Ewalt and Perkins (1979), as cited in Corr and Balk (1996), stated "indeed, adolescence may be the first time in the history of human life span in which an individual can experience the full range of possible deaths including members of older, same, and younger generations, along with one's own offspring" (p. 22). However, at the same time, adolescents believe that they are invincible. Adolescents commonly operate with the motto, "it can't happen to me" (Corr &

Balk, 1996). This is extremely similar to how Kayla was thinking in the case example above.

"This type of thing would never happen to me." How could it? Adolescents are invincible.

Bereavement is not a regular phase of development in adolescent life. The young person

encounters normal environmental and physiological demands, while coping with the death of a

parent calls for new skills to be adapted or developed (Rask, Kaunonen, & Paunonen-Ilmonen,

2002). Unfortunately, at any time in the United States, as many as 1.5 million children and

teenagers are coping with the death of a parent (Tenenbaum, 1997). In the United States each

year, approximately 4% of children or adolescents under the age of 15 suffer the loss of a parent

through death (Pfeffer, 2000). In addition, in Western countries, approximately 4% of children

will experience the death of one of their parents by the age of 18 (Mehlam, Walker, Shear &

Brent, 2007).

Within the bereavement literature, there has been a greater focus on parental responses to

the death of a child or on adult loss of a spouse (Fleming & Balmer, 1996, as cited in Corr &

Balk, 1996). David Balk (1991) explains that it is only quite recently that there has been

persistent attention paid to bereavement during adolescence as a serious life crisis. "The death of

a parent means growing up and understanding that life is more than just fun and games" (Corr &

Balk, 1996).   The adolescent learns to deal with not only the everyday difficulties of this stage

of life but also the new challenges that he or she will face in regards to coping with this

significant loss (Corr & Balk, 1996).

Death-related tensions

Noppe and Noppe (1996), as cited in Nolen-Hoeksema and Larson (1999), offered some

speculations on death-related tensions that arise from biological, cognitive, social, and emotional

factors. All of these tensions will influence an adolescent's understanding of death. The first

tension is a result of very rapid biological maturation and sexual development. An adolescent becomes aware of the loss of their, perhaps, simpler childhood. This may mean becoming aware of the fact that physical decline or accidents are inevitable and will ultimately lead to their own death and the death of others (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). This could cause two possibilities, in which adolescents may engage in extremely risky behavior because they think life is too short, or, in contrast, they may act extremely cautiously, now that they have become aware that perhaps they are not invincible.

The second tension is that adolescents' cognitive maturation enhances their ability to think about the future, which may include positive and negative components about both life and death. For an adolescent to form their own identity or reevaluate their parental values, they must embrace the inevitability of death, confronting the fact that there are just some aspects in life that are out of their control. I imagine this would be difficult for an adolescent, since they live their lives in hopes to be totally in control and invincible (Nolen-Hoeksema & Larson, 1999).

Another tension is created when social relationships within the family and among their peers change. This change represents growth and opportunity; however, it also represents a series of "lost" relationships. The adolescent is forced to develop a social life outside of his or her family, which causes the fear of being socially isolated. If their peers ostracize them, an adolescent may feel alone at both home and outside of the home, leaving them alone and without resources. Finally, the last, is the tension of vacillating between separation and individuation. The death of a parent adds so much tension and added stress to an adolescent's life. It has been observed that adolescents' feelings about development and death are often intertwined and that achieving autonomy, with everything it encompasses, may threaten an adolescent's self-esteem

and life purpose (Hoeksema & Larson, 1999). For this adolescent, life has lost its stability and certainty.

Tasks

Parents play an important role in defining what type of person an adolescent is and what type of person they will be. When a parent dies, an adolescent's life will change forever (Allen, 2002). Beasley and Beasley (2002), as cited in Allen (2002), explain that there is already grief occurring in an adolescent's life when they lose a parent. "Adolescent's are already going through a kind of bereavement, losing parts of themselves and the people around them as bodies, personalities and through changes in relationships. A parent's death at the same time is a double blow; an additional loss and shock at a time of considerable change" (p. 62). It is the parents whose attitudes, beliefs, and actions help to gauge an adolescent's place in the world. Of course, the adolescent is trying to develop his or her own attitudes, values, and beliefs. However, though adolescents may not like to admit it, the starting ground lays in their parents. Losing one parent, or even both, could have lasting effects.

For many adolescents or teenagers, growing up and merging into the world of adulthood is hard enough. The many developmental and identity formation tasks are, even under the best circumstances, not experienced without challenges. Coping with puberty, peer groups, parents, school pressures, while simultaneously searching for their own identity are among these many difficult tasks (Jurich & Jones, 1983). This identity formation is such a crucial task of adolescence because the adolescent does not yet have a place of his or her own. They must dream of what they want while meeting the requirements of others. An adolescent must carry out simultaneous role changes, including new self-responsibilities in school, work, career, or vocational choice, more intimate love relationships, marriage, and, in some cases, parenthood

(Josselson, 1987). Adolescents are experiencing a tumultuous time of life, without the extra stressors that may come into play with the loss of a parent.

Adolescents who have faced the death of a parent are forced to grow up and mature more quickly than their peers, who have not experienced a similar loss. They may be forced to accept new household responsibilities, such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, taking care of a younger sibling, or getting an after-school job. These responsibilities compound a life that was already hectic enough with homework, music, or other after school activities. Beasley and Beasley (2002) believe that "adolescents may be more prone to negative consequences of bereavement because, unlike children, they are no longer protected psychologically by immature cognitive skills and concrete thinking that could buffer them from the full impact of bereavement" (Allen, 2002, p. 63). Not only does the adolescent now possess more of these skills but they are still learning how to make use of these skills in their everyday life to their advantage.

Tyson-Rawson (1996), as cited in the Handbook of Adolescent Death and Bereavement (1996), explains that adolescence is a relational world with the main themes being separation from and connection to others. As adolescents are beginning to learn more about who they are, each is attempting to gain acceptance and belonging with peers, increasing a sense of connection outside their home. While making these connections outside the home, they are attempting to separate themselves from their parents. This goes along with the central tasks, which include the establishment of an independent self-identity and the development of mature, intimate relationships with others. This process may be complicated when the death of a parent occurs. Tyson-Rawson (1996) states, "When the death of a parent occurs, the intricate web of relationship that has been a source of stability, helping to define the self by contrast and continuity is broken" (p. 156). While the adolescent is preoccupied trying to learn who they are

6

and becoming their own person in the unstable world of their peers, their parents have always remained a constant source of stability. Now that stability is gone and their main source of continuity and constancy has vanished. Taking away this constant in their life will undoubtedly threaten their stability, and make life even more confusing to them than it had been.

This loss occurs during a stage of life for both the parent and the adolescent that goes against the norms of human life expectancy in our society. The culturally expected meaning of death no longer applies (Tyson-Rawson, 1996, as cited in Corr & Balk, 1996). The adolescent now has to cope with the death of a loved one, which calls for new skills and demands (Rask et. al., 2002). As Tyson-Rawson (1996) explains,

> "A parent's death during adolescence has been connected with seemingly
> paradoxical outcomes, such as impairment in the ability to commit to long-term
> relationships, as well as accelerated maturity, major depression, and an increased
> appreciation for the value of important relationships. It would be impossible to say that
> the experience of parent death leads to any single outcome. Rather, the experience of
> loss during this stage of the life cycle is unique to this period, and its outcome is
> isomorphic to the complexity and richness of adolescence itself." (pp. 156-157)

As I think this quote illustrates incredibly well, it is not necessary that the loss of a parent during adolescence is going to meet one outcome; it is that this time period is so turbulent already, that the challenges only become even more convoluted. For example, as in Kayla's case, when breaking up with a boyfriend might be a monumental event that you go home and cry to mom about, now becomes even bigger or more intense because the question is, "who do I go home and cry to now?" Another outcome may be that Kayla's breakup with her boyfriend may

slip into being inconsequential in the face of the overwhelming crisis of her mother's death. This is a perfect example of the systems theory concept of "multifinality".

Off-time Transitions

The death of a parent during the adolescent years of life is "off-time", or not normative. Corr & Balk (1996) explain that life-span psychologists have distinguished between normative life transitions and unanticipated events that call for coping mechanisms and present life crises. "A normative life transition is a turning point in individual development and is expected to occur at a certain time, in a certain relationship to other life events, with predictability, and to most if not all members of one's cohort" (p 5). For example, entering school at around age six would be a normative life transition in the United States. In the post-industrialized world, the death of a parent during adolescence is not a normative event (Corr & Balk, 1996).

Normative life transitions are usually described by developmental tasks. Adolescents must complete these tasks in order to navigate successfully the developmental tasks with which they are confronted. For example, Erickson, as cited in Muuss (1996), explains the task of identity verses identity confusion in adolescence. An adolescent must search for his or her own identity, while using their past, present, and future. If any of these times include the death of a parent, then how much more complicated would it be for him or her to complete this developmental task? While searching for his or her own identity, he or she will be detoured by the mourning process that must be completed with the death of a parent.

Corr & Balk (1996) explain that there is one thing that normative life transitions and unanticipated, traumatic life events have in common. Both present "dangerous opportunities". If these events are responded to well, then they may evoke growth and maturity. However, if they

8

are responded to poorly, they may cause harm and mal-development. Therefore, the death of an

individual's mother or father may threaten healthy resolution of his or her developmental tasks.

Adolescent bereavement shares some characteristics with both adult and childhood

responses to loss. For example, both children and adolescents are developing cognitively and

socially each day, which affects their grief, and mourning processes. Each one is already trying

to fit in socially at school and with friends. The death of a parent adds yet one more thing to

their full plates. However, it differs because of its increased affective intensity, which is a

product of the interaction of the loss and the developmental context in which it occurs (Meshot &

Leitner, 1993 as cited in Corr & Balk, 1996). Adolescents are already trying to make a new life

for themselves, without untimely death's making that new life in a world in which they had little

control. Tenenbaum concluded that adolescents are hit harder by the experience of death than an

adult because the higher the developmental level, the greater the capacity for a complete

normative mourning process (Tenenbaum, 1997). An adult, having already accomplished the

majority of his or her developmental tasks, has more coping skills tied to a more complete sense

of self, giving him or her greater developmental capability to mourn and grieve. Thus, the

younger the child at the time of death, the less effectively he or she would be able to move

through the mourning process. The younger the age, the more developmental tasks and roads

that are still left uncrossed, adding only more complications to the progression of grieving.

Adolescent Adjustment to loss

Fleming and Adolph (1986), as cited in Corr and Balk (1996), helped to describe

adolescent bereavement, combining both theories of adjustment to loss with theories of

adolescent ego development. For their theory, adolescence was described as the ages from 11 to

21. The main feature of their theoretical framework was to try and incorporate a comprehensive

theory of adolescent bereavement, using aspects from both adolescent development and grief

theory. Fleming and Adolph (1986) explain:

> During adolescence, the loss of a profound relationship—whether an internalized
> object or a person in the external world—may interfere in what seems to be the natural
> progression of intellectual-emotional-psychological "growing up." Changes that are
> normally expected may be averted, avoided, or may not even take place. Such an arrest
> of developmental unfolding may put the adolescent "on hold" in one phase, and thus
> inhibit the energy and skills necessary to meet subsequent phase-appropriate demands. A
> developmental arrest may also have the opposite effect, that is, of increasing the intensity
> of prior phase-specific behavior in a following phase. (pp.101-102)

This model is postulating that adjusting to the death of a significant person will be

determined by variables like the adolescent's developmental phase and the tasks with which he

or she is struggling at the time of the death (Corr & Balk, 1996). An adolescent who is in the

later stages of this phase, perhaps seventeen, may have completed more phases than a twelve

year old adolescent, thus fairing better through the grieving process.

