

SPIRITUAL AND RELATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF PARENTAL GRIEVING

by

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Abstract

This study explored relational and spiritual dimensions of parental grieving. Five bereaved parental couples participated in three sets of interviews over the course of approximately three months. The guiding research question for this study was, “how do spiritual/religious bereaved parents grieve jointly for their deceased child?” Data was collected using the qualitative action-project method and participants were asked how they grieved together for their deceased child and how their spirituality impacted their joint grieving. Joint grieving processes were identified and monitored over approximately three months. The data analysis was informed by the qualitative action project and an instrumental case study method. Joint grieving was described and enacted as goal-directed activities, including both planned and unplanned grieving actions and intended towards the development of an ongoing, relational representation of the deceased child and towards the authentic and vibrant relationships with the partner and the Divine. Joint grieving was facilitated through engaging in joint grieving rituals, sharing individual grieving actions with one’s partner, and accepting the individual grieving style of the partner. Joint grieving was impeded by experiences of disconnection from the significant others, and by various life extraneous stressors. The joint grieving projects were irreducibly related to the spiritual lives of bereaved parents. Their faiths shaped the continuing bonds with their deceased children, offered comfort and spiritual meaning in the midst of suffering and provided an avenue to express disappointment and anger over their loss. The findings offer theoretical, empirical and clinical import for the multi-disciplinary study of parental bereavement.

Preface

This research project was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (H07-03194, H07-03194-A001, H07-03194-A002, and H07-03194-A003).

The action theory section of the literature review in Chapter 2 is based in part on a joint publication with fellow doctoral student, Matt Graham, and our joint supervisor Dr. Richard Young. I served as the first author for this publication and was responsible for its main theoretical argument and for situating it within the extant literature. Matt Graham assisted with some theoretical analysis and the write-up of the case study. The case itself came from Dr. Young's research on transition to adulthood. Dr. Young's research project was approved by the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board (B03-0292).

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Dedication

To Jaycen Mark Kehler, who remains present with us.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Over the past twenty years scholarly interest in the psychology of religion and spirituality has increased dramatically (Hill & Pargament, 2003; Paloutzian & Park, 2005). Notable recent contributions to this sub-discipline include the development and publication of new and innovative journals (e.g., *Mental Health, Religion and Culture*, the *International Journal of the Psychology of Religion*, and *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*) and numerous comprehensive research reviews of and meta-analyses on the relationships between spirituality/religiosity and physical/mental health (e.g., Baer, 2003; Harrison, Koenig, Hays, Eme-Akwari, & Pargament, 2001; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Koenig, McCullough & Larson, 2001; Smith, McCullough & Poll, 2003).

Scholars of spirituality and religion are also finding their work more frequently included in mainstream reviews of other sub-disciplinary domains, such as stress and coping and positive psychology (e.g., Aldwin & Parke, 2004; Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Furthermore, other sub-disciplines, which share a significant thematic overlap with the psychology of religion and spirituality, such as existential, and constructivist psychologies (e.g., Frankl, 1984; Greenberg, Koole, & Pyszczynski, 2004; Raskin & Bridges, 2004; Wong & Fry, 1998) are also experiencing a resurgence in clinical and research interest. And while it may be argued that the sheer volume of research in these domains of psychology has contributed to their renaissance, wider social and cultural factors, such as a renewed interest in the understanding of faith-based worldviews following the worldwide resurgence of international terrorism, should not be discounted (Bibby, 2002; Meisenhelder, 2002; Plante & Canchola, 2004; Pyszczynski, Solomon, & Greenberg, 2003).

Spirituality and Health

Many researchers in the social and health sciences have been particularly interested in understanding the relationships between spirituality, religiosity and health (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Baer, 2003; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Koenig, et al., 2001; Smith, et al., 2003). Within this literature, religious or spiritual coping has emerged as especially relevant to counsellors and psychologists because of its strong research foundation in the transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1999; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Spirituality or religiosity have been found to mediate the relationship between personality level constructs and various outcomes that are commonly of interest to psychologists – health, well-being, and pathology (Fabricatore, Handal, Rubio & Gilner, 2004; Park, 2006; Tix & Frazier, 1998). Scholars from various health disciplines and the social sciences have investigated the role of spirituality in relation to post-traumatic stress (Meisenhelder, 2002; Plante & Canchola, 2004; Smith, Pargament, Brant & Olive, 2000), depression and psychotic disorders (Bosworth, Park, McQuoid, Hays & Steffens, 2003; Reger & Rogers, 2002; Rogers, Poey, Reger, Tepper & Colemank, 2002; Taylor, 2001), hypertension (Krause, Lian, Shaw, Sugisawa, Kim, & Sugihara, 2002), dementia (Kinney, Ishler, Pargament & Cavanaugh, 2003), kidney transplant surgery (Tix & Frazier, 1998), living with HIV/AIDS (Richards & Folkman, 1997; Simoni, Martone, & Kerwin, 2002; Somlai & Heckman, 2000), end stage renal disease (Snethen, Broome, Kelber & Warrady, 2004), chronic pain (Bush, Rye, Brant, Emery, Pargament & Riessinger, 1999), mortality (Krause, 1998), cancer (Alferi, Culver, Carver, Arena, & Antoni, 1999; Gall & Cornblat, 2002; Laubmeier, Zakowski & Pair, 2004; McClain, Rosenfeld & Breitbart, 2003; Nairn & Merluzzi, 2003; Stanton, Danoff-Burg & Huggins, 2002), and bereavement (Anderson,

Marwit, Vandenberg, Chibnall, 2005; Murphy, Johnson & Lohan, 2003). One element that unites these diverse research foci is the fact that many research participants have, through illness or adverse life circumstances, been pushed to the limits of their existence and have had to face the finality of their lives or the lives of their loved ones. Such existential situations, so Pargament (1997), often move people to turn to and draw upon their spiritual/religious beliefs and practices. From a research perspective, these situations also be particularly enlightening about the role of spirituality in coping.

Parental Bereavement

One of the domains of investigation in which worldviews and coping practices have been investigated is the area of bereavement (Stroebe, Hansson, Schut, & Stroebe, 2008; Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001). The topic of death in general, and in particular the death of a child, is likely to invoke existential concerns in those who suffer from the loss (Center for the Advancement of Health [CAH], 2004; Klass, 1999; Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005). Qualitative and quantitative research programs have drawn attention to the suffering of bereaved parents and explored the ways in which they have attempted to cope with the loss of their child and readjust their lives to fit this new and tragic reality (Murphy, et al., 2003; Uren & Wastell, 2002). Most researchers and clinicians (Janzen, Cadell, & Westhues, 2003-04; Worden, 2004) acknowledge that the loss of a child is the most devastating loss for parents, and that this loss puts parents at significant risk for physical and mental health problems, including increased suicidal ideation (Murphy, Tapper, Johnson, & Lohan, 2003), higher levels post-traumatic stress disorder as compared to normative populations (Murphy, Johnson, Chung, & Beaton, 2003), increased risk of complicated or traumatic grief (Bennett, Litz, Sarnoff Lee, & Maguen, 2005; Murphy, 2008), increased rates of depression and

anxiety (Kreicbergs, Validmarsdottir, Onelöv, Henter, & Steinbeck, 2004; Znoj & Keller, 2002), higher rates of alcohol abuse for fathers (Vance, Boyle, Najman, & Thearle, 2002), marital/relational distress (Oliver, 1999) and even an increased risk of mortality (Li, Hansen Precht, Mortensen, & Olsen, 2003; Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2007).

One of the main reasons for these health risks is that the loss of a child – at any age – is generally considered to be an ‘unnatural’ event, an event that reverses the biological order of death and often undermines significant portions of the parents’ assumptive worlds (Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997). Given that modern societies have largely banished death from consciousness (Becker, 1973; Greenberg et al., 2004) and that modern medicine continues to chip away at the ever-declining child mortality rates (Ahmad, Lopez, Inoue, 2000), most parents do not expect to deal with the loss of a child and are thus ill-prepared to cope with such a trauma (Prigerson, Vanderwerker, & Maciejewski, 2008). Medical and spiritual communities as well, often have relatively few resources to aid suffering parents (Massey, 2000), in spite of the fact that many of the major world religions explicitly deal with the meaning of death (Rinpoche, 1992), and that for some, such as Christianity, the death of ‘the Son’ is the central, spiritual narrative (Klass, 1999). Many parents find themselves alone and at a significant loss in how to cope with such a devastating and all-encompassing crisis (D’Agostino, Berlin-Romalis, Jovcevska, & Barerra, 2008).

One consistent theme that has emerged in the clinical and research literature on child loss is that many parents cope with their loss through engaging their religious and/or spiritual beliefs and practices (Attig, 1996; Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005). These grieving practices often extend beyond the participation in religious funeral services as parents find comfort in community, as well as solace and meaning in their relationship with the Divine (Klass,

1999). Researchers who have begun to explore the ways in which spiritual and religious resources and grieving practices may contribute to the recovery from parental bereavement have generally found them to be salutogenic in nature; that is, functioning as a protective factor against complicated grief and contributing to the adjustment and recovery process (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, 2001; see recent reviews by Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009). Spiritual coping practices that have been demonstrated to be of particular benefit to bereaved parents include, benevolent religious reappraisal, collaborative religious coping, seeking spiritual connection, seeking support from clergy or faith community members, and finding meaning (Pargament, Koenig, & Perez, 2000).

However, research on the role of spirituality/religion in coping in general (Klaassen, McDonald, & James, 2006; Pargament, 2002a, 2002b) and particularly in relation to parental bereavement (Park & Wortman, 2008, 2009) remains in its infancy. Many of the research efforts to date have attempted to bolster the support for the construct of spiritual/religious coping, while simultaneously exploring the mechanisms or strategies through which it emerges in the lives of people (Pargament, et al., 2000). This line of research has sought generally to establish the incremental validity of spiritual/religious coping and demonstrate that it cannot be explained away, that is, reduced to other social or psychological strategies.

Additionally, the investigation of the role of spirituality in parental bereavement has been hampered by the oft-bemoaned isolation of research programs in the social sciences. Bereavement researchers (e.g., Stroebe et al., 2007; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006) often fail to address spirituality as a multi-dimensional construct in their research and theoretical efforts – a point which has been argued often in the psychology of religion and spirituality (Harrison, et al., 2001; Wortman & Park, 2009). Researchers in spirituality and religiosity, on the other

hand, have frequently failed to take into account bereavement researchers and scholars who have addressed spiritual coping outside of the domain of the psychology of religion and spirituality (e.g., Klass, 1999; Neimeyer, 2001; Rubin, 1999; Wong & Fry, 1998). Thus, while the research on the role of spirituality in parental bereavement is growing, it remains fragmented and disorganized, with many scholars in one domain failing to cite those who do not customarily publish in their area.

Limitations of the Extant Literature

The upshot of the research on the role of spirituality in parental bereavement is that the literature is scattered across the social and health sciences, that few theoretical models exist that attempt to integrate the literature from these divergent domains, and that relatively little attention has been paid to the social and relational context in which it takes place (CAH, 2004; Walter, 1996). A systematic review of the literature – elaborated more fully in the following chapter – revealed several areas for further investigation.

Although the vast majority of researchers and clinicians (e.g., Bowlby, 1980/1998) recognize that parental bereavement is an inherently relational trauma, and that parents cope with this event in relationships (e.g., with the deceased child, themselves, their partners and so forth), the vast majority of studies continue to conceptualize and research grieving as an intrapsychic process. From this dominant perspective, parental grieving is about the individual parents' relinquishing or reconfiguring of the parental bond and the development of a stable 'inner representation' of the parent-child relationship (Klass, 1999). Researchers typically employ individual parents in their research studies and commonly are interested in the individual's grieving process or the relationships between individual grieving and health (Stroebe, et al., 2007).

When scholars do investigate relational aspects of parental bereavement, they typically focus on the parent-child attachment (Uren & Wastell, 2002), the role of spiritual and/or social support for bereaved parents (Barerra, D'Agostino, Schneiderman, Tallett, Spencer, & Jovcevska, 2007) or the effects of child loss on the parental relationship (Oliver, 1999). With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Nadeau, 2001a, 2001b; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009; Wijngaards-de Meij, Stroebe, Schut, Stroebe, van den Bout, van der Heijden, & Dijkstra, 2008), few scholars have asked the question how parents grieve jointly for their child – how does parental grieving emerge in their ongoing relationship with each other? Scholars have commented on the individualistic and intrapsychic focus of grieving and have suggested that parental grieving, in particular, be also investigated as a relational process (Klass & Walter, 2001; Rosenblatt, 2000; Walter, 1996), that is, as a process embedded within the dyadic relationship of the bereaved parents. Such a reconceptualization poses theoretical and methodological challenges to the field as most theories and methods consider the individual bereaved parent to be the unit of analysis.