Fleming and Adolph (1986) broke up the adolescence time period into three stages, with

differing tasks and conflicts that are to be mastered in each phase. The first stage includes ages

11-14, and emphasizes the task of emotional separation from parents and the conflict of

separation verses reunion. The second phase is ages 14-17 and includes the tasks of competency,

mastery, and control, and a conflict of independence verses dependence. The final stage, ages

17-21, involves tasks of intimacy and commitment and a conflict of closeness verses distance (as

cited in Corr & Balk, 1996). With all of these different tasks and conflicts occurring in the

different stages of adolescence, it seems that an adolescent at age 13 would experience the death of a parent very uniquely from an adolescent who experiences the death of a parent at age 17. It is for this reason that I think it is so important to look at the death of a parent during adolescence as unique to each age group.

Proposed Stages

Much of the research out there states that adolescence typically constitutes the time between the ages of 13 and 19, also known as the "teenage" years (Morin & Welsh 1996, Corr & Balk 1996). Adolescence seems to be explained as one big unified stage of time. However, I believe that the different ages of adolescence each vary from one another, especially in regards to dealing with parental death. How is it possible that a thirteen year old would react the same way to a parental death as an eighteen year old? Yes, perhaps they are both in an "adolescent stage". A thirteen year old may be experiencing their first menstrual cycle, while an eighteen year old may be preparing for their first day of college. These are two very different times of adolescence.

As Fleming and Adolph noted in their studies, one of the biggest dilemmas involves the definition of "adolescent". Haslam (1978) defined adolescence as children from age 10 to 19. Laufer (1980) described adolescence as the period from "puberty to about the age of 21". In addition, Hardt (1979) included the years of 13 to 26 years as the adolescent phase of life (As cited in Corr & Balk, 1996). Therefore, defining the period of adolescence is not concrete.

It is for this reason that I would like to use the stages of adolescence proposed by Jurich (1979), in his article postulating four stages of adolescence. These proposed stages include pre-adolescence, (approximately ten to thirteen years of age), early adolescence (approximately

11

thirteen to fifteen years), middle adolescence (approximately fifteen to seventeen years), and late adolescence (approximately ages eighteen years old and beyond).

Adolescence first begins with the stage known as pre-adolescence in which childhood is being left behind. Pre-adolescence typically constitutes the years between ten and thirteen and is explained as being a type of "no-man's" lands between childhood and adolescence. There is much unknown about this time, since the research primarily focuses on the following three stages of adolescence (Jurich, 1979).

The early adolescent stage typically includes the junior high school and early high school years, about thirteen to fifteen years old. In this stage, an early adolescent has usually finished their physical growth and is beginning to acquire a body image for himself or herself. For many parents, this stage of adolescence is the most wearisome, as peer groups become of greater importance as well. In middle adolescence, close friends and dating relationships become more significant in the adolescents' life. Middle adolescence occurs during the late high school years, usually between fifteen and seventeen years (Jurich, 1979).

In the last proposed stage, late adolescence, high school has ended and adult responsibilities are beginning. This typically includes ages eighteen and older and may include college students, graduate trainees, and young workers. In this stage, adolescents have begun to understand their parents' views better and are more tolerant of their views. It is also common in this stage for the parent-adolescent tensions and conflicts to subside (Jurich, 1979).

As I proceed throughout my paper, I will continue to explore the experiences of adolescents, who have lost a parent, in relation to these four stages. I would like to use these proposed stages of adolescence by Jurich (1979) to speculate how the affects of a loss of a parent during adolescence is either similar or different to parental divorce during adolescence, as

proposed by Jurich and Jones (1983). In addition, I will explore each stage of adolescence in greater detail and speculate how the death of a parent may affect different aspects of an adolescent's life depending on the stage he or she is in at the time of loss.

CHAPTER 2 - Stage Pre-adolescence (10-13)

*At age 12, Kayla was in the stage of preadolescence at the time of her mom's death. Her world was turned upside down in a matter of seconds. This was **her** mom. There were still so many questions that she had and still so many things she had left to go through…you know, girl things. She needed her mom. What was she supposed to do now? Nobody could even imagine what this feels like. Nobody could hurt as bad as she did. Kayla did not think about her dad who had lost a spouse but she did think about her older sister. Her older sister had always been her second mom but now it was just the two of them left for each other.*

Both divorce and death may offer detrimental circumstances to a young preadolescent who is already living in a world of transition and uncertainties. A "traditional" family may suddenly become overturned with one less parent or perhaps even two more new parents. Though divorce and death are two very different life events, there are indeed both similarities and differences to how a preadolescent will experience divorce and death. A few of these areas will be examined throughout this chapter in relation to aforementioned stage.

Pre-adolescence, the time where an individual is leaving his or her childhood and becomes ready to head into this tumultuous time they call adolescence. Typically including the years between ten and thirteen, it is a stage of adolescence that has been researched very little. Jurich (1979) has described this stage as a "no-mans land" between childhood and adolescence. This is an especially difficult time for both adolescents and their parents because adolescents have no control over the physical and psychological changes they are experiencing (Jurich, 1979). While new sexual characteristics are developing and the ability to think in more formal operations is emerging, preadolescents are experiencing a collision with their old and new selves, which causes new needs to emerge.

According to Sullivan's Interpersonal Theory of Adolescent Development, as cited in Muuss (1996), there are many new needs that emerge during preadolescence. The needs for interpersonal intimacy involve sharing of thoughts, feelings, and ideas with someone who is similar to him or her. For the first time, a preadolescent is experiencing genuine love, loyalty, intimacy, and opportunities for self-disclosure (Muuss, 1996). However, it is because of all these new needs, that preadolescents can also be very susceptible to loneliness. If they are not getting the intimacy and the newfound need for closeness met, then they feel extremely lonely. Imagine, in both death and divorce, how lonely a preadolescent could become. With divorce, he or she may get to still visit the non-custodial parent. However, with death there are no weekend or overnight visits.

At this point adolescents are seeing their family as a symbol of their childhood, which is trying to keep them from leaving their childhood roles or prevent them from not growing into their own person. Spending increasingly more time away from home and perhaps even choosing to rebel against the family is possible. This is most difficult for parents because they have to learn to readjust to this new preadolescent. A child, who once gave them unconditional love, respect, and obedience, is now a preadolescent who is not as free with these benefits (Jurich, 1979). They no longer have only these benefits to give to their parents but they have the need to distribute them among new peers and other relationships as well.

While body image, sexual functioning, and secondary sex characteristics are changing rapidly, this causes increased emotional outbursts and self-consciousness. Ten to thirteen year olds are not used to their changing body and they are unsure of how they are supposed to look or act. Pre-adolescents have neither the social skills nor the intellectual sophistication to deal with the new sexuality. Unbeknownst to the preadolescent, it is parents who actually help them adjust

to the new skills.   Unfortunately, a ten to thirteen year old is already confused about the relationship that they should have with their parents. He or she needs their love and understanding; however, he or she also wants to push them away so that he or she may form closer relationships with their peers (Jurich, 1979). This avoidance becomes a very paradoxical approach to dealing with the death of a parent because, while a preadolescent wants to push his or her parents away, at the same time, the remaining parent is the only parent left and this may cause an adolescent to want to draw closer to this parent. This paradox further complicates the crisis filled life of the adolescent.

For preadolescents, coping with the loss of a parent, social support systems; provide a number of important functions. Social support systems may include parents, peers, extended family, or social organizations. Some of these functions for the adolescent are as follows: (1) they act as a listening post to send messages about feelings, ideas, and decisions in an attempt to gauge the acceptance of emotional behavior, (2) they provide a sharing of loss to unburden one's self, (3) they may act as a replacement for severed relationships, (4) they offer sources of motivation to continue with one's responsibilities and a strengthening of the self-image, and (5) they help one review the relationship with the person that they lost (Langrad, 1986, p. 50). Many of these aspects of social support systems will be discussed in this chapter.

Jurich and Jones (1989) described how social support systems are such a major factor in determining how difficult the adjustment to divorce is for an adolescent. In comparison, Gray (1989), also explained that adolescents, who reported a high degree of social support after the loss of a parent, were significantly less depressed than those who reported very little social support. Though there is quite little known about how social support helps, there does seem to be a good case for arguing that social support affects adaptation to bereavement. I would like to

speculate and discuss some of the ways that social support does affect an adolescent's adjustment to parental loss.

A family of origin can provide emotional support, financial support, housing, and childcare. This is especially true for preadolescents and early adolescents, who have not yet reached a high degree of independence from their families. Therefore, coinciding with divorce, grandparents or siblings of the parents may help to soften the possible loss of resources after the loss of a parent, especially if the parent who died was the major breadwinner. This is especially true for pre-adolescents who are still in the early stages of forming peer relations and are still looking to family for the majority of their support (Jurich and Jones, 1989).

In divorced families, in addition to the family of origin's being used as a social support system, families may increase their participation in social organizations. This increased involvement in organizations, such as Boy Scouts and Girls Scouts or Big Brothers and Big Sisters, may serve as social support resources and fill in the spot where a now non-custodial parent is. This is especially beneficial for the pre and early adolescents, who are not yet involved in jobs or finding their career paths (Jurich and Jones, 1983). In contrast, after the death of a parent, many preadolescents become less involved in these social organizations, not wanting their peers to know about their feelings of loss and sorrow. They think it makes them different from their friends now. Thus, they may find it more comfortable to make new friends or create new relationships with individuals who are not aware of the loss.

In the world of a preadolescent, peers do not know what to do to be supportive. They are still caught up with trying to cope with their own problems, which lessens their ability to provide support or assistance to a mourning peer. In regards to divorce and peer group support, preadolescents are at the greatest risk of lacking sufficient support (Jurich and Jones, 1983).

From the case of Kayla, I would speculate that this is very similar in regards to the death of a parent. After her mom died Kayla's friends did not know what to say or how to treat her. Therefore, they became awkward around her and often ignored her. Kayla actually stopped hanging out with many of the friends that she had before her mom died and made new friends who did not know her before her mom died. Her new friends did not know about her mom's accident and they treated her just like any other preadolescent. Kayla did not have to worry about being treated like she had some sort of disease because she did not have a mom anymore.

In addition, the support of an older sibling has also shown to greatly enhance the adjustment to divorce (Jurich and Jones, 1983). With the death of a parent, I believe this would prove true with a preadolescent as well. The older sibling would provide the closest thing to the lost parent. This is especially true if a son loses a dad and he has an older brother or a daughter loses a mom and she has an older sister. The older brother or older sister is the closest thing that the son has to dad or the daughter has to mom. Therefore, a preadolescent can use siblings to cling to as the closest person in their family to be experiencing a similar situation. This may also prove beneficial to helping the preadolescent fend off feelings of loneliness and rejection if they can lean on a sibling.