The excessive focus on research methods that highlight the individual, intrapsychic (e.g., cognitive, emotional, behavioural) dimensions of grieving has likewise obscured contextual elements of the parental bereavement (Rosenblatt, 2001), such as spirituality/religiosity and culture. Grieving parents do not mourn for their children in a vacuum but rather embody the cultural and spiritual/religious norms and preferences in their grieving actions (Klass, 1999). A few scholars have begun to research parental grieving in diverse cultures (e.g., Klass & Walter, 2001) and this has been widely acknowledged to be important and underrepresented work (Stroebe et al., 2008). However, the context of parental grieving in dominant cultures and religious traditions in North America and Western Europe

has likewise been ignored. When contexts are taken into account, the vast majority of studies do so only minimally, and focus on the effect of certain moderator variables (e.g., age of the deceased, type of death, etc.) on the health and adjustment of the mourners (cf. Stroebe, et al., 2001). While it is important to understand the risk factors that may extend or complicate the grieving process, such an understanding of context is rather anaemic and ignores the more basic contextual and relational features that shape the course of bereavement (Walter, 1996; cf. American Psychological Association, 2003). Adequate attention to the context of bereavement requires researchers to pay attention to the ways in which contextual factors are woven into the very fabric of grieving (cf. Shweder, 2000) and to the ways in which such factors shape, inhibit or enhance the grieving process itself (Doran & Downing Hansen, 2006). Scholars have argued that the contextual dimensions of a given phenomenon are best explored – at least initially – through qualitative methods (Belzen, 1999; Klass, 1999).

The Current Study

This dissertation addresses some of the above-noted omissions in the parental bereavement literature by investigating how bereaved parents draw on their spirituality/religiosity to grieve jointly for their deceased child. The study employed contextual action theory (Valach, Young, & Lyman, 2002) as its theoretical lens and the qualitative action-project method (Young, Valach, & Domene, 2005) as its method of inquiry. The research question for this study was: *How do spiritual/religious bereaved parents grieve jointly for their deceased child?*

Contextual action theory can be considered an integrative framework – a specific way of looking at human emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational processes – that draws on a variety of discourses in the social sciences, including, social constructionism,

hermeneutics, phenomenology, and narrative studies (Valach, et al., 2002; Valach & Young, 2004). One of the chief features of this integrative framework is that it assumes action, and in particular joint action – intentional human activity – to be its central construct and unit of analysis. Thus, in contrast to much of the recent research on bereavement, contextual action theory directs the researcher to explore the ways in which grieving emerges jointly and intentionally in the actions of bereaved parents. As a construct, action serves to synthesize phenomena and contextualize them within the relationships in which they emerge over time (Young, et al., 2002; cf. Lazarus, 2000).

The qualitative action-project method (Young, et al., 2005) was chosen as the strategy of inquiry for this study. As a qualitative, process-oriented method, the action project method is ideal for developing an understanding of how bereaved parents grieve together over time. The method explores intentional human activity from three perspectives – behavioural activities (what parents do), internal processes (what parents think and feel) and social meaning (what actions are about and where they lead).

In light of the evident omissions in the extant literature and the chosen theory and method of inquiry, the following aims for this study were identified. The central goal for this study was to understand and describe how spiritual/religious bereaved parents grieved together for their lost child. The aim was to arrive at a rich and contextually-sensitive description of this grieving process, and to understand how this grieving emerged in the midst of the ongoing spiritual lives and dyadic relationships for each couple. Given the lack of empirical and theoretical developments in dyadic grieving, it was hoped that the findings might also offer novel theoretical constructs, which could be germane to future research endeavours and helpful in clinical practice.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

The intention for this chapter is to provide an overview of the relevant domains of literature for a study on spirituality and parental bereavement. The literature review begins by discussing key terms for this study: spirituality, religiosity, bereavement, and grieving. Next, the area of bereavement research is explored, focusing first on key theoretical grieving models and then elaborating on the experience of parental bereavement and the research on the grieving process for bereaved parents. This section concludes with an exploration of the existing literature on the role of spirituality and religiosity in parental bereavement. The second part of the literature review introduces contextual action theory as the theoretical framework for this investigation. This section outlines action theory more fully, explains its major constructs and describes the qualitative action project method.

Definitions of Key Terms

At the outset of such a project, it is prudent to review key theoretical constructs in the literature. For the sake of brevity, this section is limited to the definitions of *religion*, *spirituality*, *bereavement*, and *grieving*. It bears noting that some of these terms, such as religion and spirituality, are vigorously debated in the research literature, and that scholars have not yet (and may never) come to a consensus about their definitions. This perennial disagreement has prompted some scholars to call for the abandonment of the search for universal definitions of religiousness and spirituality and suggested that local, culturally-specific definitions may be more appropriate (Belzen, 1999). Others (e.g., Zinnbauer & Pargament, 2005) contend that there may indeed be hope for the peaceful coexistence of multiple perspectives if not the opportunity for synergistic advancement.

Scholars of religion (e.g., Bibby, 2002, 2008; Pargament, 1997) remind us that the term *religion* (as well as its derivatives, *religiousness* and *religiosity*) has a long history within the humanities and social sciences. Traditionally, religion was considered a broad-band construct (Pargament, 1999), which incorporated both public (e.g., public prayer, worship attendance) and private (e.g., private prayer, beliefs, finding hope and solace) expressions. In relative recent history, concurrent with the advancement of secularization in many western countries, religion has been reconstructed as a narrow-band construct, which includes only public and formal expressions and has fallen out of favour with academics (Zinnbauer, Pargament, & Scott, 1999). Religion, in this view, is seen as formal, stultified, and largely unrelated to authentic experience of the transcendent or the divine. Concurrently with the decline of religion, the term *spirituality* has gained in popularity and has been defined as separate from religion. Spirituality is understood as a broad-band construct, focused on the personal and relational, and is seen as authentic engagement with the transcendent or divine. While it behoves scholars to understand the history and development of such constructs and to examine them critically, it is nonetheless important to employ terms, such as religion and spirituality, in a contextually-sensitive manner (Belzen, 1999).

One group of scholars (Hill, Pargament, Hood, McCullough, Swyers, Larson, & Zinnbauer, 2000) has proposed a solution that takes into account historical understandings of religion and spirituality and offers definitional criteria for both spirituality and religion. They suggest that it is perhaps too early to propose conclusive definitions for these constructs as they remain under-investigated and controversial. However, they propose that their description of these terms may serve to identify commonalities and unique aspects of the constructs. Accordingly, *both* religion and spirituality are described as “feelings, thoughts,

experiences and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred. The term ‘search’ refers to attempts to identify, articulate, maintain or transform. The term ‘sacred’ refers to a divine being, divine object, Ultimate Reality, or Ultimate Truth as perceived by the individual” (p. 66). Religion, in addition, is proposed to include “a search for non-sacred goals (such as identity, belongingness, meaning, health or wellness)” (p. 66) and the “means and methods (e.g., rituals or prescribed behaviors) of the search that receive validation and support from within the identifiable group of people” (p. 66). These descriptions include both functional and substantive elements, allow for the emergence of spirituality outside of or within a religious framework, and yet also avoid the pitfall of indiscriminate spiritualization.

Following Belzen’s (1999) suggestion of contextually-sensitive definitions, it is important to elaborate on the role of the spiritual in the lives of bereaved parents. Drawing on his twenty-year ethnography with a bereaved-parent support group in the United States, Klass (1999) identified three essential features of the spiritual life that are particularly relevant to those who have experienced the loss of a child. Spirituality, in this context, relates to (1) an encounter or union with transcendent reality (e.g., God or the Divine); (2) the adoption a worldview, that is, a set of beliefs, assumptions, and practices that give order and meaning the world, and (3) belonging to a community who seek to live out their lives in relation to the transcendent reality and worldview. Klass emphasizes that spirituality does not refer to other-worldly phenomena, but emerges in the day-to-day lives of bereaved parents. He notes, that, “spirituality is woven into the fabric of our world. The question is not whether spirituality is present; the question is whether we see it. The color-blind and the color-sighted see the same world; the difference is in the seer not in the seen” (p. 172).

In the domain of bereavement, two common terms should be explained. *Bereavement* is typically considered to be an umbrella term for the entire process of death and dying, including the anticipation of death, the actual experience of the death itself and the subsequent period of adjustment to the loss of a loved one (Christ, Bonanno, Malkinson, & Rubin, 2003; CAH, 2004). Grieving, by contrast, is more specific and addresses both the personal reaction to loss as well as activities that aim to restore personal wholeness.

Attig (1996) has differentiated two types of grieving – active and reactive grieving. Reactive grieving has been described as an emotional reaction to a loss, which points to the felt discrepancy between the world as it is, and the world as it should be. This type of grieving typically emerges in the early phases of coping with a loss. Active grieving, by contrast, is defined as an integrative effort to reshape existing life patterns and relearning one's personal and relational world. The main contrast, for Attig, is that this active part of grieving is a process that is imbued with personal choice, with an opportunity to live out one's recovery in consonance with personal values and in harmony with one's being-in-the-world (Dasein; Heidegger, 1927/1962). He notes, that

Grieving is inherently a multi-faceted struggle toward renewed wholeness and restoration of personal integrity, within broader social and historical contexts that support and sustain identity and meaning in our lives. Because we are primarily practically engaged in the world and only secondarily self-reflective, bereavement reveals how much we have taken for granted as it uproots our souls, shakes our spirits, and reminds us that even the most viable posture in the world is tentative and precarious. (p. 358)

Since this current project draws upon contextual action theory, Attig's (1996) differentiation between active and reactive grieving is particularly relevant. Two points about grieving are worth emphasizing: Firstly, grieving is not merely a directionless expression of pain, but rather intentional and directed towards the restoration of wholeness. Various scholars disagree on the ultimate aim for the grieving process (cf. Parkes, 2001; Klass, Silverman, & Nickman, 1996), but generally find consensus that grieving is an agentic activity, which involves turning towards the experience of the loss of someone of value in one's life, accepting the facticity of the loss and beginning to find a new orientation, a new way of relating to the deceased, and a new way forward in our lives (Länge, personal communication, September 8, 2007). Secondly, grieving in general and especially parental grieving has been described as a holistic process that involves a relearning of one's entire being-in-the-world (Attig, 1996; Klass, 1999; cf. Chiari & Nuzzo, 2006). Thus, while parental grieving may involve cognitive reappraisals and coping behaviours, it is more accurately understood from a holistic perspective, involving the entire person-in-context and his/her spiritual, psychic and somatic dimensions. Such a complex process calls for an ontological and epistemological openness on the part of the researcher, as well as a research method which can address this complexity.

Theoretical Approaches to Grief

The study of bereavement in modern society has emerged largely over the last century. Although grieving and bereavement are universal experiences, which have been explored by poets, scholars and spiritual texts throughout the ages, the modern understanding and investigation of bereavement and grieving can be dated to a landmark paper by Sigmund Freud, *Mourning and Melancholia* (1917/2005). Freud's work on grieving and depression, as

we would translate these terms in current psychological literature, was foundational for the study of grief and remains influential in clinical practice to this date. Attachment theorists (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Parkes, 1996) subsequently shaped the psychodynamic tradition and gave rise to further stage (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) and task (Worden, 2004) based theories of grieving. Challenges emerged for the psychodynamic understanding of grieving with the rise of the cognitive revolution (Wortman & Silver, 1989, 2001), and some began to explore the experience of grieving through the lens of the transactional coping theory (Folkman, 2001; Park & Folkman, 1997).

More recently, we have witnessed the rise of numerous integrative theories of grieving, such as Stroebe's dual process model (Stroebe, Schut, & Stroebe, 2005), Rubin's two track model (Rubin, 1999) or Neimeyer's meaning-reconstruction model (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, 2000). These integrative models have generally attempted to bring together traditional psychodynamic understandings of grieving with cognitive and constructivist frameworks (Bonanno & Kaltmann, 1999; Davies, 2004; Stroebe, Folkman, Hansson, & Schut, 2006). Additionally, recent challenges to traditional psychodynamic understandings of grieving have emerged from continuing bonds perspectives (Klass, 1999; Klass, et al., 1996).

Psychoanalytic theory. The history of modern psychoanalytic and psychodynamic thinking on bereavement and grief finds its origins in Freud's work (1917/2005) on grieving and depression in the context of the horrific deaths associated with World War I. Written within the wider framework of the psychoanalytic understanding of libidinal energies, Freud postulated that grieving (or mourning, as it is still known in psychoanalytic circles) served the function of withdrawing libidinal energies from a given object. The purpose of this

withdrawal was to free the ego from the continued attachment to the deceased and enable it to invest this energy into other objects or activities. This process of decathexis (or ‘relinquishing bonds’, as some have termed it; cf. Klass et al., 1996) and the subsequent re-investment of the energy in other objects or activities developed the fundamental psychological dynamic of grief work (or “Trauerarbeit” in German; cf. Hagman, 2001). The dynamic of disengagement and reengagement became the central process for the psychodynamic understanding of grief and finds its expressions today in modern integrative theoretical models (e.g., Rubin, 1999; Stroebe et al., 2005). And as we will see, decathexis has also become a central point of contention within the parental bereavement literature (Klass et al.), with clinicians and scholars challenging the validity of such a process for bereaved parents.

A second and highly influential paper on grieving within the psychoanalytic community was published by the psychiatrist Erich Lindemann in 1944. This paper, too, was written in the aftermath of a traumatic event – the Cocoanut Grove fire in Boston – and drew upon Lindemann’s clinical observations after treating 101 patients at a local hospital. Lindemann’s observations were highly influential at the time and critical to subsequent theoretical and clinical developments (Parkes, 2001, 2002). He identified several key processes and constructs, including the differentiation between normal and pathological (or “morbid”) grieving. Normal grieving, according to Lindemann’s observations, involved ‘grief work’ or the “emancipation from the bondage to the deceased, readjustment to the environment in which the deceased is missing, and the formation of new relationships” (p. 190). Normal grief included symptoms of somatic distress, preoccupation with the image of the deceased, guilt, hostile reactions, and a loss of patterns of conduct. Pathological or

morbid grieving, by contrast, involved delayed or postponed grieving, or distorted reactions, such as overactivity without an emotional acknowledgement of the loss, the adoption of psychiatric symptoms belonging to the deceased, the development of psychosomatic conditions (asthma, arthritis, colitis), irritability and hostility in relation to one's friends, a repression of rage, changes in social interactions, and agitated depression. Lindemann also claimed that normal grieving could be alleviated within eight to ten psychiatric interviews over the course of four to six weeks, thus laying the groundwork for the differentiation between normal and prolonged grief and for time-limited clinical intervention in the form of grief counselling.

While the work of Freud (1917/2005) and Lindemann (1944) was highly influential on subsequent research and theoretical developments, scholars have also offered several criticisms of the early psychoanalytic perspectives on grieving (Wortman & Silver, 1989, 2001; Klass et al., 1996; Stroebe et al., 2005). While some critics focused on inadequate research methods for Freud and Lindemann, one the strongest and most enduring critiques was that both clinicians failed to take their context into account in their descriptions of grieving. Both psychoanalytic accounts were derived from work with psychiatric patients who had experienced severe traumas and whose losses were violent and, at times, unexpected. Thus, it is not surprising that both Freud and Lindemann encountered psychopathology (depression and post-traumatic stress, respectively) in their clinical work with bereaved patients, and that their descriptions of grieving tended to pathologize this process. Modern research on complicated grief has certainly sustained the claims that grieving can be associated with psychopathology (Prigerson, et al., 2008), but it has also

shown in many cases, particularly in ones where the deceased died a timely and peaceful death, that grieving can be unencumbered by pathology (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008).

Attachment theory. John Bowlby and his colleagues at the Tavistock Clinic in London (Bowlby, 1980/1998, Parkes, 1996) sought to enhance the existing psychoanalytic formulations of grieving through the adoption of an interpersonal perspective of this process. Drawing upon his earlier work on maternal-child relationships, Bowlby essentially conceptualized grieving as a form of separation anxiety, in which the bereaved undergoes a series of psychological reactions in adapting to the psychic reality of the permanent loss of the loved one. The phases were initially identified as protest, despair and detachment but later reformulated as, (1) numbing (with intermittent outbursts of extreme distress), (2) yearning and searching for the lost person, (3) disorganization and despair, and (4) reorganization (Bowlby; Parkes, 2001).

Bowlby's (1980/1998) phases of grieving were slightly amended in relation to the loss of a child. Drawing upon his research studies with the bereaved parents of young, fatally-ill children, Bowlby identified the grieving phases as, (1) numbing (with outbursts of anger), (2) disbelief and attempts to reverse the outcome, (3) disorganization and (4) reorganization. He acknowledged that bereaved parents frequently face numerous relational struggles, such as marital problems and divorce, as well as mental health challenges, such as substance abuse, depression, anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms. Critically, Bowlby was one of the first to comment on shared grieving between bereaved parents. Commenting on the importance of the parental relationship for the grieving process, he noted:

How well or badly mourning proceeds, every study shows, turns in great degree on the parents' own relationship. When they can mourn together, keeping in step from

one phase to the next, each derives comfort and support from the other and the outcome of their mourning is favourable. When, by contrast, the parents are in conflict and mutual support is absent the family may break up and/or individual members become psychiatric casualties. (pp. 120-121)

It is important to note that Bowlby's (1980/1998) research on the grieving processes of bereaved parents exclusively involved parents whose children were diagnosed with fatal illnesses. It is questionable as to whether these phases are relevant for the grieving of parents who have their children to acts of violence or sudden deaths, such as murder, suicide or accidents. Also, Bowlby's description of parental grieving spanned the time-frame from the point of diagnosis until approximately two years after the death of the child, and thus included both the process of dying and an initial period of grieving.

One of the most significant contributions from attachment theory is the identification of secure and insecure (anxious, avoidant) attachment patterns (or attachment styles) and their respective impacts on the grieving process (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Parkes, 2002). Individuals with chronic attachment insecurities are often unable to: (1) develop and maintain normal levels of autonomy, (2) soothe themselves when remembering the deceased loved one; (3) reinvest their emotional energies in new relationships. Thus, insecure attachment patterns are likely to precipitate prolonged and complicated grief. Avoidant attachment styles, typically characterized by the denial of attachment needs and the suppression of attachment-related thoughts and emotions, are likely to lead to absent or delayed grief. Secure attachments, by contrast, are predictive of the successful resolution of grieving, described by Mikulincer and Shaver (2008) as follows:

Psychologically successful mourners can integrate elements of their identities that were related to the lost relationship into a new reality, maintain a symbolic bond to the deceased while adjusting to real circumstances, and restore and even enhance their sense of security and well-being on the basis of the continuing attachment bond with the deceased and new attachment bonds with living companions (p. 94)

In relation to the focus on parental bereavement in this current project, it is important to keep in mind that the vast majority of research which supports attachment theoretical conceptualizations on bereavement and grieving has been conducted with individuals who have experienced the loss of a partner or an adult attachment figure (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Parkes, 2002; Stroebe et al., 2005). A few studies (e.g., Uren & Wastell, 2002; Wijngaards-de Meij, et al., 2007) have explored parental bereavement from an attachment theory perspective, but prominent scholars on parental bereavement (e.g., Klass, et al., 1996; Murphy, 2008) have questioned how well dominant grieving theories map onto the experience of child loss, particularly if that loss is unexpected and violent.

Stage or task theories. Influenced by Bowlby's (1980/1998) work on attachment and loss, several scholars and clinicians have developed similar versions of the grieving process, that have either emphasized the stages of dying and grieving (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2005) or the tasks of grieving (Worden, 2004). While neither of these theories have emerged as a result of a systematic program of research, it is hard to deny that the work of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and William Worden have had a significant impact on bereaved individuals and those who work with them. However, the popularity of the theories has not prevented researchers from offering poignant critiques of their work (Wortman & Silver, 1989, 2001).

Swiss psychiatrist Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1969, Kübler-Ross & Kessler, 2004) initially formulated an interdisciplinary and largely theoretical account of the process of dying, which was based largely on her clinical observations and was informed by attachment theory (Parkes, 2002). Other authors saw parallels between the process of dying and that of grieving and suggested that her work had implications for models of grieving also (Bennett, 2009). In the later years of her life, Kübler-Ross co-authored a book in which she formally adopted the five-stage dying process as a five-stage grieving process. This process included the well-known stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. Kübler-Ross added the caveat that the stages “are not stops on some linear timeline of grief. Not everyone goes through all of them or goes in a prescribed order” (Kübler-Ross & Kessler, p. 7).

William Worden’s (2009) classic text on grief counselling is currently in its fourth edition. Drawing on Bowlby’s (1980/1998) conceptualization of grieving as a process and Freud’s (1917/2005) construct of grief work as an active process, he formulated four tasks of grieving: (1) to accept the reality of the loss, (2) to process the pain of the grief, (3) to adjust to a world without the deceased, and (4) to find an enduring connection with the deceased in the midst of embarking on a new life. Over the years, Worden’s formulations of the grieving process have changed slightly. His newer texts have included three subtasks as part of the adjustment to the world without the deceased. These have included external adjustments (e.g., learning to take over some of the tasks performed the deceased person), internal adjustments (e.g., adjustment to one’s identity and sense of self), and spiritual adjustments (e.g., finding meaning in the loss). More substantively, Worden’s fourth task has departed from his original decathexis hypothesis and has opened up the possibility of the establishment of a continuing bond with the deceased. And while Worden has acknowledged

the possibility that some people may not complete all tasks in the order outlined, he has held fast to the assertion, that “it is essential that the grieving person address the issue of these tasks in order to adapt to the loss” (p. 39).

Continuing bonds. One of the most central questions in the grieving process relates to its purpose or intended end. Freud (1917/2005) initially posited that the purpose of grieving was the withdrawal of libidinal energies from the deceased object. This ‘relinquishment hypothesis’ was generally supported by subsequent theorists (Bowlby, 1980/1998), although some (e.g., Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008; Parkes, 2002) have argued that Bowlby has been misunderstood in this regard. Some recent critics (Klass et al., 1996; Klass, 2006), however, have suggested that Bowlby and many bereavement researchers have over-emphasized the relinquishment of bonds and ignored those who sought to maintain a continuing bond with the deceased. Klass (1999) stated this argument as follows:

Grief has been defined for most of the twentieth century as breaking an attachment.

The advice given to bereaved people was to mourn their loss, let go of the dead, and move on to form new attachments in the present. Clinicians assumed, with virtually no supporting data, that grief was pathological or chronic if the bereaved held on to the dead or maintained their bond.

Researchers who sought to understand and not immediately pathologize these continuing bonds began to explore previously neglected contextual aspects of grieving, such as spiritual and religious beliefs and practices and cultural dimensions of bereavement (Hussain & Oyebode, 2009; Klass & Goss, 1999). This line of research is especially relevant for a study on the role of spirituality in parental bereavement, as much of research supporting these continuing bonds has emerged from studies of parental bereavement.

The work on continuing bonds has largely been credited to Klass and his colleagues (Klass et al., 1996; Klass & Walter, 2001). Klass (1999) conducted a 20-year ethnography as a consultant to a bereaved parent support group, which culminated in his publication of *The Spiritual Lives of Bereaved Parents*. While other researchers and clinicians (e.g., Bowlby, 1980/1998) have suggested that the presence of continuing bonds may at times be adaptive in the grieving process, it was Klass and his colleagues who made the explicit case for the possibility of continuing bonds. On the basis of his research and clinical work, Klass suggested that bereaved parents do not necessarily relinquish the bonds with their children; rather, they transform the bond into an ongoing inner representation with their deceased child. He noted that “the transformation of the inner representation of the child is, I think the key to understanding the spiritual lives of bereaved parents. For their parents, when the bond is transformed, children become like angels, saints, or bodhisattvas, that is, beings who mediate between the realm of the sacred and the realm of human beings” (p. 52).

It is worth noting that the term “inner representation” may be somewhat confusing, as bereaved parents frequently resist being told that their continuing bonds with their children is merely a matter of memories and emotions on the part of the bereaved (Klass, 1999). Rather, many bereaved parents experience their continuing bonds with their children as an ontological reality and not a mere mental representation thereof. While the veracity of such claims is not subject to verification in traditional social science, this author contends that we need not reduce them to psychological constructs or pathologize them by explaining them as psychotic processes (Field, 2008; Field & Filanovsky, 2010). If we want to do justice to the experience of the continuing bonds for bereaved parents, bereavement researchers and

clinicians must at least make room within their own worldviews for the possibility of such continuing bonds and take the experience of them seriously.

Perhaps due to his work with bereaved parents rather than bereaved individuals, Klass and others (e.g., Riches & Dawson, 1996; Walter, 1996) have also challenged the intrapsychic conceptualization of grieving. Their interpersonal vision of grieving argues for a reconceptualization of this process as a dialogical exchange embedded in relationships. These include relationships with the deceased child, the bereaved parental couple, the community and, if relevant, the Divine. The purpose or goal of grieving as a dialogical process is, according to Walter, the construction of a durable biography that “enables the living to integrate the memory of the dead into their ongoing lives” (p. 51). It is critical to understand that this dialogical perspective does not require the relinquishment of grieving as an intrapsychic process, as bereaved parents maintain the capacity to be in dialogue with themselves (Längle, 2005a). Rather, this perspective can be understood as a restoration of balance to the grieving process, which may now be understood as incorporating both intrapsychic and interpersonal elements. Indeed, some philosophers have suggested that all being is irreducibly relational, a being-in-the-world (Dasein; Heidegger, 1927/1962).

In addition to the relational reformulation of grieving, Klass (1999; Klass & Walter, 2001) has also suggested that parental grieving is a process that unfolds over time. In contrast to the stage or task theorists (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Kübler-Ross, 1969; Worden, 2004), however, Klass has eschewed the development of a regular process of steps and has suggested that it might be helpful to adopt the loose outline of the grieving journey employed by the bereaved parents themselves. The parents in Klass’s support group described four phases of the grieving-process: (1) newly bereaved, (2) into their grief, (3) well along in their

grief, and (4) resolved as much as it will be. A crucial distinction in this sequence of grieving is the absence of resolution or closure to the grieving process. Bereaved parents are frequently adamant in claiming that their grieving does not have an endpoint, however, they also note that the grieving process does not stay the same (Klass). This grieving process will be elaborated more fully in a subsequent section in this chapter.