When the loss of a parent occurs, with both divorce and death, a once "normal" and "traditional" family has suddenly been made into one less parent in the home. For divorce, this may mean that the parent is somewhere else in town or in another city. However, for a death, this means one parent that is completely absent, hence, one less form of support is totally absent for an adolescent. Though adolescents may not consciously know that they need their parents as support, they do know that their parents are a constant in their life when they need to turn back to them. However, it may only be at the most high stress situation, such as bereavement, that the

importance of parental influence is most evident (Gray, 1989). Despite the most popular notion that the role of parents diminishes to an adolescent, the majority of adolescents do perceive their parents as extremely important and, very often, their favored source of influence. It is during preadolescence that he or she is becoming aware of each parent's individual qualities, though it is still in regards to how the parent meets his or her needs. For example, he or she might say, "my mom was such a good cook, and I could talk to her about anything" (Silverman as cited in Doka, 2000). This is why it would be so crucial for the remaining parent to strengthen his or her relationship with the preadolescent, offering the teen extra support and allowing him or her to become aware of his or her individual qualities as well.

Similar to divorce, the relationship with the remaining parent for a preadolescent is vital. The relationship with the remaining parent is determined just as much by that remaining parent as it is by the preadolescent. After this type of loss, it is not only the adolescent who is dealing with the loss of his or her parent but it is the living parent's dealing with the loss of his or her spouse as well. A preadolescent is not thinking and speculating yet as to how other people are feeling about the loss. He or she is only aware of how he or she is feeling and what is going to make him or her feel better. This causes the potential for conflict with the remaining parent because the remaining parent is dealing with his or her own grief as well, of which the preadolescent is not cognizant. Consequently, a preadolescent may not understand why the living parent cannot give them the care that they are asking for at that time. They do not see that the remaining parent is still trying to figure out how to grieve for his or her spouse, while having to remain strong for the preadolescent.

However, the dynamics of the relationship with the remaining parent may become very unique, depending on whom the remaining parent is. Schedules, relationships and routines

change. Silverman and Worden (1993), as cited in Doka (2000), stated, "most often when the mother is the surviving parent there seems to be fewer changes in the family's daily routines" (Doka, 2000, p. 218). The mom is the parent who most often provides stability in family routines. Many times she is playing the role of two people, perhaps working, scheduling and planning activities, keeping finances in check, and getting everyone where they need to be when they need to be there. In addition, mom may be the primary nurturer for both girls or boys, or a primary role model for preadolescent girls.   For example, when a daughter loses her mom during preadolescence, she is just beginning to learn to exhibit self-confidence and assertiveness. A daughter in preadolescence is looking to gain greater intimacy outside the home, yet at the same time, she is still looking to gain self-confidence and assertiveness by modeling after her mother at home. With the death of her mother, a preadolescent is in danger of losing her self-confidence when transitioning from preadolescence to the later stages of adolescence (Kaplan, 1997). It is the remaining nuclear family left who can hopefully provide the extra support needed.

Different relationship dynamics and struggles would be present with the death of a father. If a father is the primary breadwinner, then the remaining parent, mom, would be left to deal with financial struggles in addition to any other aspects of the family's interface with the outside world. A preadolescent who is not yet thinking of other people and their possible feelings, cannot understand how the living parent is dealing with not only now being a single parent but with being the only source of finance. The remaining parent also may have to go back to work or take an additional job in order to remedy some of the new financial burdens resulting from the loss.

As Jurich and Jones (1983) explain in regards to divorce, preadolescents may not be able to distinguish between parental separation and personal rejection, since they have not yet reached the stage of formal operations. The divorce is a perceived rejection by their parents, which then

evolves into self-rejection. They feel that, if their parent's cannot love them, then they cannot love themselves either. They feel guilty about being so unlovable (Jurich and Jones, 1983). Similar to the aftermath of divorce, preadolescents, experiencing a loss of a parent, may also feel guilty or rejected (Jurich and Jones, 1983). These feelings could create the danger of allowing them to retreat even further into feelings of loneliness.

Complicating the grief and mourning process for a preadolescent would be their feelings of guilt that may stem from the loss of a parent. Again, preadolescents have not yet reached the stage of formal operations in their cognitive development, which means that they cannot fully understand that the death of the parent was not a personal rejection. Because preadolescents are so egocentric, he or she may not comprehend that the parent did not die because they did not want to be with him or her anymore. Some may feel like they could have done something differently or acted differently in order to prevent the death. For instance, Kayla's mom stopped by the house just minutes before her accident to pick something up for work. Her mom gave her a hug and told her she loved her and then walked out the door. After the accident, Kayla thought that, if she had just talked to her a few more minutes instead of letting her leave, she might have helped to prevent the accident.

Another common reaction for preadolescents in both divorce and parental loss is anger. He or she may feel angry with the remaining parent for being the living parent. He or she may have questions for him or herself such as, "why did mom die and not dad or why dad and not mom?" After the loss of either parent, a preadolescent simply wants the one missing to come back again. It is not necessarily that he or she wishes the remaining parent were the one that died, rather that any alternative seems better at this time. He or she may also feel angry with the parent who is gone for leaving. If mom or dad loved me, then why would they leave me? A

21

preadolescent may not yet understand why one parent died verses the other or why the parent that died did not do something, or fight harder, or be more careful, etc. In regards to divorce and preadolescent males, anger may be used to intimidate others into leaving them alone and to keep the weak, vulnerable, scared self hidden from the people around them (Jurich and Jones, 1983). I would speculate that the experience of a divorce on a preadolescent male could have quite similar affects. Using their anger would be easier than letting their peers know how much the loss is hurting them. Letting their peers know how much they are hurting would cause them to be seen different in the eyes of their peers and, therefore, either be treated differently or even rejected.

Both death and divorce are not fair. They will both hurt and they may both carry their complications, especially for a ten to thirteen year old. How can a preadolescent forge on courageously into the already tumultuous time of adolescence? Suddenly he or she is caught even more by wanting to hold onto what is still there, while at the same time wanting to forget and cover the hurt so as to be "normal", like other peers. The preadolescent is forced into having to learn effective ways to grieve over his or her loss, while leaving childhood and figuring out how to become a happy, successful adolescent.

For a preadolescent, death and divorce share many similarities. In the subsequent chapter, I will explore how the next stage of adolescence, early adolescence, also offers its challenges after the experience of losing a parent verses the experience of divorce.

CHAPTER 3 - Early Adolescence (13-15)

For the first time, early adolescents are getting a glimpse of who they are, who they might be and are becoming aware of the dialectic between "being" and "not being" (Hooyman, 2006). The circumstances of divorce and death only further complicate this process. While wanting to push their parents away, yet keep them close for their own comfort, when a parent leaves by divorce or death, an adolescent does not know how to do this. Early adolescents expect to leave their parents, not for their parents to leave them.

As I explained in the beginning of my report, it is the words of adolescents that may sometimes say the most. Fifteen year old, Ella explains how living through early adolescence with a parental loss has its challenges.

> "Sometimes I feel like I am 5, and I just want to crawl into my mother's lap, staying there, curled up, oblivious and ignorant to the rest of the world. At other times I feel so worn out and sad, like I've experienced too much to take anymore. I feel like I am 80. The thing is, though, that sometimes all of that doesn't have to do directly with my dad's death. As a teenager, life is so difficult (especially for our generation and the upcoming generations) that my dad's dying is just one more thing added to the chaos and turmoil in my life. At times I'm not upset about it directly, but it's one more thing that I have to deal with." (Hughes, 2005, p.76)

The early adolescent stage, typically including the junior high school and early high school years about thirteen to fifteen years old, is the time period where adolescents are really beginning to identify with the subculture of the teenage world. Early adolescents have most likely finished their physical growth and are beginning to strengthen their body image (Jurich, 1979). It could be argued that there is nothing quite "normal" in the lives of early adolescents; however, one thing that is a normative life transition during this stage is puberty. All early

adolescents may not be prepared to deal with puberty, though it is still a normative transition that can be expected (Corr and Balk, 1996). Many adolescents have siblings who have experienced puberty or parents who have helped explain puberty to them. Adolescents are aware of puberty and, though difficult, it is most often known to be something that happens in the life course of an adolescent, completely "normal". On the other hand, some not so normative life transitions for an early adolescent to encounter are divorce and death.

Hooyman (2006) explains the unpredictability of early adolescence, "an unpredictable mix of pulling away from the family, refusing to participate in family outings, sitting on a parent's lap screaming at a parent in response to discipline, wanting to be "cool" and hanging out with friends, hugging a parent and expressing love, and being absorbed in instant messaging—all in the span of one hour!" (p. 141). Parents must learn to facilitate appropriate levels of autonomy with their early adolescent, relaxing some control, while still remaining supportive during this demanding transition. The parents cannot fix everything for the adolescent anymore nor can they tell them how to do everything anymore. However, they must stand by and watch how the early adolescent decides to deal with situation and attempt to support their decisions or new directions. This may prove extremely frustrating only further complicating both divorce and death.

Peer Support

These years can also involve a high level of parent-adolescent conflict due to both the parents' and the peer groups' vying for the adolescent's allegiance. The peer groups are becoming increasingly important to the early adolescent, helping to support the adolescents in their search for independence. An adolescent at this point has both the physical and intellectual ability to rebel successfully, while also having the support from the peer groups to do so (Jurich,

1979). Therefore, how does an early adolescent, attempting to separate from their parents and gain allegiance with their peer groups, deal with the loss of a parent to divorce or death, when the parental figure is at the same time, still playing such a vital role in the adolescents' life. The adolescent wants to be autonomous and independent, being accepted by his or her peers, which forces the parents to step back and let him or her be. However, when that first friend stabs him or her is in the back, or calls them names behind his or her back, it is the parent that the adolescent may run to for emotional support and will look towards to model how he or she should react or deal with the situation.

In addition, they are not only going through physical changes but intellectual developments as well. Early adolescents, leaving the world of such concrete thinking, are now able to think more abstractly and hypothetically about loss, either divorce or death. Coming from the "world of what is", early adolescents are entering into a "world of what if" (Jurich, 1979). They are no longer satisfied with orders or things' just being "what they are". Suddenly, they need logical reasoning for demands and happenings and will argue against the reasoning, if they feel it is unfair or inadequate (Jurich, 1979).

He or she needs answers and reasoning, as he or she is no longer living in such concrete life terms. A divorce and a death are both unfair and unjust and the early adolescent will be demanding of answers. One of the main problems with losing a parent to death is that there are no more answers which will satisfy that demand. However, it will be hard to get answers when the adolescents will not talk about their loss. Noppe and Noppe (1997), explain how, during the years of early adolescence, adolescents do not talk about death with their friends or parents nor do they even worry about death. Early adolescents, who are egocentric in their views of the world, think they are invincible and that nothing bad could ever happen to them. Their parents

would not divorce or one or both could not die because that is what happens in the movies, not to them. The peers of an adolescent cannot be helpful in dealing with these non-normative life happenings because they too are egocentric and cannot be helpful to an adolescent in dealing with loss. This is why the adult social support surrounding the early adolescent can prove to be so beneficial.