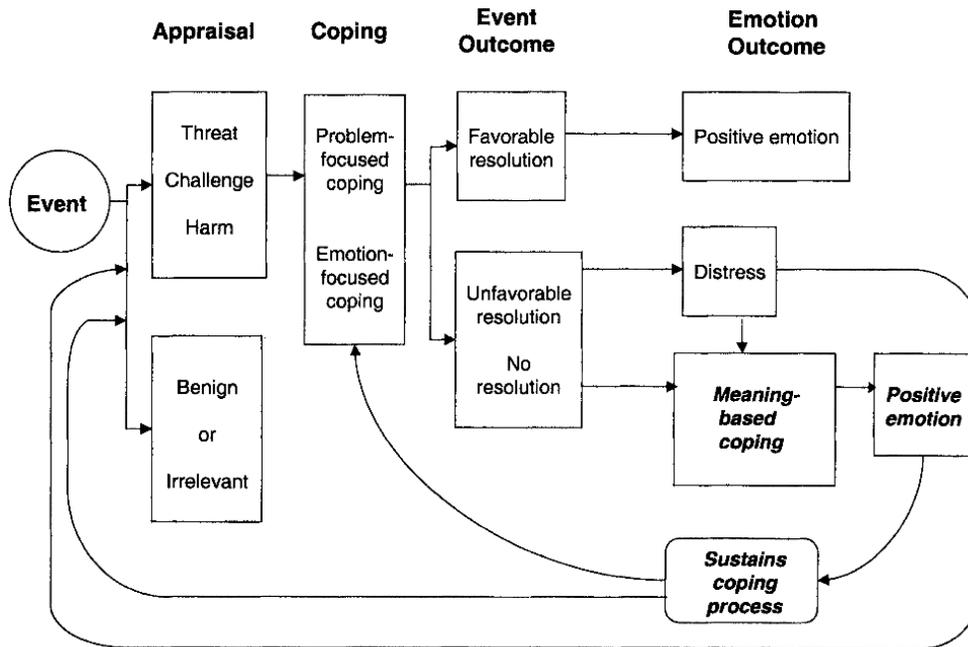
Cognitive stress and coping theories. In addition to the psychodynamic theories of bereavement and grieving, cognitive stress and coping models have had a significant impact on the grieving literature (Folkman, 2001; Lazarus, 1999; Park & Folkman, 1997). While there are some variations among current models of coping that have been applied to grieving, the central features of these models overlap significantly and find their common origin in Lazarus and Folkman's transaction model of coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These features include an understanding of the subjective rather than objective nature of stressor, the cognitive appraisal process, and the individual's response through problem-focused or emotion-focused coping strategies. Problem-focused strategies have an objective emphasis as they are intended to alter the source of the distress. Emotion-focused coping strategies, by contrast, are employed when the problem cannot be remedied and their intention is on shifting the person's emotional response to the stressor. In the context of grieving, emotion-focused coping is generally considered a more appropriate response.

Since their original publication, both Lazarus (1999) and Folkman and her colleagues (Park & Folkman, 1997; Stroebe, et al., 2006) have revised their coping models. Lazarus (1993, 1999, 2006) proposed the rather radical idea of abandoning the study of stress and coping entirely and suggested that researchers and clinicians instead focus on the development of an integrative theory of emotion, which would include both stressful

emotions and those that fall outside of this domain. Folkman (Folkman, & Moskowitz, 2000, 2004), by contrast, retained the basic structure of the original coping model, but made modifications to include the role of positive emotion and meaning-making in the coping processes. These latter amendments are particularly relevant to the grieving process as they were developed in light of Folkman's investigation of caregiving for persons living with and dying from HIV/AIDS (Richards & Folkman, 1997; Richards, Acree & Folkman, 1999).

Folkman's (2001) (see Figure 1) expanded coping model retains the elements of primary and secondary appraisal, in which the former determines whether the event is a threat, challenge, harm/loss or benign, and the latter evaluates whether the person in the situation has the personal and social resources to manage the stressful situation. Should an event, such as a death, be appraised as harmful, the person would engage in problem and emotion-focused coping strategies to manage the situation and regulate emotional distress. If these strategies result in the reduction of distress, the person would experience a positive emotional experience as a result. In the event of the death of a child, however, problem and emotion-focused coping efforts are unlikely to ameliorate the significant distress that parents experience, especially in the immediate aftermath of the loss. In this case, Folkman (2001) postulated that the distress of unsuccessful coping is likely to engage meaning-based coping.

Figure 1. Folkman's revised coping model. © American Psychological Association, 2001, by permission.



Folkman and her collaborators (Folkman, 2001; Park & Folkman, 2001; Park, 2005) have differentiated between two general types of meaning. Global meaning refers to general goals, beliefs and assumptions about the world. Meaning-making coping, however, happens in response to a specific event. Situational meaning, is defined as “the meaning that is formed in the interaction between a person's global meaning and the circumstances of a particular person-environment transaction. Situational meaning encompasses an initial appraisal of the meaning of the event and the search for meaning... In terms of situational meaning, meaning refers to the significance of a particular occurrence in terms of its relevance” (Park & Folkman, 1997, p. 116). Meaning-making coping involves an ongoing comparison process between global and situational meanings (Park & Folkman, 1997). Global meanings influence initial appraisal processes, are then compared with the appraised, situational meaning, and are then implicated in the coping strategies that alleviate the distress.

Following the initial coping efforts, situational and global meaning structures are once again compared in terms of their congruence. In the case of congruent meaning structures, the person will be able to accept and resolve the stressful situation. Should this not be the case, it is likely to cause persistent rumination and a re-engagement of the coping and re-appraisal processes.

Religious/spiritual coping. Drawing upon Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) theory of coping, Pargament and his colleagues (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Harrison et al., 2001; Pargament, 1997; Pargament, Zinnbauer, Scott, Butter, Zerowin, & Stanik, 1998) developed a theory of coping that integrated a multi-dimensional understanding of spirituality and religiosity with the cognitive appraisal and coping process. Pargament's work is arguably one of the most well-developed theories that includes spirituality in the daily coping activities of individuals facing various life stressors. Some researchers (Park, 2005; Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009) have expanded his work and integrated it with Folkman's (2001) revised theory of coping, focusing specifically on the role of meaning-making in the coping processes of bereavement and grieving.

Pargament's theory (1997) begins with the fundamental supposition that people are inherently motivated, that is, that much of human activity is not just simply reactive to external stimuli, but intentional and goal-directed. Equally important, Pargament suggested that human beings are not simply attracted to anything, but rather drawn towards objects of significance. It bears noting that the assumption that human beings are inherently meaning-oriented beings has been echoed by many scholars in social sciences, including Emmons (1999), Frankl (1984), and Valach and colleagues (Valach et al., 2002). Pargament's (1997) theory postulates further that people are not simply passive recipients and processors of

information, but that they actively anticipate, plan, create and shape – in short – construct events to maximize their experienced sense of significance and attain their personal goals. This transaction between the person and his/her context is applicable both to positive events and to times of difficulty and stress.

Similar to most prominent researchers in coping (e.g., Folkman & Moskowitz, 2000; Lazarus, 1999), Pargament (1997), too, asserted the importance of evaluating the success of coping on the basis of process and outcome. Such a claim necessarily implicated contextual elements of coping. Successful coping depended not only on whether the outcome is satisfactory but also on the process, the ‘how’ and ‘why’ of coping. Having asserted this, however, even a cursory review of the literature reveals that the temptation to evaluate coping on the basis of outcome has been difficult to resist. The vast number of spiritual/religious coping studies have concerned themselves with the relationships between spiritual/religious coping and various measures of mental health (cf. Harrison, et al., 2001). Following the exhortation of prominent scholars (e.g., Lazarus, 2000), some researchers have taken up the challenge of understanding spiritual/religious coping as a process (e.g., Butter & Pargament, 2003; Gall & Cornblatt, 2002; Mattis, 2002; Pendleton, Cavalli, Pargament, & Nasr, 2002).

Crystal Park and her colleagues (Benore & Park, 2004; Park, 2005) have begun to explore the role of religious/spiritual coping in bereavement. Park’s work has largely adopted the meaning-making coping model (Park & Folkman, 1997) and sought to understand religion and spirituality in relation to global and situational meaning structures. Bereavement may give rise to a cognitive discrepancy between the bereaved person’s global meaning structures and his or her appraised meaning of the loss of the loved one. Religious/spiritual

meaning-making may involve the reappraisal of events or the formulation of benign attributions. Park (2005) notes that, “following the death of a loved one, a person may come to see the hand of a loving God in the event or may redefine the event as an opportunity to learn new coping skills or develop new sources of social support” (p. 710).

In her review of the quantitative research on religiosity/spirituality and bereavement, Park and her colleague (Wortman & Park, 2008) found that there is a moderate amount of evidence that suggests that religiosity/spirituality may be of assistance in coping with the loss of a loved one. They also noted the importance of conceptualizing and measuring religiosity and spirituality as multidimensional constructs. A second, qualitative review of the research on bereavement and religiosity/spirituality (Wortman & Park, 2009) explored the findings through the lens of the meaning-making coping model. The authors identified bereavement studies which offered evidence that demonstrated the religiosity/spirituality assist the bereaved in coping with the loss of a loved one. At times, religiosity/spirituality offered bereaved individuals a worldview into which the meanings of the loss could be integrated. When the religious cognitive structures could not assimilate the appraised meaning, the results included a revision of personal goals, a greater appreciation for life, spiritual growth, and a revised view of God.

Research in spiritual/religious coping has begun to mature theoretically and methodologically (Pargament, 1997; Pargament, Koenig, Tarakeshwar, & Hahn, 2004) and thus has drawn the attention and praise of prominent coping researchers (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). However, several limitations can also be identified. Firstly, in spite of the fact that both Pargament (1997) and Park (2005) emphasize that religiosity and spirituality are multi-dimensional phenomena, the vast majority of the research to date has explored

religious/spiritual coping through the lens of cognitive appraisal. Even meaning-making coping, which has the potential to be considered holistically (cf. Längle, 2005a; Neimeyer, 2000), has been reduced to a cognitive process involving the assimilation and accommodation of situational meanings into global meaning structures. Certainly the grieving process does involve some cognitive processes (Attig, 2004), but at its core grieving is far more than cognitive reconstruction (Attig, 1996; Klass, 1999) and cannot be reduced to cognitions, even when these involve spiritual/religious content.

Secondly, spiritual/religious coping and meaning-making research largely remain focused on coping as an individualistic, intrapsychic process (cf. Wong & Wong, 2005). Although coping is an inherently contextual process and Pargament (1997) acknowledged the importance of understanding the context in which the person copes, this has rarely been explored. Personal and social resources in the coping process (e.g., congregational or spiritual support) are often considered to be relatively passive contributors to an individual's coping process. The intentionalities of other agents in joint or collective coping efforts are generally ignored or presumed only to occur in collectivistic societies (cf. Ratner & Lui, 2001). While some scholars have begun to examine dyadic (Bodenmann, Pihet, & Kayser, 2006) and collective coping (Chen, 2006), spiritual/religious coping research remains largely focused on the decontextualized individual as the sole agent in the coping process (except for Mahoney, Pargament, Tarakeshwar, & Swank, 2001).