Social Support Systems

Similar to the previous stage of pre-adolescence, the social support systems of early adolescents are extremely imperative in helping to determine the adjustment difficulty of both divorce and death. Since preadolescents and early adolescents have not yet achieved a high degree of dependency on the outside world, still heavily relying on their families, the family of origin still provides emotional support, financial support, and housing. With the death of a parent, similar to divorce, it is the grandparents or siblings of the parents who often remain supports that may be able to assist in lessening the possible loss of resources (Jurich and Jones, 1979). When losing a parent, the grandparents or siblings of the deceased parent can provide strength in the face of losing possible resources by providing emotional support, financial support, or maybe even housing. These family of origin ties to the lost parent may also allow the adolescent to remain closer to the parent he or she has lost

In addition, one of the most important support systems for early adolescents is their peers. As Jurich and Jones (1983) explain, though the peers of early adolescents may not necessarily offer direct validation of the divorce situation, it is simply the feeling of belonging and participation with peers that an early adolescent feels which may offer an incredible source of needed emotional comfort. I would speculate that the same aspect would be true for an early adolescent who is experiencing the loss of a parent. The peers of an early adolescent may not

have any idea what it feels like to have a parent die or what to say to an adolescent who has lost a parent. However, the peers may offer a sense of normalcy and emotional comfort to a hurting early adolescent. The peer groups are not yet ready to hear adolescents talk about their parents' death or help them grieve. However, this is why the peer group may help the adolescent feel so "normal".

For example, Kayla, after her mom died, first made new friends who did not know that she was not "normal" anymore. When she had a new peer group who accepted her for who she was and gave her a sense of belonging, Kayla was able to receive much needed friendship and emotional comfort outside the home when, perhaps, she was not getting as much as she once had at home. Her friends could give her the time she needed to proceed with her "normal" life, not involving loss or death of any kind. Her older sister at home was the person with whom she knew it was "ok" to grieve.

The early adolescent may not be getting as much emotional support at home as they did prior to the loss of his or her parent, while there are other relationship dynamics that may be altered. For instance, both a divorce and the loss of a parent may constitute a shift within the relationships between siblings. The early adolescent, though wanting to leave the home and seek support in his or her peers, still is craving some type of emotional support from home. Very often, it is the siblings onto whom he or she may find it easiest to grasp for support and comfort. A sibling may be the closest person to experiencing what he or she is going through. It may be possible that a sister looks like "the new mom" or a brother may look like "the new dad", now that the "old parent" is no longer there. An early adolescents' adjustment to divorce may be greatly enhanced when having a supportive older sibling (Jurich and Jones, 1983). The process of grieving may be helped by an older sibling as well, by offering both support and the

permission to grieve with each other, since an early adolescent would not be able to do this yet within his or her peer group.

In divorce, the relationship with both the custodial and non-custodial parent is vital. With a death, it is the living parent's relationship with the early adolescent, which becomes so crucial to the process of grieving for the adolescent. An early adolescent is living with the loss of a parent, while the remaining parent is living with the loss of his or her spouse. In contrast to the preadolescent, an early adolescent is beginning to not only think about his or her self but to think about the other person as well. It is much easier for him or her to think hypothetically and about "what ifs", allowing him or her to speculate how it might feel to lose a spouse, and to wonder how the remaining parent is feeling. However, though the early adolescent may now be aware of what the living parent may be experiencing, he or she is not yet to a point of acting on these feelings. An early adolescent is still concerned with making him or her feel better and helping himself or herself "get over" the loss. This may sometimes jeopardize the relationship between the early adolescent and the remaining parent because, if the living parent is caught in his or her own grief, he or she may not see what his or her son or daughter is seeking from him or her.

Perhaps yet another danger is the amount of support the living parent may be asking from the adolescent. Jurich and Jones (1983) stated that, during a divorce, the establishment of relationships with others is difficult and, therefore, may cause the custodial parent to rely on his or her adolescent for the main source of his or her support. With the death of a spouse, the living parent is attempting to deal with his or her own grief, while caring for the children and helping the adolescents deal with their grief as well. In the case of a loss by death, it is also very difficult for the remaining parent to form and maintain relationships for support. An early adolescent would then become susceptible to being a main support for the living parent. Asking an early

adolescent to provide this type of support is asking to put too much responsibility on him or her, while already struggling with the everyday tasks. The adult is struggling with everyday tasks also, in which, other adult support systems may be more beneficial.

A remaining parent is left to be the responsible and sole provider of the children. The loss of a parent, through either divorce or death, may result in a lower economic status for the family. For an early adolescent, this can be viewed as detrimental. An early adolescent is attempting to achieve emotional separation from their parents but still needing their emotional, physical, and financial support. An early adolescent is conscious of their status and membership within his or her peer group. Typically, a peer group's fuel for status is money. An early adolescent, who is already trying hard to keep up with his or her peers, may find it devastating to have fewer financial resources at home from which to draw (Jurich & Jones, 1983). In regards to parental death, this may result in the early adolescent's being angry at the remaining parent for not being able to provide what he or she had before, again possibly causing a rift or conflict between the living parent and the adolescent.

After a parent dies, an early adolescent may feel a multitude of confusing emotions. In divorce, an adolescent experiences the death of a parental relationship, the physical removal of one parent, and the emotional removal of the other parent (Jurich & Jones, 1983). For death, it is very similar. An adolescent also experiences the death of a parental relationship, and, instead, feels both the physical and emotional removal of one parent and perhaps the emotional removal of the living parent. These new relationship dynamics, as in preadolescence, may cause many angry and guilty feelings in the early adolescent.

Just as in preadolescent males, early adolescent males are also quite susceptible to feeling angry about the loss. In divorce, it is this angry front put up by the adolescent that allows

adolescent males to reassure themselves by intimidating their peers into leaving them alone. This protects them from feeling vulnerable. This reaction would be very similar in regards to the loss of a parent. An early adolescent male may use his anger to feel less weak or less powerful, as these feelings may be associated with being less masculine. Therefore, an early adolescent male wants to keep this weakness and vulnerability away from his peers, as anger is much easier and much more acceptable, especially among males. This anger is such a logical response to feelings of loss.

Instead of anger, an early adolescent female may feel more feelings of depression. As in a divorce, a female adolescent may feel helpless and in pain, which allows her to fall into depression easier. These reactions to loss of a parent by death coincide with the reactions to loss of a parent from divorce (Jurich & Jones, 1983). For adolescents, many possibilities could arise from these feelings causing them to become less self-confident, less assertive, and retreat into themselves. These reactions could potentially be detrimental to early adolescents, perhaps causing them to close off their boundaries to other people, thus losing forms of support.

If the early adolescent loses his or her forms of support, he or she may also be at the risk of losing some self-concept. This can be detrimental, since self-concept is so important in adolescent bereavement. High self-concept scores are associated with less depression, fear, loneliness, confusion, and intensity of grief. While early adolescents are already struggling with self-esteem issues; associated with gender, sexual orientation, and racial; or ethnic identification; the loss of self-esteem or self-concept is already a vulnerability to adolescents. A major loss, including both divorce and death, may only interfere with the efforts of the adolescents to achieve high self-esteem (Hooyman, 2006). Encountering loss is one enormous extra aspect added to the tasks of the early adolescents.

An early adolescent should be going through puberty, worrying about what outfit will make her look more attractive, or if he is big and strong enough to play football. Puberty is considered normal. Divorce and death are not considered normal, nor are they something an early adolescent is socialized to confront. Do early adolescents cope with death? Yes, they do. It is how adolescents cope with the loss and the support that surrounds them that may make all the difference. While simultaneously going through a storm of times already, perhaps adults should be in awe of how an adolescent can do this and perhaps come out as an even stronger and mature adolescent.

Kayla, now fifteen years old, explains some of the feelings she now has:

Losing my mom changed everything in my life, or so it felt. Friends treated me differently, family needed my support, and it seemed like my life was stopping while everyone else just kept going. I had to mature faster than all my friends did and I hated it sometimes. But now, a few years later, I feel like that one event has shaped me as a person. My values and the way I act towards other people have changed. I no longer take things for granted as much as other teenagers do and I wouldn't be the person I am now if this hadn't happened. Of course that doesn't make anything better. I still wish I could yell at scream at my mom the way other teenage girls do but I can look at the fact that, if my mom were around, I would cherish that time with her and wouldn't get in silly little arguments.

CHAPTER 4 - Stage Middle Adolescence (15-17)

Cassie explains how scary losing a parent at fifteen years old has been for her:

> *"I still live in fear every day of losing my mom and my grandma. Losing my dad made me realize that no one is invincible. On Thanksgiving morning, my dad was skipping down the sidewalk, and less then five hours later, he was dying on a stretcher that got rolled down that same sidewalk. Life to me became so fragile. Every day, in the back of my mind, is the fear of losing my mom. I know, realistically, if something happened to her, I would not be able to do anything to stop it. But to make myself feel better, I talk to her every day, just to reassure myself that it's okay. Sometimes when I can't get a hold of her, I get really scared that something happened. I just don't know what I would do if I lost my mom. After my dad, died, she and I got extremely close. We're best friends, and I'm not sure if I would be able to handle losing her.*
>
> *I do fear not being able to say good-bye to my mom. I think, subconsciously, every time I say good-bye, I do it as if it was the last time I was ever going to see or talk to her again. Each time I end a conversation with her, I always say "I love you", because I never know if it is going to be the last time I'll get to tell her. I think it is probably a defense mechanism on my part. So I'm already prepared if something does happen. At least I won't regret saying something to her, which is what happened when my Dad died."* (Hughes, 2005, p. 33).

During the late years of high school, usually including ages fifteen to seventeen years, middle adolescents are beginning to come into their own person. Attempting to shake off the need to conform to their peer groups, adolescents are interested in becoming less dependent upon their parents and peer groups for ideas and values. However, what is becoming more important to middle adolescents is the company of a few close friendships, as well as dating relationships. With the newfound importance of dating relationships in a middle adolescent's life, comes a

higher possibility of parent-adolescent conflict. Although the parent-and adolescent conflict is

less than in the early adolescent stage, these conflicts may be more intense.

These conflicts may even be extremely ego damaging to both the parents and the

adolescents (Jurich, 1979). The parents are hurt from the adolescents' not accepting their advice

to be as important anymore, while the adolescents are hurt about the parents' not "getting" them.

Suddenly wanting to become a person of their own, yet still holding onto their peers and their

parents, middle adolescence is a "push and pull" of autonomy verses connection. Imagine the

difficulty of trying to become your own person, yet remain connected to your parents if one

parent has been lost through divorce or death. How does an adolescent find this balance while

yearning for the parent that is lost?

Hooyman (2006) described middle adolescence,   "middle adolescents are beginning to

organize and integrate their early experiences of separating from their parents, continue to

experiment with "possible selves" or alternative self-concepts, and begin to forge a distinctive,

mature identity. In some ways, they undergo a second individuation or separation process,

fluctuating between independence and dependence in order to achieve

competence/mastery/control" (Hooyman, 2006, p. 142).   Therefore, middle adolescence is a

question of independence verses separateness from the parents, a relational dialectical push and

pull. Middle adolescents may become personally or individually resourceful by reorganizing the

values internalized for their parents, overcoming the egocentrism of childhood and early

adolescence, and deciding on future roles and responsibilities. The greater the distance from his

or her family of origin that middle adolescents may grow, the better able to make long-term

commitments to other people and goals (Hooyman, 2006). However, it would seem that, with

the loss of a parent through either divorce or death, this task could be complicated. These losses

may cause adolescents to want to stay closer to their families of origin in case of another unexpected happening. The task of distancing themselves in order to fulfill their own future goals is now harder and perhaps less significant.