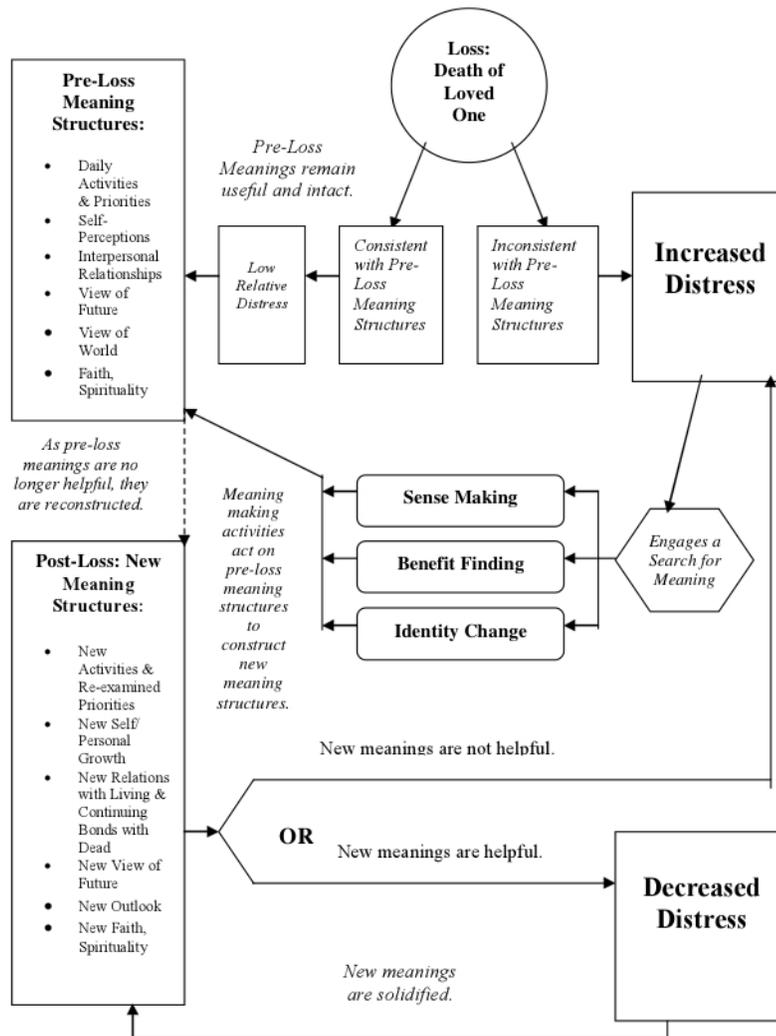
Integrative Models of Grief

In addition to the theories of bereavement and grieving based on psychodynamic conceptualizations (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Freud, 1917/2005) and cognitive stress and coping processes (Folkman, 2001; Park & Folkman, 1997), several scholars and clinicians have also

sought to develop new models, which synthesize existing findings and generate new perspectives. Although there are numerous proposals for such models (Bonanno & Kaltmann, 1999), this review will focus on four prominent models: Neimeyer's meaning-reconstruction model (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006), Stroebe's dual process model (Stroebe et al., 2005; Stroebe et al., 2006), Rubin's two-track model (Rubin, 1999; Rubin, Malkinson, & Witzum, 2003) and Attig's existential-phenomenological model (Attig, 1996, 2000, 2004).

Meaning reconstruction model. Drawing on his roots in personal construct theory, Neimeyer and his colleagues (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, Herrero, & Botella, 2006; Neimeyer, Prigerson, & Davis, 2002) have developed and begun to test (Currier, Holland, & Neimeyer, 2006) a meaning-centred model of grieving. This model is integrative in that it synthesizes psychoanalytic (Freud, 1917/2005), attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980/1998), trauma theory (Janoff-Bulman & McPherson-Frantz, 1997), cognitive stress and coping theory (Folkman, 2001), and religious/spiritual coping (Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005) into one model (see Figure 2). The heart of the model is oriented around the process of reconstructing *meaning*, which Neimeyer argues is central to the process of grieving, and has important implications for grief counselling also (Neimeyer, 2001).

Figure 2. Neimeyer's model of meaning reconstruction. © Routledge, 2006, by permission.



Neimeyer's writings initially defined meaning as a multi-dimensional construct (Neimeyer, 2000). In relation to grieving, he identified six crucial aspects of meaning reconstruction: (1) addressing meaning in the life of the survivor, as well as in the death of the loved one; (2) the integration of meaning, as well as its reconstruction (given, received, and constructed – i.e., changing over time); (3) the construction of meaning as an interpersonal, as well as personal, process; (4) the anchoring of meaning in cultural, as well as intimate, discursive contexts; (5) the tacit and preverbal, as well as explicit and articulate meanings; and (6) the processes of meaning reconstruction, as well as its products. In these

six key aspects of meaning, Neimeyer touched on a variety of largely omitted aspects of meaning, including the ways in which it is found or received (in addition to being ‘constructed’ or ‘made’), the social and cultural sources of meaning (in addition to the intrapsychic process), and the ways in which meaning transcends cognitive articulation through tacit and embodied avenues. In relation to this final aspect of meaning, Neimeyer stated that, “there are some meanings that are too embedded in our lives, too embodied in our actions, to be amenable to formulation in a set of ‘beliefs’ or ‘self-statements’ (p. 554). In reminding us of the tacit or preverbal dimensions of meaning, Neimeyer connects with other scholars in asserting that grieving is primarily action, something that we do, and only secondarily reflection (cf. Attig, 2004; Heidegger, 1927/1962; Längle, 2005a; Young & Valach, 2004).

When returning to the meaning-reconstruction model, however, it is clear that Neimeyer focused nearly exclusively on cognitive processes. This is understandable to the extent that Gillies and Neimeyer (2006) sought to ground their model on the existing research and this research in North America does indeed focus strongly on cognitive processes (Neimeyer, personal communication, September 14, 2007). However, the exclusive focus on cognitive meaning impoverishes the model and ignores emotional, social and action-oriented avenues towards meaning.

The model (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006) postulates three primary functions of meaning-reconstruction – sense-making, benefit finding, and identity change. The model begins with the assumption that people hold core meaning structures, akin to cognitive schemas, which may or may not be conscious and articulated. These pre-loss structures include daily activities and priorities, self-perceptions, interpersonal relationships, views of

the future and the world, as well as spiritual assumptions and faith. Into this assumptive and experienced world comes the death and loss of a significant person – for example, a child. The model posits that such a loss is either consistent or inconsistent with such pre-loss meaning-structures. While the loss of a loved-one may be distressing, especially initially, the key factor is whether these losses can be incorporated into existing meaning structures. To the extent that the person's assumptive world is able to assimilate such a loss, to the extent that it 'makes sense' to him or her, the loss may be distressing but ultimately explainable and thus manageable. However, if the pre-existing meaning structures are not able to accommodate such a loss, the death of a child will be not only severely distressing, but will also require the bereaved parent to adjust his or her meaning structures. The increased distress and cognitive dissonance, according to Gillies and Neimeyer, will precipitate and engage a search for meaning.

To the extent that the meaning reconstruction strategies – sense-making, benefit-finding and identity change – are successful, that is, resulting in more adaptive and helpful worldviews and decreased distress, the search for meaning will have been successful and the bereaved person will now be able to view the world in a way that incorporates the very real possibility of death (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006). However, there is also the possibility that these meaning-making processes are not successful. Meaning-reconstruction may result in changed meaning structures, but these new meanings may not produce the desired reduction in cognitive dissonance or emotional distress. Should this be the case, it would once again trigger a reengagement of the search for meaning.

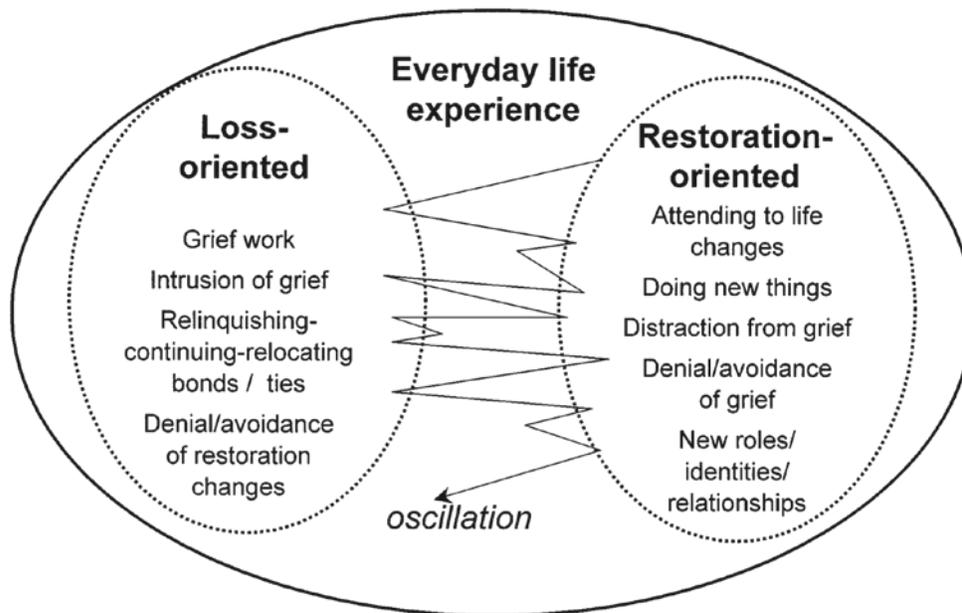
Dual-process model. One of the most prominent models of grieving in the current bereavement literature is the dual-process model of grieving developed by Margaret Stroebe

and her colleagues at Utrecht University (Stroebe, 2002; Stroebe et al., 2005; Stroebe et al., 2008; Stroebe & Schut, 2001). Stroebe stated that she and her colleagues found the dominant grieving process – grief work – to be too vague, too static, and insufficiently tied to the research literature on grieving outcomes. The dual-process model, on the other hand, was developed with deliberate attention to the functions and outcomes of grieving. The intention of its authors was for the model to address questions about maintaining and relinquishing bonds, as well as about what successful grieving might look like.

Drawing upon constructs from attachment theory and cognitive stress theory, Stroebe and her colleagues (Stroebe et al., 2005) postulated that bereaved persons oscillate between attending to two categories of stressors – loss-oriented stressors and restoration-oriented stressors (see Figure 3 below). Loss-oriented appraisal and coping involves attending to the loss, engaging in grief work, separation distress, reappraising the meaning of the loss, and maintaining or relinquishing bonds with the deceased. Restoration-oriented appraisal and coping, on the other hand, addresses issues that come about as a result of the bereavement and are secondary to the loss itself. They involve changes to identity as a result of the loss, rebuilding shattered assumptions, the engagement in new activities and the formation of new relationships and the temporary disengagement from the grieving process. A critical component of the dual-process model is its dynamic centre, the process of oscillation between loss and restoration oriented stressors. Stroebe and her colleagues note that, “oscillation occurs in the short term (transient fluctuations in the course of any particular day) as well as across the passage of time, because adaptation to bereavement is a matter of slowly and painfully exploring and discovering what has been lost and what remains: what must be avoided or relinquished versus what can be retained, created, and built on” (p. 52).

Stroebe and her colleagues (Stroebe & Schut, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2005) have also suggested that certain cognitive mechanisms underlie the oscillation between loss and restoration oriented coping. They have terms these processes: (1) positive meaning (re)construction, which includes positive reappraisal, revised constructive goals, positive event interpretation and the expression of positive affect; (2) negative meaning (re)construction, which includes rumination, wishful thinking, revised unconstructive goals, negative event interpretation and ventilating dysphoria.

Figure 3. Stroebe's dual process model of grief. ©American Psychological Association, 2005, by permission.



Research supporting the dual-process model of bereavement has been widely documented in the literature (Stroebe, 2002; Stroebe et al., 2005) and scholars have praised the model for its synthesis and extension of attachment theory and the transactional model of coping (Parkes, 2001). In the view of this author, however, the dual-process model suffers from some of the same shortcomings that have been suggested for the transactional model of coping. Lazarus (1999), author of this transactional model, criticized the model in his later

years and called for a more holistic and contextually-sensitive model, which transcends cognitive appraisal processes and addresses emotions more generally (Lazarus, 2006). Secondly, Stroebe's strong emphasis on functionality and outcomes of grieving pushes the model towards the adoption of the binary categories of positive and negative meaning reconstruction. The cognitive orientation and positive-negative dichotomy seems ill-suited to such a complex and holistic phenomenon as grieving (cf. Attig, 1996; Neimeyer, 2000). Rather, grieving is inherently related to the expression of 'negative' emotions, and the absence of its expression has been related to ill-health (Parkes, 2002).

Two-track model. A second, dually-oriented model of bereavement can be found in the work of Israeli psychologist Simon Rubin and his colleagues (Rubin, 1996, 1999; Rubin et al., 2003). This model parallels the traditional structure of bereavement theories since Freud (1917/2005), with the one track focusing on the relationship with the deceased and the second focusing on the functioning of the bereaved person in the absence of the deceased. Similar to the dual-process model (Stroebe et al., 2005), Rubin's model draws on attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980/1998), but in contrast the Utrecht model, this model transcends the near-exclusive focus on cognition and offers a more holistic approach to grieving.

Track one of Rubin's (1999) model focuses on the functioning of the bereaved person across a wide range of affective, interpersonal, and somatic indicators. These include a focus on anxiety, depressive affect and cognitions, somatic concerns, psychiatric symptoms, family relationships, general interpersonal relationships, self-esteem, self-worth, meaning structures, work functioning and investment in general life tasks. Track two emphasizes the relationship to the deceased person and includes imagery and memories of the deceased, emotional distance to the deceased, positive and negative affect in relation to the deceased,

preoccupation with the loss and the lost, idealization of or conflict with the deceased, features of the grieving process (shock, searching, disorganization, reorganization), impact on self-perception and the memorialisation and transformation of the loss and the deceased.

Rubin's theory has likewise amassed a substance amount of empirical support (Rubin et al., 2003), although not to the same level as the dual-process model. Nonetheless, there are certain features of Rubin's model that make it a good fit for a study on spirituality and parental bereavement. Firstly, most of Rubin's research to date has been conducted with bereaved parents. This includes a substantive number of studies of with bereaved parents of adult deceased children who died suddenly and violently. Given the documented importance of these factors for one's understanding of bereavement and grieving (Murphy, 2008), it would seem critical to take note of this model. Secondly, reflecting perhaps his practice in Israel and his clinical work with bereaved parents, Rubin's model offers a more holistic understanding of grieving and greater attention to the continuing bonds with the deceased.