Middle adolescents now have more advanced cognitive abilities which allow them to take apart ideas, put them together in new ways, examine both possibilities and realities, and build entire systems of thought. Adolescence is definitely a time of arguing, questioning, and continually debating with peers, parents, and authority figures (Hooyman, 2006). Imagine how confused an adolescent would be after he or she loses a parent and these things may abruptly hold less significance. The arguing and fighting with parents and others is now trivial, compared to the other things with which he or she is dealing. Their level of maturity soars quickly due to their losses.

When the death of a parent occurs, it is the normal order of life that has been so viciously revoked (Sussillo, 2005). The parent is not supposed to die before his or her children have experienced life and the milestones of growing with them. Sussillo (2005) explains how the loss of a parent affects the middle adolescents' sense of self. To understand this we have to know what even makes a parent so meaningful. Mitchell (1998), as cited in Sussillo (2005), explains, "Parents provide a safe base to explore inner and outer experience. Parental figures continue to be counted on to sustain, to regulate affect, and to repair aspects of the self"(Susillo, 2005, p. 1). One seventeen year old, following the death of her mother, explained how she felt, "We were so close; she loved me unconditionally. I felt like I lost half of myself when my mother died" (Sussillo, 2005, p. 1). The sense of self, already questioned all throughout adolescence, is now threatened to become ever more so.

Social Support

Just as in all phases of adolescence discussed so far, the manner in which a middle adolescent adjusts to divorce or death may be greatly determined by his or her social support. Many times, with divorce, there is a social stigma attached to it and, therefore, adolescents may experience some peer rejection. Peer rejection may also be possible in the loss of a parent through death because many adolescents may just not know how to be supportive. Peers are frightened of death and worry about saying something which would sound insensitive. These peer rejections are much more detrimental and devastating to middle adolescents, since their friend and peers are so important to them. If peer rejection takes place, it would be imperative that this is counterbalanced by other supportive friends and/or boyfriend-girlfriend relationships (Jurich and Jones, 1983). It is these close and intimate relationships of most value here.

The close friendships and intimate relationships are so much more important to the support of the adolescent because, as the cognitive abilities of middle adolescents are developing, so is their moral awareness. Middle adolescents are becoming less egocentric and more able to step outside of themselves and care about other people, such as their close friends who may be experiencing something difficult, such as a loss of a parent through either divorce or death. However, though middle adolescents are more likely to have more stable friendships, they will be more susceptible to feelings of betrayal if the friends choose not to be supportive (Jurich and Jones, 1983). This seems to make sense, due to the fact that the adolescent is already experiencing a loss in his or her life, and does not need to feel the loss of friendships at the same time. Their feeling of loss is compounded.

A middle adolescent's peer, though not always a source of emotional support or a place in which to express painful feelings, is typically a more important form of support to the

adolescent than the family itself. This peer network is essential to maintain some sense of

normalcy in the adolescents' life. It is also the peer network which supports the adolescent as he

or she seeks to differentiate oneself from a parental unit which has been fractured by the death of

one of the parents. However, at the same time, since it is so important to "fit in" with the peer

group, sometimes the sense of "different", created by a parental loss, may create isolation. This

can happen even when adolescents are longing for support from their friends. Although, simply

"hanging out" with their peers can be a major source of comfort, allowing them to feel "normal"

like their friends (Hooyman, 2006). Middle adolescence, bringing closer and more intimate

circles of friends, allows adolescents to create a stronger support network outside of the home.

In the case of Kayla, as she reached the stage of middle adolescence, around the age of

fifteen, she found that she had one or two close friends with whom she could talk about the loss

of her mom. She stated that this is when she learned who her "real friends" were. These were the

people who were there when she needed support, who would let her cry around them, and would

accept her being happy as well. I would speculate that, similar to losing a parent through

divorce, positive peer relationships with peers who are nonjudgmental and empathetic, can help

to lessen the intensity of an adolescent's grief.

Other Parent Relationship

With the loss of a parent, through both divorce and death, adolescents are losing more

than just one parent. For divorce, both parents may be so completely entangled in the divorce

and their own experiences, they are not able to respond to the needs of his or her son or daughter

(Jurich and Jones, 1983). In regards to the loss of a parent through death, the situation seems

very parallel. The remaining parent is left to deal with double the tasks and roles. Not only do

they still have to fulfill the same tasks and roles as before the loss, but also they are now

performing the tasks and roles of the deceased parent. The remaining parent, in the death of a

parent, or the custodial parent, in a divorce, is stuck in a "role overload". There are too many

roles needing to be fulfilled from one person. Therefore, the adolescent has lost not only one

parent but, in a sense, has lost both parents for at least a length of time.

In the loss of a parent through death, both the living parent and the adolescent are

learning to cope with something new. Corr and Balk (1996) explain, "the death, whether sudden

or anticipated, of the person who was both spouse and parent demands that the surviving parent

incorporate respect for the adolescent's increasing autonomy and cognitive abilities as well as

creating an intimate environment within which grief may be expressed and meaning may be

found for the loss" (Corr and Balk, 1996, p. 166).   In most cases the living parent may never

have experienced the loss of a spouse, while the adolescent has probably never experienced the

loss of a parent. Both individuals are attempting to learn what this loss in his or her life is going

to mean and how they are going to be able to help and understand each other.

Though both grieving, they are both grieving for different relationships. This may cause

a strain on the relationship between the parent and the adolescent, at least until they have found

ways to cope. In contrast to a divorce, the loss of a parent through death brings more of a sense

of permanency to the loss and it is hard for the adolescent to see how the parent may is grieving

as well. Fortunately, the middle adolescent is less egocentric than in previous stages of

adolescence and is beginning to empathize with how it might feel for their parent to have lost a

spouse, verses only thinking of his or herself. Middle adolescents are now able to reflect on

others people's feelings. Early adolescents may have only been beginning to think about this,

while middle adolescents may begin to act on their feelings. They may believe that it is part of

their job, as the child, to help his or her parent with the grief that is being experienced by him or her.

However, this could prove dangerous for the adolescent. Instead of the adolescent's receiving the support he or she needs from the living parent, he or she may be forced to be a support for the living parent. The remaining parent may be asking the adolescent to take on more responsibilities or to help out with things that, perhaps, he or she did not have to worry about before or are not even "typical" adolescent responsibilities. Thus, the adolescent may only see the fact that he or she has more responsibilities, more work to do, and with less support than he or she previously had. Playing the role of a surrogate spouse to the living parent or the custodial parent may also become a possibility. They may sacrifice their childhood for the sake of the remaining parent. However, this is more likely to happen with younger adolescents who have no means of escape (Jurich and Jones, 1983). Middle adolescents may be saved from this because of the other outlets they have in life, such as peers or other intimate relationships.

Resources lost

In some instances, a divorce or loss of a parent through death can also cause a decrease in financial stability. Similar to divorce, the loss of a parent may cause the withdrawal of one income, perhaps, even the only income if the living parent was the stay-at-home parent, bringing in no income. Fortunately, a downward economic status may be the least detrimental to a middle adolescent because of his or her support network that is smaller and more intimate, which helps to ease the lack of these economic resources (Jurich and Jones, 1983). Different from early adolescents, middle adolescents are not still trying to keep up with a large social network, which causes less strain if financial resources have been decreased. In addition, older middle adolescents may seek out jobs outside of the home in order to either pay for some of their own

things or to help out the families' finances. This new extra job may allow not only for extra

financial support but perhaps extra emotional support as well. At a time when the adolescent can

do little to ameliorate the loss of the deceased parent, he or she may feel as if he or she can at

least contribute financially.

Common Emotions

Wallerstein (1983), as cited in Servaty and Hayslip (2001), has made comparisons

between the experiences of parental divorce and that of losing a parent to death and argues that

both life events are crises followed by an extended period of disequilibrium that may last several

years. Middle adolescents, experiencing the loss of a parent through both divorce and death, are

thrown into a new way of life. Perhaps this is a life once only seen on the television or in the

movies. Suddenly there are new relationship dynamics, including the physical and emotional

loss of one parent and perhaps the emotional loss of the remaining parent. Meanwhile, while all

of this is occurring, there is an atmosphere of tension and anxiety (Jurich and Jones, 1983). In

divorce, there may be bickering and custody battles, while, with death, there may be funeral

arrangements and memorial services.

In a divorce, middle adolescents may show disappointment in their parents, which lessens

their own feelings of guilt, which they may have felt over the divorce. This is different than in

the previous stages of adolescence where such guilt and fault is felt over the parents divorce

(Jurich and Jones, 1983). In contrast, when a middle adolescent loses a parent to death, though

he or she may not feel at blame for the parents' death, he or she may feel remorse or guilt about

comments made to a parent during a typical adolescent struggle to separate from family control

(Schlozman, 2003). Especially if the loss is sudden, adolescents may feel that they should have

said or done something differently or wish they could apologize for past behaviors. The last thing said to the parent could have even been hurtful.

At times, since middle adolescents' are so involved with school, extracurricular activities, peers, and other relationships; the living parent may be very confused at how the adolescent is responding to the loss. In the later stage of middle adolescence, adolescents often feel very unsure of how they are supposed to respond to the loss. Therefore, they throw themselves into what they believe to be most important and most "normal" at the time. Many adults become upset with the adolescent who appears to be more concerned about a date to the prom or a sporting event than the death of his or her parent (Scholozman, 2003). Lee Ann, a sixteen year old explained how participating in outside activities facilitated her grieving:

'Two months after my father died, a close friend went through the same thing. Talking with and helping her in actuality allowed me to help myself. My father had been a coach in my hometown. After his death I became very active in booster clubs, fund raisers, and anything else involved with sports. The sports I was participating in became all the more important to me at this point. This involvement made me feel all the closer, even as though he was there participating with me." (Langrad, 1986, p. 95).

Often times, it is these events that help the adolescent maintain a sense of normalcy in his or her life.

Adding to the stress and complications of loss is the middle adolescent's beginning to explore career options, university entrances, and pursue intimate relationships. With a middle adolescent's preparing to leave home and deciding what he or she is going to pursue for a career, school, or intimate relationships, many adolescents look to their parents for guidance. Though an adolescent is struggling to make decisions and gain autonomy, these large decisions may be

more difficult while trying to figure out how much autonomy he or she really does want from the only living parent left.

Middle adolescents may also begin to engage in intimate relationships or date. In divorce, middle adolescents may date frequently in order to escape families and find security in a different way, a way they so desperately need (Jurich and Jones, 1983). When a parent dies, something similar may be prevalent with middle adolescents. A parent's dying may sometimes cause the adolescent to feel less safe and less secure and entering an intimate relationship can replace this lost sense of security. Here is someone who can now give them what they are attempting to search for.   This false sense of security may lead adolescents to engage in premature sexual activity. This sexual activity may serve as a filler to help block the empty void and pain that adolescents are experiencing, in turn making them feel the love and security that they have just lost. Although these adolescents may experience a temporary relief from their grief, it is also possible that these romantic relationships may give them real security within this romantic relationship. However there is still the possibility that many adolescents, after experimenting with this activity, may indeed find these relationships to be of less importance than the home life.

Faith

As middle adolescents have become less egocentric, they are also able to develop their faith because their world-views are widening. This may prove challenging with the loss of a parent, allowing the adolescent to question faith because of the loss in their life. Their questions have become much more complex in trying to figure things out now.