Relearning-the-world model. The final model that will be reviewed in this summary of grieving models is Attig's (1996, 2000, 2004) existential-phenomenological model. Although Attig's work as a philosopher and clinician has not been subjected to empirical scrutiny, his model has drawn the attention of prominent bereavement researchers and clinicians (e.g., Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Klass, 1999; Worden, 2004). Additionally, Attig's work is of importance to this specific study as his theoretical formulations draw heavily on his clinical experience with bereaved parents and his model of grieving is perhaps the most holistic conceptualization reviewed thus far, and therefore very compatible with the theoretical framework employed in this dissertation.

As we noted earlier in the definition of grieving, Attig (1996, 2000) draws strongly on existential-phenomenology, most notably the work of Martin Heidegger, in his formulation of grieving. He differentiates between reactive grieving (or grief), which he describes as an emotional reaction to loss, and active grieving, which involves the personal decision to engage actively with the loss. Drawing on his phenomenological analysis, Attig describes reactive grieving as follows:

In grief reaction, we believe that we have lost someone valuable. We still harbor within ourselves deeply engrained dispositions to feel, act, think, expect, and hope in continuing life as if we have not lost the one who has died. And we feel the pain and anguish (typically including sadness, loneliness, helplessness, and their somatic companions) grounded in the realization that our dispositions are no longer sustainable. Grief in this sense is another something, a reactive agony, that happens to us after bereavement happens to us. (Attig, 2004, p. 343)

Active grieving, according to Attig (1996), is imbued with personal choice. This process involves the decision to engage the pain of the loss directly and to begin to reshape one's life patterns and redirect one's life story. Attig (2004) describes this process as follows: "We exert physical energy. We work through and express emotion. We change motivations, habits, and behavior. We modify relationships. We return home to familiar meanings in life. We stretch into inevitably new meanings. And we change ourselves in the process" (p. 343). In contrast to other theoretical perspectives, such as coping models (Folkman, 2001) and task models (Worden, 2004), Attig describes this coping as a holistic relearning-the-world. Relearning-the-world, for Attig, involves four inter-related foci: (1) the physical world (the surroundings of the lives of the bereaved, (2) the social world (relationships with fellow

survivors), (3) the relationship with and understanding of oneself, and (4) the ongoing relationship with the deceased. This model seems particularly apt for bereaved parents, as they naturally describe their grieving as an all-encompassing, life-changing process and readily identify with reactive and active aspects of grieving (Klass, 1999). The model also fits well with the theoretical approach for this study, as contextual action theory, as we will see, likewise emphasizes the agentic and relational nature of action.

Theoretical Limitations

Grieving and bereavement theories date back to the work of Freud (1917/2005) and have generally focused on the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased. Grieving, for Freud, was about the withdrawal of libidinal energies from the deceased object, thereby freeing up the bereaved to invest his or her energy into other relationships. Bowlby (1980/1998) and other attachment oriented scholars framed the grieving process similarly, conceiving of it as a form of separation anxiety in which grieving served the purpose of soothing the bereaved in the process of accepting the permanent absence of the deceased. The goal for Bowlby, however, was largely the same as for Freud – the relinquishment of bonds (for a dissenting opinion see Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). Stress and coping scholars (Folkman, 2001; Folkman & Park, 1997; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) generally reframed the grieving process as a form of coping with loss, and emphasized emotion-focused and meaning-making coping strategies as being adaptive for the process of grieving. The cognitive focus of reappraisal has also been central in various other approaches, including Neimeyer’s meaning-reconstruction model (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006) and Pargament’s (1997) religious coping theory. Recent theoretical efforts have sought to integrate attachment theory and cognitive coping models into the dual process model (Stroebe et al., 2005),

emphasizing loss-and restoration oriented coping, as well as the process of oscillation. Additionally, some (Klass, 1999) have sought to challenge the relinquishment orientation of much of grieving theory by proposing and offering evidence for the adaptive possibility of continuing bonds.

Although the theoretical work to date has provided a solid grounding for the empirical efforts (Stroebe et al., 2008), several limitations are evident and have been documented in the literature. Scholars have pointed out that bereavement theories have largely focused on grieving as an intrapsychic process (Nadeau, 2001a, 2001b; Toller & Braithwaite, 2008). Grief work, as conceptualized by Freud (1917/2005), Lindemann (1944) and adopted by modern grieving scholars (e.g., Worden, 2004), is principally about the emotional working-through of a loss at an intra-individual level. Attachment (Bowlby, 1998/2008) and continuing bonds (Klass et al., 1996) have focused on the relationship between the bereaved and the deceased, but the emphasis has remained on this singular relationship. Parental bereavement challenges conventional bereavement theories in several ways (Murphy, 2008), including in its dyadic focus of grieving. When the parental relationship has been taken into account, efforts have generally focused on the important but secondary question of the relationship between parental bereavement and divorce (Oliver, 1999; Schwab, 1998). However, some researchers (e.g., Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008) have recently begun to document the ways in which the grieving processes of bereaved parents are more fundamentally related to each other. Other scholars have called for theoretical reformulations and research efforts that take the relational nature of grieving into account (Walter, 1996). To date, however, few researchers have taken up this challenge.

A second limitation in the literature has been the lack of attention to the religious/spiritual dimensions in the grieving processes of bereaved parents. Pargament and his colleagues (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Butter & Pargament, 2003; Pargament, 1997) extended Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of coping to address the unique ways in which religiosity and spirituality contribute to the process of coping. Park and her colleagues (Park, 2005; Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009) have explored spiritual and religious coping within the context of bereavement. While Pargament and Park's efforts are laudable, their research has largely focused on the same intrapsychic focus of grieving that is evident in the research efforts of cognitive stress and coping scholars more broadly. Furthermore, religious/spiritual coping and meaning-making coping scholarship has focused most centrally on cognitive appraisal and re-appraisal, with fewer studies examining the grieving process as a holistic human response to loss. Emotional and relational processes have been understood as secondary to the cognitive efforts of the bereaved, and thus grieving has been reduced from a holistic and relational response to loss to cognitive re-appraisal. Phenomenologically-oriented scholars (Attig, 1996), however, have pointed out that bereavement in general and specifically parental bereavement (Klass, 1999) cannot be reduced cognitive processes. They are important, for sure, but grieving for bereaved parents involves a reconfiguration of their entire being, as taken-for-granted assumptions and practices about the world, their lives, relationships and their children are challenged.

Parental Bereavement

After reviewing the dominant theoretical models of bereavement and grieving, it is important to turn towards the experience of the loss of a child and the research efforts that have sought to understand this experience. As will become evident, the death of a child is a

unique form of human loss, and scholars have suggested that current theoretical models do not adequately capture this experience or the grieving processes of bereaved parents (Bennett, 2009; Murphy, 2008). This section of the literature review begins by focusing on the experience of parental bereavement and the grieving process. Subsequently, we explore the consequences of child loss, including challenges to the health, mental health, and relationships for bereaved parents. The section concludes with an elaboration on the role of meaning and spirituality/religiosity in the grieving processes of bereaved parents.

The untimely death of a child is a deeply painful, distressing and life-changing event for the bereaved parents (Christ et al., 2003). Most researchers have found it to be the most distressing form of loss (Stroebe et al., 2008), which precipitates one of the most intense and enduring grieving processes. Modern countries have generally witnessed declining child mortality rates in the 20th century, especially for younger children and for ‘external’ causes, such as accidents, drowning, suicide, homicide and or poisoning (Ahmad, et al., 2000; Statistics Canada, 1999). Christ and her colleagues report that the deaths of children between age one and fourteen now amount to less than five percent or approximately 57,000 annual deaths in the United States. Thus, while the death of a child is not an entirely uncommon occurrence, these indicators may explain why most parents do not expect to deal with the loss of a child and are thus ill-prepared to cope with the gravity of this trauma.

An adequate understanding of parental bereavement must begin, first and foremost, by turning towards the experience of parents. This is not an easy task, even for researchers, who have sometimes been accused of avoiding the severity and permanence of this pain and turning too quickly to focus on the heroic coping efforts of parents (Klass, 1999). However, parental bereavement does not begin there. Instead, the defining experience of losing one’s

child is characterized first and foremost by a nearly inexpressible pain (Weed, 2007). Parents often describe their suffering in very graphic terms, likening it to an amputation of a limb or even noting its physical sensations (Klass & Walter, 2001).

A significant number of qualitative studies have focused on helping researchers understand the lived-experience of parental bereavement (Janzen, et al., 2003-2004; Murphy, et al., 2003; Rosenblatt, 2000; Uren & Wastell, 2002; Wheeler, 2001). The intensity of the pain corresponds to the intimacy of the parent-child bond (Stroebe, 2002), as well as to the ‘failure’ of the bereaved parents to safeguard their child. Klass (1999), who conducted a 20-year ethnography with a bereaved parents group, noted, that “when a child dies, the parent does not just know about death, the parent knows death. Children can die. It can happen to them. Now the news is no longer pictures, but people like themselves with cameras in their faces during their worst moments. Bereaved parents are no longer protected by the illusion that death only happens to other people” (p. 47). As the reality of the death of their child and of their own pain sets in, parents begin to understand the loss of the loved child is permanent, and their pain, although changing over time, is equally enduring.

Some scholars have suggested that the intensity of the agony of child loss is so severe because the death of a child – at any age – is generally considered to be an ‘unnatural’ event, an event that reverses the biological order of death and often undermines significant portions of the parents’ assumptive world (Janoff-Bulman, 1989; Janoff-Bulman & Frantz, 1997; Matthews & Marwit, 2006). This assumptive world – with its generally tacit and preverbal beliefs and experiences about the presence of order and justice in the world, is suddenly and deeply thrown off kilter, thus depriving the parents of important inner resources that are necessary to face the personal experience of bereavement (Braun & Berg, 1994; Klass,

1999). The violent and sudden loss of a child, particularly, calls awareness to these tacit beliefs and often casts radical doubt on the veracity of what most of us have tacitly held to be true – that children are young and healthy, that they have their entire lives before them, that parents can and should protect their children, and that death arrives at the end of a long and meaningful life. The metaphorical map has been wiped clear and parents are left to ‘relearn the world’ (Attig, 1996).

With the aid of the participants in a bereaved parent support group, Klass (1997, 1999) sought to explain the process of grieving for bereaved parents. While eschewing a rigid stage approach for this grieving process, he adopted four categories of the grieving process that were developed by the bereaved parents themselves. These categories are descriptive rather than prescriptive and offer bereaved parents an overview of the grieving process that is ahead of them. The sequence is described as: (1) newly bereaved; (2) into their grief, (3) well into their grief, and (4) resolved as much as it will be. It is worth noting that other researchers have described similar developments in the grieving processes for bereaved parents (Arnold & Buschman Gemma, 2008; Malkinson & Bar-Tur, 2004-2005).

The experience of being newly bereaved begins with the shock of learning of the death of one’s child (Klass, 1999). Parents describe this shock in varied ways, including initial experiences of disbelief and subsequent dissociation in response to an overwhelming pain and incomprehensible reality. As the initial shock of hearing of the death of their child begins to wane, parents begin to experience the obdurate reality of their loss – their child is truly gone and the bereaved parents are confronted by this fact daily, hourly, moment-by-moment. The absence is experienced as an emptiness and sometimes is described as a the loss of a limb, a loss of part of themselves. Like their child, bereaved parents often have an

initial inclination that a part of themselves has been irrevocably lost, and that their lives after this experience will never be the same. Thus, the death of a child has an immense impact on the lives of the parents, who typically will divide time into ‘before’ and ‘after’ the loss. This irrevocable loss and its felt hopelessness may also give rise to the questions of existential meaning related initially to the life and death of the child and subsequently to the ongoing life of the bereaved parents themselves (Braun & Berg, 1993).

The inner turmoil for bereaved parents is also experienced in their social and relational worlds (Klass, 1999). The newly bereaved and friends and relatives engage in public events to commemorate the life and mourn the death of the deceased child. Memorials are planned at schools; wakes are held in homes; funerals planned at places of worship. While bereaved parents often experience much support in the days and weeks following the loss of their child, the support may wane over time as friends, communities and even relatives begin to ‘move on’ after the loss of their child. However, this experience is not shared by bereaved parents as they continue to experience the emotional intensity of the loss and find that all of life has come to an abrupt halt. Klass notes that, “it often seems to the parents that neither the child nor the child’s death has social reality. They find people will not mention the child’s name in their presence, that inquiries about how they are doing imply that it doesn’t hurt as bad as it does, that the child can be replaced by a new baby, or that God loves the child in heaven better than the parent could have loved the child here” (p. 59). Some bereaved parents (Kehler, 1999) have commented on the pain of receiving such well-intentioned remarks and on the consequent feelings of disconnection from the community.