Corr and Balk (1996) explain how, in middle adolescence, individuals have the capacity to attain "individuative-reflective" faith. This is a stage of faith consciousness that depends on

examining, evaluating, and restructuring one's beliefs and values. It may require making choices about the roles and responsibilities that one will assume in life. Corr and Balk state, "In the individuative-reflective stage of faith, people seek foundations that underlie the roles and relationships in their lives" (Corr and Balk, 1996, p. 11). This loss during adolescence can cause them to question their religious assumptions which may, in turn, prompt them to grow stronger in their faith and appreciate the relationships in his or her life, while looking to some sort of higher power or spiritual guidance to guide them through the blessings that they do have left.

Growth/Maturity

The loss of a parent almost forces a middle adolescent to "grow up" and mature faster than perhaps their peers do. Though this can be detrimental, it can also be a hidden blessing. Shifting from egocentric thinking to a more other oriented perspective, allows adolescents to engage in a transformation. This transformation is seen as reaching out to and appreciating the experiences of other people around them. For an adolescent, working through his or her grief enhances his or her perspectives, clearly propelling them to "grow up" faster. Adolescents may have been forced into realizing the importance of their families and how much they may have taken them for granted, prior to their loss. These changes can cause adolescents to alter their views of the world, causing them to think differently about their future endeavors and life decisions.   Suddenly, a sixteen year old, who was once more concerned with meeting his or her friends at the mall, may now choose to attend the family dinner and game night at grandma's house. For the middle adolescent there is a discovery that he or she has the capacity to make choices which feels "right" to him or her, even if it is "out of step" with the peers. Maturity means "choosing", not necessarily "following".

Chapter 5- Stage Late Adolescence (18 +)

The closure of an individuation process and shift toward independent thinking, principled awareness, and awareness of one's own value, apart from society, are the markings of late adolescence. Late adolescents have completed their physical maturation and are now better able to control their sexual feelings, strong emotions, and newfound adult skills and abilities. Because of this, late adolescents are able to delve into the primary challenge of this stage, involving achieving intimacy and commitment in sexual and social relations, which causes the conflict between closeness and distance to arise (Hooyman, 2006). Adolescents are at the point where they can tackle this task more successfully and confidently with the assurance of a strong, stable, and loving family of origin to lean against.

Western culture does not visibly acknowledge the end of adolescence. However, at this age, as adolescents generally separate from the home and gain financial independence, this time is often thought to mark the beginning of a shift to young adulthood (Hooyman, 2006). This challenging shift from adolescence to young adulthood, although necessary and wanted by the adolescent, can still be challenging. Some late adolescents remain adolescents developmentally and are ambivalent about accepting responsibility, forging a separate identity, and sustaining personal intimacy. On the other hand, some adolescents may be caught in a rut because of earlier or current traumatic events in their lives, such as physical or sexual abuse, eating disorders, substance abuse, or a major loss. Late adolescents' experiencing the loss of a parent, through divorce or death, may interfere with the development of their emotional selves (Hooyman, 2006). This loss in the life of a late adolescent creates feelings of chaos and uncertainty, hindering the adolescent from carrying on with the many tasks he or she needs to fulfill.

In our society, pain, grief, and loss are not supposed to be associated with this vibrant age group. Late adolescents, many times also known as young adults, are not associated with words such as pain and grief. Society perceives these young people as being perpetually happy and living life to its fullest. Late adolescents don't know how to share their pain. Therefore, they may have a difficult time learning to manage or cope with it. This may be especially complicated when their pain is the loss of a parent from whom they are attempting to shift away, from a dependent relationship to a more equal friend relationship (Langrad, 1986).

Typically, between the ages of eighteen and twenty two years old, many late adolescents have joined a world separated from their family of origin. Middle adolescence was spent involved with concerns, regarding mostly social issues and understandings, while late adolescence is now giving way to issues such as making career choices, developing intimate relations, and gaining autonomy from ones family of origin, particularly from one's parents. The normative life transitions of late adolescence are the hallmarks of achieving separation from one's parents and becoming autonomous. It is this individuation, which allows the adolescent to feel mastery over his or her life and attain an ongoing relationship with his or her parents, based on mutual respect and attachment (Corr and Balk, 1996).

As stated above, since the hallmark of late adolescence is achieving autonomy and separation from one's parents, what might happen to this hallmark if one parent is lost during this process. Is achieving separation and autonomy even more important or is it lost, delayed, or questioned when the separation from a parent is chosen for the adolescent either by divorce or by death? Separation and autonomy may have been of utmost importance to the late adolescent. However, he or she is now drawn back into the family to help deal with the task of coping with the loss.

The loss of a parent calls for one more major task associated with late adolescence, which is attaining personal strength through successfully dealing with traumatic life events. In doing this, the adolescent must struggle with the meaning of life and death. However, Hooyman (2006) explains, "after this struggle, the adolescent can emerge with a philosophical, spiritual, and/or religious stance that promotes optimism for the future and a reason to continue living" (Hooyman, 2006, p. 142). A late adolescent, who is dealing with loss, is gaining a maturity that perhaps other late adolescents have not yet attained. This early maturity may cause late adolescents to miss out on the possible benefits of adolescence. The feelings of added responsibility and roles may not allow the adolescent to feel comfortable being "a kid" or just having fun with his or her peers. Developmentally, this "fun" counterbalances many of the stresses of adolescence and gives the adolescent space to consolidate his or her self-image during periods of rapid change.

With both divorce and death, late adolescents, who are experiencing loss, may be vulnerable to additional stressors, due to their life stage, as well as the environment in which they have to grieve (Toth, Stockton, & Browne, 2000). One of the major differences in the stage of late adolescence, in comparison to the previous stages, is that late adolescents may no longer be living at home. Perhaps they are living at college, submerged in new classes, new professors, new peers, and a completely new living environment. Students, whose peer and familial support systems are not proximal, may have difficulty engaging in active emotional coping, thus relying on the use of avoiding coping methods instead. This is may be because, when a loss is encountered in their lives, the main sources of support physically present are all new to them and avoidant coping is often easiest to employ (Schnider & Elhai, 2007). Though avoidant coping may only delay an adolescent's grieving process. Avoiding the reality of their grief and,

instead, pushing it away in order to "get on with life", can cause adolescents to delay their grief. The grief will still be there, just hidden until it comes out later, perhaps even stronger and more intense since it has been pushed away for such a period of time.

On the other hand, late adolescents may also be preparing for college or making career and vocational choices. Jurich and Jones (1983) explain how losing a parent through divorce can be so disruptive to late adolescent's attempting to make these plans. It is a major planning resource that is taken away from them. It is because of this that many late adolescents, experiencing a parental loss through divorce, may become panicked over future career and college choices (Jurich and Jones, 1983). Similar to divorce, the loss of a parent through death may also challenge a late adolescent's decision making for college or career paths. Sometimes these decisions may even be put "on hold" or made hastily in order to "be there" for their family of origin.   Late adolescents may choose a college closer to home simply to ensure being closer to family and fulfill more familial responsibilities. They may choose to get a job and just stay living at home to help out. These decisions are often made so hastily that it makes them dangerous for late adolescents. The added responsibilities that they are feeling cause them to make decisions that they believe are best for the family, even if it is not best for them, thus delaying their own growth and transition.

Peer relationships

LaGrand (1981), as cited in Corr and Balk (1996), reported a study with bereaved, late adolescent, college students*,* "The power for resolving loss seems to lie in the strength of the self-image, the quality of interpersonal relationships…the ability to communicate on an intimate level with others, and feelings of acceptance by friends and family" (Corr & Balk, 1996, p. 164). This quote helps to illustrate how the importance of peer support and relationships can be so

crucial to the experience of loss during this stage. Jurich and Jones (1983) explain how, with the loss of a parent through divorce, peers are incredibly important. However, because of their developmental stage, they are in a better position to go somewhere else to seek support if their peers are not receptive.

With adolescents' experiencing the loss of a parent through death, while simultaneously being away at college, social support may be more of a challenge. These adolescents, who are geographically separated from their families and peers in their own communities, may fear how other college community members perceive them. They do not want other students or professors to view them as being different or difficult. Therefore, they may retreat, attempting to ignore the feelings of grief and loss embedded within them. The importance of the existence of social support in this setting is crucial for the grieving process of a late adolescent.

In some cases, an adolescent, who is experiencing loss, now feels very different and secluded from their peers. The loss may cause the adolescent to feel separated from his or her peers, due to the fact that he or she may not feel as if anyone could possibly understand how he or she is feeling or even want to hear about it for that matter. Adolescents may feel as if they have gone a step beyond their peers and are dealing with something that peers won't have to worry about for a long time. This can put a huge gap in between adolescents and their peers, as one experiencing loss suddenly sees almost everything else as little and petty.

Hanging out with friends, going to movies, going to parties, and having fun suddenly seems ridiculous. There are indeed bigger and more significant things to do and worry about now, right? However, it is these adolescents who are in danger of losing the support of the peers. Late adolescents who have close, intimate friends, who maintain empathy and interest in the grief of the adolescent, can help to bridge the gap between the "old" world and the "new" world

of the adolescent (Corr and Balk, 1996). The peers, who want to avoid the subject of the loss or even avoid the adolescent all together, only emphasize to the adolescent the differences he or she already believes are present now between them and their peers. Generally, adolescents, who are experiencing a loss, tend to choose friends whose behavior and attitudes reflect a greater maturity and willingness to take death and loss seriously.

Kayla's sister, Shara, was nineteen at the time of their mother's accident. She explained the differences between her "real friends" and those who are not:

"The friends that I used to have fun with, I couldn't have fun with anymore. They are the ones that wanted to avoid the subject or just plain avoid me. My 'real' friends were the ones who asked me about the accident, wanted to know the details of my loss, and who told me how much they cared. They were the ones who encouraged me to write a memorial, talk to her, and not to forget the good memories. They were the ones who I knew would always be there to give me a push when I needed one. They were **real**."

Forming Romantic Relationships

Another context for support, in addition to the peer network, can be the arena of sexual and/or romantic relationships. When an adolescent loses a parent, he or she feels an increased sense of vulnerability and unpredictability in the world, along with a new understanding of the possibility of losing someone close. This new understanding can influence how willing an adolescent is to enter into and maintain committed relationships. Hepworth, Ryder, and Dreyer (1984) found that adolescents, who lost a parent during late adolescence, either moved more quickly into committed relationships or avoided these relationships entirely. This also illustrates how adolescents who experience loss by death are more likely to exhibit extreme reactions in the quality of intimate relationships than were non-bereaved peers or peers who experienced parent loss through divorce. An adolescent's view of the world has changed so fast, making him or her

49

feel more vulnerable and become more aware of the transitory nature of life, causing him or her to model relationships from his or her experiences of loss (Corr and Balk, 1996).

Seeing their parent lose a partner that they love so dearly could cause adolescents to want to avoid the pain of an intimate relationship. Why would adolescents want to experience love and closeness through an intimate relationship when they have seen how suddenly it can be ripped out of a person's hands? If they avoid these feelings of closeness and intimacy, then perhaps they will never have to deal with the hurt of losing it. However, perhaps it could do the opposite and enhance the importance of finding this love and valuing it while it does exist. Seeing someone love a person so dearly and realize that having that love is better than never having it at all could be a valuable lesson in regards to intimacy. The loss of a parent through divorce proves similar in that, after witnessing a parental divorce, many adolescents may avoid intimate relationships for fear of getting hurt or being abandoned by their partner. On the other hand, adolescents may decide to date a lot in order to gain acceptance and security in which they did not feel they had within the family after the divorce (Jurich and Jones, 1983).