As the bereaved parents move into their grief the dissociative aspects of grieving tend to diminish and the grieving process becomes increasingly complex (Klass, 1997, 1999). The

grieving parents frequently find that the loss of their child has touched their entire existence and that they will continue to discover aspects of their inner and social worlds that have been touched by the loss. In contrast to some other forms of loss, bereaved parents, even if they have lost their only child, remain parents after the death of their child, and now must engage in the process of reconfiguring the relationship with their deceased child. However, this reconfiguration may also be extremely difficult for the parents as they discover that the most salient point of connection to their deceased child is the pain they experience in their grief.

Bereaved parents have now frequently found that the world has moved on and that their child's life and death has faded from the daily consciousness of many friends and acquaintances (Klass, 1999). However, the grieving process typically continues with great intensity for bereaved parents, who often struggle to find socially acceptable ways of continuing to grieve in public. Many parents have returned to their previous places of work and are experiencing the difficulty of integrating themselves and their ongoing grieving into the world of work. To address their need to express their grief in relationship, bereaved parents may join support groups, such as the Compassionate Friends, where they find understanding and compassion for their grief and learn that they "need not walk alone" (The Compassionate Friends [TCF], n.d.). In addition to listening to the grieving stories of bereaved parents, support groups also share practical coping resources for the grieving process and validate the ongoing interactions between bereaved parents and their children. Interestingly, Klass noted that many conferences and workshops for bereaved parents will have sessions on the ongoing relationships of bereaved parents with their children, and that these sessions will frequently include descriptions of paranormal or sense-of-presence experiences (cf. Somanti & August, 1997; Steffen & Coyle, 2010).

Over time, bereaved parents frequently become more comfortable in their grief (Klass, 1999). Grieving experiences become familiar and predictable and the raw intensity of the initial months of grieving has slightly subsided. As parents move ‘well into their grief’, one of the central challenges is the ongoing transformation of inner representation of the child by letting go of the pain and finding a positive bond. Klass describes this challenge as follows: “The idea of letting go of the pain in exchange for a clearer, comforting inner representation of the child is one of the central insights in *Bereaved Parents*. Rather than identifying with the child’s pain, the parent identifies with the energy and love which was in the living child” (p. 74). Some parents may experience an ambivalence at this point, as there is a perceived risk of losing the final remaining connection with their child when letting go of the pain. Klass (1997) notes that as bereaved parents develop a clearer inner representation of their child and solidify their inner continuing bond, they also become more confident in bringing this bond into their social worlds. The continuing bond is symbolized in regular, public grieving rituals and parents may include mention of their child at public occasions. Additionally, many bereaved parents express a deep compassion for other bereaved individuals and parents, and may at this time express a desire to offer support to them.

The final phase of bereavement, according to Klass (1999), is the resolution of grief “as much as it will be” (p. 82). Contrary to some bereavement theorists, the bereaved parents in Klass’ ethnographic study denied the possibility of an end to their grief. The website of the *Compassionate Friends* (2010) echoes this when addressing newly bereaved parents:

You’ll never “recover” from your loss nor will you ever find that elusive “closure” they talk of on TV—but eventually you will find the “new me.” You will never be the same person you were before your child died. It may be hard to believe now, but in

time and with the hard work of grieving (and there's no way around it), you will one day think about the good memories of when your child lived rather than the bad memories of how your child died. You will even smile and, yes, laugh again someday—as hard to believe as that may seem.

Rather, so Klass, bereaved parents enter this phase of grieving when they have found an enduring and dynamic inner representation of their deceased child. This stable inner representation may give rise to an ongoing reconfiguration of a 'better self' as bereaved parents reorganize their values, their identities and search for an ongoing and meaningful expression of the value of their child's life and death. Such expressions may take on the form of an activism on behalf of their child, such as joining a group against drunk driving, or by taking leadership in a bereaved parents support group. These activities also serve to imbue the ongoing lives of the bereaved parents with meaning through the identification and enacting of a value related to the life and death of their child (Braun & Berg, 1993).

The section has hopefully helped the reader to come a little closer to the experience of losing a child. Since there is much variability in grieving (Stroebe et al., 2008), the goal of this section was not to describe this experience exhaustively. Rather, the intention was to bring the reader a bit closer to the pain of the loss of a child and to the intensity and breadth of the grieving process for bereaved parents. In this next section, we will turn to the implications of this loss by exploring its effects on the health, well-being, and relationships of bereaved parents. This section will also explore the crucial role of meaning and spirituality in the grieving process after the loss of a child.

Health and Relationship Consequences

Bereavement researchers frequently remind their readers that grieving is generally considered a natural, although distressing, process, which does not inevitably result in psychopathology or necessitate psychological or pharmacological intervention (Stroebe et al., 2008; Wortman & Silver, 1989, 2001). While there is some evidence to suggest that bereaved parents may not develop complications in their grieving, a number of studies have shown significant health risks for bereaved parents, particularly those parents who have lost their children suddenly and violently (CAH, 2003; Murphy, 2008; Stroebe et al., 2007).

Numerous studies to date have demonstrated that bereaved parents are more likely to suffer adverse mental health and health reactions when compared with other bereaved individuals and non-bereaved persons (CAH, 2003). In the early 1990s, Shirley Murphy and her colleagues at the University of Washington undertook one of the most significant and substantive studies of parental bereavement (Murphy, 2008; Murphy et al., 2003). The nurse researchers conducted a five-year, quantitative and qualitative study on the health consequences of parental bereavement for two-hundred-and-sixty-one violently bereaved parents and gathered data at four, twelve, twenty-four and sixty post-death. Several important health and mental-health related findings emerged. Murphy and her colleagues found that their grieving patterns for these bereaved parents frequently included elements of trauma, anxiety and depression. For example, two years post-death, the parents' mean scores on an overall measure of emotional distress found that bereaved parents scored approximately twice as high in comparison to their non-bereaved counterparts (Murphy et al., 1999; Murphy et al., 2003). Five years post-death, 28% of bereaved mothers and 12.5% of bereaved fathers continued to meet the diagnostic criteria for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), compared

with 9.5% of women and 6.3% of men in the general population of the United States. Additionally, many bereaved parents noted increases in depressive symptomatology and suicidal ideation (Murphy et al., 2003), which in other studies has been shown to contribute to the increased mortality rate of bereaved persons (Stroebe et al., 2007).

Other studies have confirmed Murphy's (2008) findings for bereaved parents, frequently showing increases risk for PTSD, anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Rogers and her colleagues (Rogers, Floyd, Mailick Seltzer, Greenberg, & Hong, 2008) examined 428 bereaved parents in the Wisconsin Longitudinal Study and compared them with an equal number of comparison parents with similar backgrounds. Results indicated that bereaved parents were more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression and more likely to have had a depressive episode than the comparison parents. What is striking about this study is that these results were obtained from bereaved parents an average of 18 years post-death, thus lending further support to the contention that grieving is a life-long process for bereaved parents.

In their study of 219 bereaved parents, Wijngaards-de Meij and her colleagues at Utrecht (Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2005) found that depression in bereaved parents was predicted by individual parent factors, such as gender, religious affiliation and help seeking, with mothers, religious parents and professional help seekers more likely to exhibit symptoms of depression. Kreichbergs and her colleagues (Kreichbergs et al., 2004) examined the mental health risks for 449 bereaved parents in Sweden who had lost a child to cancer, and compared them with 457 non-bereaved comparison parents. Results revealed increased risk for both anxiety and depression in bereaved parents at four to six years post-loss, although this risk decreased in subsequent years. Similar findings were shown in a study of 50 Australian bereaved parents, who had lost their child to cancer in the year preceding the

study. Goodenough and her colleagues (Goodenough et al., 2004) reported higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety for the parents, especially for those whose child had died in hospital rather than at home. Likewise, Znoj and Keller (2002) found that 87 bereaved parents in Switzerland showed marked increases of distress on measures of physical health, depression, and post-traumatic stress relative to the 89 comparison parents. Interestingly, however, these researchers also found that bereaved parents, like other comparison parents who had undergone a traumatic event, had increased their ability to regulate their emotions.

Although less frequently examined than mental health, the question of the physical health consequences of parental bereavement has also been investigated in numerous studies. Overall, the results appear to demonstrate that the loss of a child has a slight to moderate negative impact on the health of bereaved parents, although the findings remain somewhat tentative and the effect sizes quite low (Stroebe et al., 2007). As noted above, Znoj and Keller (2002) asked bereaved parents about their general health and well-being and found some evidence of worsened health (e.g., increased visits to physicians, chronic health conditions) compared with the comparison group. Murphy and her colleagues (Murphy et al., 1999) also found indicators of worsened physical health for bereaved parents, especially bereaved mothers. Jiong Li and her colleagues in Denmark (Li et al., 2003, Li et al., 2005) conducted a series of epidemiological health studies and found that parental bereavement was associated with an increased risk, particularly for mothers, of hospitalization for a psychiatric condition, as well as an increase in mortality rates for both mothers and fathers.

The increased health and mental health risks for bereaved parents, in combination with studies of traumatic grief in other populations, have led two research teams to advocate for the inclusion of complicated or traumatic grief in the next released of the Diagnostic and

Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM, Prigerson et al., 2008). Prigerson (Zhang, El-Jawahri, & Prigerson, 2006) and her colleagues suggested diagnostic criteria for 'prolonged grief disorder' based on research with a variety of groups of bereaved individuals, including bereaved parents. Prigerson's criteria include three main criteria – the presence of chronic and disruptive yearning for the deceased, grieving related symptoms (e.g., trouble accepting death, inability to trust others, numbness or detachment), as well as marked and persistent disruption in functioning. Horowitz and his colleagues have adopted a similar model for complicated grief, based on a stress response model (Horowitz, Siegel, Holen, Bonanno, Milbrath, & Stinson, 1997). Neither group included absent or delayed grief as part of their conceptualization of complicated or prolonged grief.

The estimates for the incidence rates for prolonged or complicated grief vary between nine to twenty percent in bereaved adults (Stroebe et al., 2007). The preliminary indications for bereaved parents, however, are significantly higher. In a study of 232 bereaved parents who had lost a child 18 months previously, Dyregrov and her colleagues in Norway (Dyregrov, Nordanger, & Dyregrov, 2003) found that 58% bereaved parents who had lost a child to sudden infant death syndrome and 78% of the parents who had lost a child to accidents or suicide met the suggested diagnostic criteria for complicated grief. Although the criteria for complicated or prolonged grief disorder have not yet been codified in the DSM, the preliminary results suggest that bereaved parents are highly vulnerable, particularly if their child has died suddenly and violently (Murphy, 2008).

One of the issues that emerges consistently in the self-help (The Compassionate Friends, 2006) and research (Oliver, 1999; Schwab, 1998) literature for bereaved parents is the status of the parental relationship after the death of a child and the widely-held belief that

bereaved parents experience higher rates of relational conflict and divorce than non-bereaved parents. While researchers have certainly acknowledged that the loss of a child can certainly exact a strain on the marital relationship, the results of the research thus far do not seem to support the self-help lore that bereaved parents divorce at higher rates than non-bereaved parents. The question of the rate of divorce suffers from numerous methodological problems, most importantly the fact that all such research is likely to be retrospective and that it is difficult to extricate the impact of the death of the child from pre-existing stressors and other confounding factors post-loss. Schwab's review of the literature found that many studies were poorly conducted or that the authors of the studies drew unwarranted conclusions about the causal relationship between the loss of a child and parental divorce. In a comparison between the recorded rates of divorce in bereaved parents and the general population at the time of the study, Schwab found that these rates generally did not differ substantively from each other. Future research, employing longitudinal designs and matched comparison groups, is needed to answer this question more conclusively.

While the research on parental divorce following bereavement has not yielded strong findings, researchers have certainly found that the loss of a child may strain the parental relationship (Oliver, 1999). Numerous reasons for this strain have been suggested, such as a lack of synchronicity in the grieving patterns of the partners, or divergence in the grieving actions of bereaved parents (Gilbert, 1989). Gilbert (1996) suggested that bereaved parents may expect to grieve in the same manner or at the same time as their partner, and when this does not occur, one partner may interpret this divergence as a lack of love for the deceased child or as a disengagement from the grieving process. Clinicians (e.g., Worden, 2004) cautioned bereaved parents against drawing rapid conclusions about their partner's

engagement with the grieving process and have suggested that bereaved parents need to be given the freedom to express their individuality in their grieving.