Other parent relations

Wolchik, Tein, Sandler, & Ayers (2006) reported that,

> "the death of one's spouse includes a broad array of experiences that are likely to affect the quality of the caregiver-child relationship and diminish its protective ability. After the death, caregivers need to cope with stressors such as financial hardship, moving, development of relationships with new partners, and additional household and work responsibilities, as well as their own grief-related emotions. Dealing with these stressors is likely to result in caregivers having less time to spend with the children, being less supportive and emotionally available to them, and being less effective in reinforcing positive behaviors" (p. 222).

Though the remaining parent or custodial parent is supposed to be a form of support for the adolescent, as with all of the previous stages of adolescence, losing a parent during late adolescence can feel like the loss of both parents instead of one. With divorce, both parents are caught up in their own experiences, both lost emotionally to the children. With death, one parent is both physically and emotionally lost, while the remaining parent is lost emotionally, caught up in the shock of the loss of a spouse. This loss will undoubtedly cause the adolescent to encounter a shift in the roles that he or she previously played in the family. These role shifts cause more changes and seem to parallel the changes of the adolescent already. An adolescent, who is already struggling to develop his or her new, own, model of understanding the world, now undergoes changes from perhaps a stable family structure to now one of vulnerability and uncertainty (Corr and Balk, 1996). Each family member now has new added responsibilities, with one less form of support, and their own grief and other family members' grief to cope with.

In divorce, the loss of one parent in the home causes the custodial parent to be somewhat lost also. This parent is caught up in his or her own experiences, sometimes unable to tend to the need for increased understanding and care for the adolescent (Jurich and Jones, 1983). This can prove even more difficult with a late adolescent because the surviving parent may see the late adolescent as being old enough and mature enough to not need their support as much. In comparison, the loss of a parent through death appears quite similar. The parent who died is gone both physically and emotionally, leaving the remaining parent to pick up the pieces and parent the adolescent by himself or herself, while somehow attempting to manage his or her own grief. The depth of this overwhelming feeling can cause the remaining parent to subconsciously lean on their child, especially a late adolescent who is appearing more in control and perhaps in the beginnings of more equal relationship.

The danger of this situation is allowing the adolescent to become the primary support for the surviving parent. When the surviving parent leans on the late adolescent too much, looking to them to take on many of the roles of the deceased spouse, this can cause the adolescent to only be a "surrogate spouse". A late adolescent's playing the role of a "surrogate spouse" may only impede their journey into young adulthood. Instead of being able to focus and concentrate on his or her own tasks of late adolescence and growing into a young adult, the adolescent is too caught up in playing a different role for his or her remaining parent. This is most likely to happen with late adolescents because they have left the stages of egocentric thinking and have become much more other-oriented and relationship focused. A late adolescent is not only experiencing his or her own grief but, now, perhaps the surviving parents' grief as well. The late adolescent now has an increased capability of empathy, understanding and the experience of others (Corr and Balk, 1996). Though this increased empathy and understanding is how it should be, this does not mean that the remaining parent should expect the adolescent to be his or her primary source of support and comfort. They still have unfinished tasks of late adolescence to complete.

Sibling Relationships

In addition to possibly becoming a "surrogate spouse" for the living parent, an adolescent can easily become a surrogate mother or father for younger siblings. Just as the late adolescent can now feel empathy for the surviving parent, he or she can also be worried about the younger sibling and want to be a replacement for the lost parent. This may cause difficulties for the adolescent who struggles with taking care of the younger sibling instead of just wanting to be the sibling and have fun together. Instead of successfully completing the normal developmental tasks of planning for college, employment, and the future, these adolescents may become fearful about the future. If they feel the need the protect and care for the surviving parent and other

52

siblings, their development is interrupted, caught within the role of family caregiver and unable to leave the family for extended periods of time (Hooyman, 2006).

However, it has been found that, after the loss of a parent, siblings may grow even closer and have better relationships. Mack (2004) found that siblings, who experience the death of a parent during childhood or adolescent years, become closer and remain closer into adulthood, because of their shared experience through this traumatic event. They are reported to have "intense sibling loyalties" (Mack, 2004). The value and importance of family becomes highlighted.

Finances

With the loss of a parent through both divorce and death, sometimes the adolescent feels more responsible for helping to take care of the family. This feeling of responsibility may lead the late adolescent into choosing to work instead of going to college, or perhaps even work while attending college simultaneously. Jurich and Jones (1983) explained how, during a divorce, late adolescents are best equipped to handling a possible financial hardship, and may enter into the work force to help with financial aspects. However, though this situation may help late adolescents gain independence and responsibility, it might also delay an adolescents' own life by hindering career preparation through making it impossible to finish school or college (Jurich and Jones, 1983). Assuming this is quite similar to late adolescents, who have experienced the loss of a parent through death; these adolescents may put aside their own developmental needs in place of caring for their families. However, these late adolescents may also have the opportunity to gain the value of hard work for a family, a value helping them later on in the families that they build.

Common Emotions

As cited in Jurich and Jones (1983), Whiteside (1982), explains how the emotional reactions of adolescents to the divorce of their parents are quite similar to the emotional reactions of adolescents who have lost a parent through death. In divorce, Jurich and Jones (1983) illuminate the initial common reactions for a late adolescent to be feelings of upheaval and turmoil. Quite similar to this, losing a parent to death may trigger feelings of shock or denial, causing older adolescents to first withdraw from their friends and then later look to their peers for support and encouragement.

Due to the fact that the remaining parent has taken on so many added responsibilities and the adolescent has become so much more aware of the feelings of the living parent, the adolescent may avoid talking about his or her feelings, for fear of distressing the remaining parent even more. This again is where the importance of close friendships or intimate relationships can play such a leading role in helping a late adolescent in their grieving process. Adolescents may feel they cannot talk to the people in their family with whom they are closest because they are so deep in their grief as well, and they do not want to cause them any more pain or hurt by having to worry about the adolescent as well.

In addition, there are also some differences among the feelings and reactions of the parents in divorce verses death. Mack (2000) says that common parental reactions to divorce may include feelings of anger, rejection, hostility, and bitterness toward the spouse. In contrast, typical reactions to widowhood are more likely to include feelings of guilt, sadness, anxiety, and preoccupation with thought of death or the dead spouse. These differences in parental reactions to divorce and widowhood are so crucial because they suggest similar differences in responses that an adolescent might have. If a late adolescent witnesses his or her parent to be feeling guilt

or sadness in response to the loss, he or she may be likely to exhibit these behaviors also because it is what is being modeled for the adolescent (Mack, 2001). These feelings of despair, guilt, or sadness can lead an adolescent into having less self-confidence and more symptoms of depression later in life (Mack, 2001). On the other hand, being able to feel comfortable expressing these emotions is less dangerous than an adolescents' bottling them up inside and then having them come out even later.

Late adolescents typically mourn in a more adult manner, meaning that they are better able to see death from another perspective than their own. They can express empathy to the remaining parent and siblings. Adolescents, who suffer loss, may also develop deeper and more intimate relationships with peers, now having learned what is most important in life (Corr and Balk, 1996). Relationships are valued as matchless.

All of the stages of adolescence include some challenging tasks that need to be fulfilled, however, perhaps late adolescence is so crucial because of its bridge into adulthood. Imagine you are nineteen years old, a freshman in college, your first time away from home, and suddenly the relationship with your parents has changed. No longer are they telling you what to do and how to make decision but, instead, you are now picking up the phone to ask them for advice or just to chat with them as you would any old friend. The relationship with your parent is slowly shifting from a parent-child hierarchy to a somewhat more balanced and equal relationship. Your mom or your dad may suddenly become a friend with lots of experience in where your life currently is and you want them to experience yours with you. You can't wait for your mom to help you plan your wedding or be there for you when you birth your first child. You know that your dad will be there on your first day as a "new dad". What if all these thoughts and dreams were suddenly ripped out of your reach by the loss of your mother or father? Your family

mobile has been drastically shifted; altering your relationships, roles, needs, and goals. All of these new alterations now cause a shift into a new personality, a new identity, and a new story to be written for your future. Regardless of all your plans and dreams, your future has been irrevocably altered and all you can do is react and respond to that change.

Chapter 6- Implications for Practice and Research

An adolescent, who is already experiencing one of the most turbulent and perplexing times of life, does not need to add the loss of a parent to their plate. However, as many know all too well, the loss of a parent is not something in which they have a choice. Adolescents are known to be little lawyers, attempting to negotiate their ways in and out of things. The loss of a parent through death is not negotiable. Then, when the loss does occur, this stage of their life becomes even more intricate; with meanings needing to be made of their loss not only with the deceased parent but with the remaining parent as well. Adding even more obstacles to this situation is the fact that today's meaning of the word grief has become so convoluted. The word *grief* is described in a variety of ways in different contexts by different people, leading to multiple ends. For instance, does grief ever go away? Is grief a brief state of acute stress or a prolonged sense of malaise? Does it end?

Becvar (2001) reported that, traditionally, therapy or clinical intervention with the bereaved has focused on helping people continue to find a way to *end* their grief. However, in this situation, grief is defined as sorrow and the emotional suffering caused by loss, though grief is much larger than sorrow. Grief is the celebration of the lost person as much as it is the sorrow (Moules, Simonson, Prins, Angus, & Bell, 2004). This does not *end*. Grief, though sometimes relenting and sometimes distressing, is always part of the life of a person who has experienced a loss. In this sense, grief does not ever end. Therefore, it is the meaning attributed to grief that becomes such an essential part of a person who has encountered loss. By attributing meaning to their loss, adolescents learn the meaning and importance of relationships, perhaps even allowing

them to better form future relationships. Knowing the impermanency of a relationship can teach

the true nature of a real relationship.

Implications for practice

Tyson-Rawson (1996) examined adolescent grief over parental death in regards to both

family and peer relations. She found that few adolescents were even willing to talk about the

loss in their lives or even about the person that they had lost. Unfortunately, it seems that

adolescents are socialized into this "not talking about it" attitude because their peers are not

comfortable with loss. Few adolescent peers feel comfortable in the presence of someone who is

bereaved (Tyson-Rawson, 1996).   Therefore, the majority of adolescents, who are experiencing

a loss in their lives, are not talking to anyone about it, thus, avoiding, ignoring, and delaying their

grieving process. This is where the occasion of therapy may prove so beneficial and

advantageous to an adolescent in the middle of grieving the loss of a parent.

Kubler-Ross (1969), as cited in Servaty-Seib (2004), found the five stages of the grieving

process to be (1) denial, not yet accepting the reality of the loss, (2) anger, feelings of intense

anger toward the person who is gone and/or anything in regards to the loss, (3) bargaining,

bartering in a hopes to bring the lost person back in return for something else instead, (4)

depression, an extreme sadness over the loss, and (5) acceptance, or coming to terms with the

loss. In addition, Parkes (1969) described the phases of grief to include numbness, yearning and

searching, disorganization and despair, and reorganization (Servaty-Seib, 2004). These two, in

addition to many of the other advances made in the field of thanatology, help describe varies

responses that people may have to grief. However, though they can prove useful in therapy, the

literalism of these stages can complicate a clients' grief, especially when used with adolescents,

who are already looking for a "right way" (Servaty-Seib, 2004).

Though both Kubler-Ross (1969) and Parkes (1969) stated that their stages were only rough guides, adolescents may be especially prone to taking these stages with more literalism (Servaty-Seib, 2004). In seeing these stages it may be particularly easy to see them as a recipe in just five steps or stages. An adolescent could see it as, "I will simply go through each stage, one by one and then it will be over. That's what the steps say, that is what I am supposed to feel". If only it could be that straightforward. However, factors contributing to bereavement are not at all simplistic. Factors that may need to be accounted for are personality traits, cultural background, and developmental level of the bereaved as well as the nature of the relationship with the deceased, mode of death, availability of social support, and previous and concurrent stressors (Servaty-Seib, 2004). An adolescent, experiencing the loss of a parent, is not going to grieve the same as a thirty year old, experiencing the loss of a sibling. Grief is a unique experience within each individual.

Due to the fact that grief is so exclusive and unique to each individual, I have found that one of the theories that has proven most valuable in my work with grief, loss, and bereavement is the theoretical framework of Narrative Therapy. Since the basis of this report focused on how important it is to not see adolescence as one solitary stage, it would be important to illustrate some different therapeutic interventions that might be used with adolescents who are experiencing loss through the different stages of adolescent development. For example, in preadolescence and early adolescence, adolescents still want to remain "normal" in their peer groups, thus, they may not be allowed to talk about their grief for fear of being labeled as "weird". In using narrative therapy with pre and early adolescents, the use of activities, such as making memory boxes or writing letters to the lost parent, can be very helpful. These activities utilize young adolescents' creativity while allowing them to review the relationship with their

lost parent, whether it be through photographs, words, or thoughts. Pre and early adolescents are particularly keen to these ideas, because they may not be comfortable talking a lot about such an abstract, yet emotionally laden concept like death in the beginning.

Middle adolescents, who are experiencing milestones such as graduating high school, getting a drivers license, or choosing a college, have a greater chance of intimate friendships with whom to share their loss. However, it is still possible that they may feel alone in their loss, without anyone who *truly* knows what they are going through. In addition, they may feel as if they are supposed to be the support for their living parent. In therapy, it is may be helpful for the middle adolescent to make meaning of their roles in the family, now that a parent is gone, by examining the relationship they hold with both parents. This can be done by journaling or scrap-booking or even using the previous interventions mentioned with earlier stages of adolescence, as this may help them to remember they are not supposed to be an adult yet. All of these activities help adolescents build their current and future relationships with both the deceased and the remaining parent.

Often times, late adolescents are in need of much validation and empathy, especially if living away from home or at college. Living away from their primary social support networks cause them to feel even more detached and in greater need of someone who can support them. While in the process of becoming an adult themselves, they are perhaps getting married, having children, or starting their career and they are lost and confused as to how to do it without their deceased parent. This is when the meaning making of their relationship between themselves and the deceased is crucial. Helping them to learn how to incorporate this relationship into their life changes and milestones would be ideal. One narrative intervention that has proved very valuable for late adolescents is the writing of letter to their deceased parent, telling them what they are

missing, what has been happening, and how they would want them to feel if they were alive during this time. Late adolescents are able to use this in order to create a new relationship meaning, which will sustain them in their new journey through their life without their deceased parent.

Narrative therapy allows for an adolescent to tell his or her own story of loss, in his or her own words, language and metaphors, in the hopes of making meaning of his or her "new story". It is my belief that the use of metaphors is so important in grief therapy with adolescents because their own language, expressed in metaphors, allows them to explain the uniqueness of their loss. Wolfelt (1992), a specializing grief therapist, said, "I can only help people when I allow them to teach me about their unique journey" (p. 7). After all, the only person who is the expert on the loss is the person who is telling the story himself or herself and it should be the primary goal of the therapist to honor the individual's personal experience of grief and loss.

One of the many assumptions of Narrative therapy says that stories are not simply reflections of life but they are the structure of life. It is around these stories that you have to build new meaning (Nichols & Schwartz, 2004). One adolescent woman, who lost her father and her brother, described how her relationship with them had continued:

> *"When you lose somebody, it's almost like you're building a house and when somebody dies, all the top gets taken off but the foundation is still there. This is how I picture it. So we still have this foundation but we have to build it up again and in that foundation are my dad and brother—still there. They're still there. And they're so much engrained in who we are but all of the physical parts of them are gone."*(Moules, et. al., 2004, p. 102).

This adolescent describes so beautifully not only how the relationship continues, but also, how new meaning must be built around her relationship with her father and her brother.

The use of "meaning making" in narrative therapy is also essential in looking into the future of a loss. After a loss it may be very possible that an adolescent, who has had an enmeshed relationship with the deceased parent, will not be able to let go of his or her loss and may become stuck in the time he or she lost the parent. This may cause them never to be able to make a decision without them or making decisions based on how the parent would react. An adolescent has to learn how to examine the relationship and make meaning of that relationship before the death, in order to differentiate from his or herself from the lost parent and build the new relationship. Metaphors may prove helpful throughout this process as well. Many people can understand and express themselves more easily through metaphors when topics like death are the subject of the conversation.

The use of her metaphor also helps to describe the loss in her language and how she views what she wants the loss to mean in her life. The use of metaphors is so incredibly valuable with adolescents in therapy for loss because a metaphor allows an adolescent safety, giving them more distance from the loss, yet at the same time allowing them to be close to their loss. Moules et. al. (2004) describes metaphors as a paradox. The metaphors simultaneously serve to remove us from the loss, while at the same time offering us a home in our own language and understanding. Metaphors seem to be even more beneficial in Narrative therapy with clients' experiencing grief, due to the fact that grief is such a mystery, while metaphors offer something that can be pictured and understood, thereby communicating more than just thoughts but feelings and emotions as well. Metaphors, used to explain our loss, make it easier to describe the pain and make it more understandable for other people (Moules et. al., 2004).

62

Narrative therapy also proves to be significantly helpful for adolescents who are learning to cope with loss, because narrative strategies utilize an adolescents' creativity. Some forms of intervention used with adolescents have been writing letters to the lost parent, writing their own eulogies, or creating memorials for the deceased (Servaty-Seib, 2004). Utilizing these interventions with adolescents allows them to walk backwards, while moving forward. In order for an adolescent to form a new relationship with the deceased parent, they must make sense of their relationship before the death. In this sense, walking backwards is permitting them to move forward. Walking backwards may not happen until the adolescent is given the invitation to do so by a trusted therapist. It is at this time that it is so essential that a therapist is able to walk alongside the adolescent, as they proceed to walk backward into their future and new story.

While walking backwards into their future, it may even be helpful to bring the living parent or peers into the therapy sessions. This may prove beneficial if the adolescent seems to have had a hard time examining his or her relationship with the deceased parent while he or she was living. If an adolescent is stuck, a living parent may act as another voice of support for the adolescent in order to help he or she examine the relationship that was present. The parent may be able to tell the adolescent what he or she saw, perhaps refreshing the memory that may have been washed away in the midst of an adolescents' grief. The parent may also be able to help the adolescent make meaning of the new relationship he or she is beginning to form with the deceased parent.

The hope for an adolescent who leaves therapy is not that his or her grief is over. As I said before, the grief will not end. However, it will mean that the adolescent has worked on healthy ways of coping and managing their grief. Perhaps the adolescent has been assisted in making meaning of a new relationship with his or her lost parent. Perhaps, the grief has turned

from an everyday intense ache, to a less frequent and duller feeling. An adolescent, who has learned ways to cope with their grief, viewing his or her relationship with the deceased as still present, only different, is at a much better place to continue on through their grief work.

It must also be mentioned that, while working with adolescent's experiencing grief through the loss of a parent, a therapist must always be aware of his or her own self-of-therapist issues. Working with grief and loss can be challenging and rewarding, however, it can also be taxing and emotionally heavy, which is why it would be so important to monitor oneself. Knowing when to seek out supervision and increase self-care strategies is crucial for a therapist working with loss. For example, if, while working with an adolescent, a therapist were to begin thinking of his or her own loss, this will alter the effectiveness of the therapy, not fully benefiting the client. This would be a time to seek out supervision, not only about the case, but about his or her feelings of loss also.

Implications for future research

Due to the fact that many of the ideas in this report are speculation, I believe that there are many opportunities and outlets for future research within the topic of parental loss during adolescence. More research needs to be completed on the differences in bereavement across the life span development. How is bereavement in childhood or adolescence different from other types of bereavement or why is this type of loss so unique? During this report, I have speculated to some of the reasons why this type of loss may be so unique. However, as researchers of grief have noted, there has not been sufficient research done to understand this life-span perspective (Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). For instance, losing a parent during early childhood years may not cause you to fear intimacy or entering into close relationships. Although, if you were to lose a parent while you were dating your first boyfriend, might that change your view on

intimate relationships? There has been very little empirical research done to assess the

implications of the bereavement experience according to age, experience, and cognitive capacity.

In addition, it seems like it would be most beneficial to study adolescent grief more in

terms of its family context. The family is the first classroom and the first learning environment

of an adolescent, which plays into so much of who an adolescent is going to become.

Adolescents watch the way that their families are grieving and depending on what they see,

could determine their grieving process as well. Doing more research on the grief of an

adolescent could increase our understanding of how the grieving parents and siblings may

complicate or ameliorate the grief of an adolescent.   On the other hand, it would also be helpful

to look at the ways that families deal with grief that allow the adolescent to incur a more

manageable grieving process. What coping mechanisms and skills may families be comprised of

that make them less susceptible to the hurdles of grief?

Another route on which I have not found sufficient research is down the path of personal

growth occurring from loss. As previously discussed in this report, losing a parent during

adolescence is "off-time". However, though it is "off-time", and many studies, books, and

reports discuss the negative consequences for an adolescent, this is not to say that this loss could

not also lead to positive outcomes as well. Schaefer and Moos (2001) reported on a study of late

adolescents in college who had lost a parent. The following results were reported: 45%

reprioritized their goals, 35% gained a deeper meaning of life, 30% questioned their personal

vulnerability, and 30% became more religious. It could be argued that many of these results lead

to positive personal growth for the adolescent. How interesting it would be to note the

characteristics and temperament of adolescents that end up with not only negative consequences

but positive growth from loss as well.

Conclusion

It is both my personal and professional belief that one of the most difficult experiences encountered in life is loss. Throw an adolescent into loss and themes of pain, confusion, loneliness, and hurt are likely to be present. Loss throws a persons life into an instantaneous state of shock. Life, as they knew it, has suddenly become a "Lifetime Television Movie" and they are the leading role. From now on, loss makes them who they are; influencing their personalities, identities, relationships, careers, and future endeavors.

"Unlike the adult, who experiences parent loss with a relatively intact personality, a girl who loses her mother during childhood or adolescence co-opts the loss into her emerging personality, where it then becomes a defining characteristic of her identity. From learning at an early age that close relationships can be impermanent, security ephemeral, and family capable of being redefined, the motherless daughter develops an adult insight while still a child but has only juvenile resources to help her cope." (Edelman, 1994, p. xxv)

As a therapist, helping an adolescent, experiencing loss, to make meaning of his or her own life movie is critical. It will forever be my existing passion and zeal, as well as the theme of my own "life-time movie".

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