In addition to divergent patterns of grieving, bereaved parents may experience relational strain after the loss of a child because of each parents' individual preoccupation with his or her grief (Gilbert, 1996). The intensity of the grieving process for each parent may result in a decline in communication between bereaved parents (Kamm & Vandenberg, 2001) and in a lack of sexual intimacy within the relationship (Oliver, 1999). Kamm and Vandenberg found that, on the whole, women tended to value open communication more highly than men and that open communication tended to facilitate more rapid resolution of intensive grief reactions for both men and women. Oliver suggested that the loss of a child may have a serious impact on the sexual relationship of the bereaved parents. Sexual intimacy frequently declined after the loss of a child and relational problems emerged in relation to differential needs for sexual intimacy between men and women, as well as from guilt over experiencing sexual pleasure after such a painful loss. Some parents may also explore the possibility of conceiving another child rapidly after the death of their child, but clinicians and researchers (e.g., Bowlby, 1980/1998; Rubin, 1989-1990) have cautioned that such a course of action may complicate grieving and the relationship with the new child.

Moderators of Parental Bereavement

Researchers have found consistent and strong evidence that the experience of the loss of a child is deeply distressing to bereaved parents, that this distress is enduring and that it places bereaved parents at some risk of developing physical and mental health problems (Murphy, 2008; Stroebe et al., 2007). A natural next step is to ask what moderators, if any, influence the development of parental grieving (cf. Stroebe et al., 2006). Although the

research is not unanimous, there is some evidence to suggest that parent characteristics, child characteristics and the cause of death have a significant impact on the process of grieving for bereaved parents.

One of the more consistent findings is that bereaved mothers tend to grieve more intensively and tend to be at higher risk for complicated grieving, depression and PTSD than bereaved fathers (Barrera et al., 2007; Li et al., 2003; Murphy et al., 2003; Stroebe et al., 2007; Znoj & Keller, 2002; see Stroebe, et al., 2001, or Gilbert, 1996, for more general reviews of gendered grieving in bereavement). Some studies have reported some variability in this generally consistent finding. For example, Murphy and her colleagues (Murphy et al., 1999) found that during the second year post-death, distress in mothers continued to decline, while fathers, who had started at lower levels of distress initially, showed a modest level of increase. Likewise, Goodenough's study (Goodenough et al., 2004) of Australian parents found that fathers, and not mothers, showed higher levels of stress, depression and anxiety when their child passed away in hospital. Li and her colleagues (Li et al., 2003) found that bereaved fathers had higher rates of early mortality when their child died of unnatural causes.

Several scholars have offered biological or psychological reasons for this observed difference. Some (Stroebe et al., 2007) have implied that bereaved mothers may be more vulnerable to intensive grief and mental health consequences for evolutionary reasons and because of more emotionally intensive bonds with their children. Another possibility is that the intensity of grieving and reported mental health problems may follow the observed pattern for anxiety and depression more generally (American Psychiatric Association, 2000). Others (Gilbert, 1996; Schwab, 1998) have suggested that parental grieving follows traditional masculine and feminine ways of expressing emotions, with mothers more prone to

expressing their feelings overtly and strongly and fathers more focused on the pragmatic aspects of grieving. While there may be some validity to these explanations, few studies have taken the question of gender seriously by separating sex from gender or have examined contextual dimensions in the gendered grieving patterns of bereaved parents.

One issue that is worth addressing briefly in relation to the gendered grieving of bereaved parents concerns possibility of delayed or absent grief, which is typically associated with the grieving processes of men. Lindemann's (1944) landmark paper on the grief of the Cocoanut Grove fire in Boston brought this form of complicated grief to the forefront of psychoanalytic consciousness at the time, and to this date clinicians and some researchers acknowledge that bereaved individuals, including bereaved parents, may not engage in their grief for some time after a loss (Parkes, 2001, 2002). The implication of this delayed or absent grief is that there is some psychological process which is blocking or inhibiting the grieving process, and most clinicians assert that this is suggestive of pathology. Notably, however, the notion of delayed or absent grief is absent from the current formulations of complicated or prolonged grief (Horowitz et al., 1997; Prigerson et al., 2008). Wortman and Silver (1989, 2001) claimed that there is little evidence to suggest that absent grief is little more than individual variation in grieving, while Parkes has suggested that delayed/absent grief may indeed warrant clinical attention.

Returning to the focus on the moderators of grief, relatively few researchers have investigated the effect of the age of the child at the time of death on the grieving processes of bereaved parents. Wijnngaards-de Meij and her colleagues at Utrecht University (Wijnngaards-de Meij et al., 2005) found a curvilinear relationship between the age of the child and the intensity of the grieving process in their longitudinal study of 219 bereaved

parents. They reported that the parental emotional intensity of grieving was highest for deceased teenage and young adult children and comparatively lower for younger and older children. They also reported that the intensity of the grief was moderated by the number of remaining children, with those parents with more remaining children grieving less intensively. This finding has been confirmed in other studies also (Stroebe et al., 2007). Simon Rubin (1996) has also conducted some comparisons between the intensity of grief for parents who were bereaved of young children and those bereaved of young adult children. Rubin's findings likewise confirm that the intensity of grieving for older children tended to be higher relative to the grieving for younger children. Rubin offered a developmental explanation for the greater intensity observed in the parents of adult children:

In contrast to the bereaved parents of adult sons, the loss of a young child is the loss of a potential relationship. The relationship to the child may be mourned for many years, as parents have occasion to mourn additional aspects of the deceased child. At each milestone of life, they mourn the loss of the child as he or she might have been. Yet the loss of a grown child is the loss of a relationship that has in reality consumed a large amount of energy and emotional investment. Decades of interaction with the son need to be mourned and the finality of the death acknowledged (Rubin, 1989-1990, p. 334).

While the empirical findings suggest the patterns reported above, two caveats are in order at this point. Firstly, although Rubin may be correct in asserting that there is a developmental aspect to the grieving processes of bereaved parents, the comparison of younger and older bereaved children may also be confounded by the cause of their deaths. As will be explained shortly, the sudden and violent deaths more likely in adult children (and

certainly the case in Rubin's investigations of deceased soldier sons) are compared with the deaths of younger children, who tend to have died of non-violent causes, such as diseases. Research has definitely shown that the sudden and violent deaths of children are more traumatic to bereaved parents, and thus the cause of death may confound the observed relationship between the age of the child and the intensity of parental grief. Secondly, there is the potential for bereaved parents of younger children to find comparisons of age and intensity to be deeply hurtful and invalidating of their own grieving experiences. Thus, it is important to return to the unanimous conclusion of the research community that the death of a child, regardless of his or her age or cause of death, is a deeply distressing event, and that comparisons of grieving intensity cannot account for the subjective suffering of each parent.

A very important consideration in the exploration of parental bereavement is the cause of the child's death. Similar to the discussion on the gender differences in parental grieving, the research on the cause of death is fairly robust (Murphy, 2008). Researchers have consistently found that sudden and violent deaths of children (e.g., by sudden illness, accident, homicide, or suicide) are likely to yield a more intensive grief for bereaved parents (cf. Stroebe et al., 2007). This result appears to be fairly robust and may be explained by the fact that bereaved parents of suddenly and violently deceased children experience more drastic and immediate invalidation of core beliefs and worldview assumptions, while the bereaved parents of deceased children who die of diseases may have had time to understand the cause of their child's death and anticipate the coming loss.

Some researchers have sought to differentiate between the various types of violent death, wondering whether a suicide may be particularly harrowing for bereaved parents (Murphy et al., 2003). Contrary to clinical lore, Murphy and her colleagues found that suicide

was not associated with the most intensive or complicated forms of grief, when compared with homicide or accident. She explained this finding by noting that parents of children who committed suicide may have had some warning of their child's impending death, as suicide is frequently associated with mental disorders. An investigation of grieving processes of 540 bereaved parents likewise demonstrated that the differences in the intensity of grieving between suicide and other violent causes were not substantive (Feigelman, Jordan, & Gorman, 2008-2009). Rather, the researchers found that the differences were overshadowed by the finding that the intensity of parental grieving diminished over time.

While research has failed to demonstrate that one type of violent death is predictive of increased grieving intensity for bereaved parents, thematic differences in the grieving processes of bereaved parents have been found quite consistently (Murphy, 2008). Parents of children who committed suicide frequently deal with themes of guilt and shame surrounding the cause of death of their child, and wonder about the moral consequences of committing suicide (Owens, Lambert, Lloyd, & Donovan, 2008). Feigelman and his colleagues suggested that the grieving processes of bereaved parents may be complicated by stigmatization of suicide and with pre-death complications in the relationships between the deceased children and significant others in his or her life. Bereaved parents of murdered children also reveal unique themes in their grieving as they synthesize their own reactions to their child's death and their child's murderer with public reactions and media attention (Dannemiller, 2002).

Searching for Meaning

One of the most prominent themes in the parental bereavement literature concerns the issue of meaning. To date, a variety of qualitative (Braun & Berg, 1994; Klass, 1999; Matthews & Marwit, 2003-2004; Nadeau, 2001a, 2001b; Wheeler, 2001) and quantitative

(Anderson, et al., 2005; Davis, 2001; Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Davis, Nolen-Hoeksema, & Larson, 1998; Davis, Wortman, Lehman, & Silver, 2000), and mixed methods (Murphy et al., 2003; Uren & Wastell, 2002) investigations have begun to explore the process of how parents come to find meaning after the loss of a child. While the results are informative, they also point to the complexity of meaning-reconstruction, which is influenced by a myriad of personal and contextual factors. Of particular mention is the fact that many studies have suggested that religiosity/spirituality may offer important resources in the search for meaning for bereaved parents (Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009).

Qualitative researchers have offered detailed insights into the phenomenology of parental bereavement and the process of finding meaning. Braun and Berg (1994) conducted one of the first studies on the meaning reconstruction efforts of bereaved parents. Interestingly, Braun and Berg found that pre-existing structures, which could accommodate the death of a child, were not as disrupted as structures which could not account for such loss, which in turn led to disorientation. Central elements to meaning structures which could not account for a child's death included the view that a child was seen as the central source of parent's meaning and purpose, the view of the child as an extension of parent's self and future, the belief in life as orderly, good and basically fair, the belief that parents and children were basically immune to tragedy, and the belief that life is basically confined to one's earthly existence. These views were aided by social factors, which reinforced the beliefs.

By contrast, Braun and Berg (1994) noted that those informants whose prior meaning structures could account for the loss of a child included the following elements: (a) that the experience of the loss of child does not eradicate the basic value of life itself; (b) having experienced prior difficult experiences in the past; (c) a strong belief in an afterlife, (d) the

perception of self as powerless under control of an all-powerful God; (e) an ongoing belief in order in the world, and (f) the belief that God has reasons for such tragic events and the ability to accept these reasons unquestionably. Although this study did not solely include people with spiritual/religious beliefs, the phenomenology of grieving that emerged clearly pointed to the importance of such elements in the grieving experiences of bereaved parents.

Wheeler (2001) explored the process of finding meaning after the death of a child through asking 176 bereaved parents (78% female; 98% white, 42% Protestant, 32% Catholic, 10% no affiliation, 7% Jewish) to respond to several open-ended questions about their experience of their child's death and the meaning of the parent's lives post loss. Findings revealed that many parents initially were unable to accept the reality of the death and that their focus was on their own emotional reactions of anger, bitterness, pain, fear, guilt, as well as on their preoccupation with the deceased child. However, as time progressed, parents reported that some were indeed able to accept the death of their child, while others engaged in continual questions and remained unable to accept the reality of the death of their child. In terms of the meaning, Wheeler found that parents focused on: (1) their pain and suffering; (2) the deceased child's life and death; (3) connections with other people; (4) positive gains, such as a new appreciation for life and re-evaluation of values.

In terms of meaning, ten percent of the respondents reported that nothing has given meaning to their life since the death of their child (Wheeler, 2001). Others reported that they had found meaning in connections with other people and in new and valuable activities. For some parents, beliefs and values had become significant, including faith in higher power, reunion with child, belief in greater scheme, valuing life and living more fully, accepting what cannot be changed, caring more about people, valuing the spiritual above the

materialistic, and finding new religious/spiritual beliefs. Another category that emerged was the connection with the deceased child – valuing time spent with child, volunteer work connected to the child, keeping the child’s memory alive, and valuing memories of the child. Finally, a minority of the parents stated that they had found meaning again through focusing on personal growth (e.g., becoming a better person, pursuing education, self-discovery).

In a distinctly unique study, Nadeau (2001a) explored the meaning-making processes of ten non-clinical, multigenerational families. In contrast to the vast majority of studies, which explored these processes from an individual perspective, Nadeau’s work stands out as a systemic perspective on grieving. Nadeau found that the process of finding meaning was influenced by a variety of factors, including: (1) the in-law effect, in which in-laws fuelled the family conversation by introducing elements that members who were closely related did not; (2) meaning enhancers, which included a variety of elements that facilitated the family’s willingness to share meanings, such as the frequency of contact, rituals, tolerance for differences, nature of the death; (3) meaning inhibitors, which were factors, such as family secrets, fragile family ties, cut-off relationships, widely divergent beliefs, and implicit rules which prohibited sharing.

Nadeau (2001b) reported a variety of strategies which families employed to make meaning following a loss. These strategies included family storytelling, the sharing of meaningful dreams, comparison of accounts of the deceased, using seemingly random events to make sense of the death, characterization of the deceased, and the sharing of particular insider information about the deceased family member. In terms of the results, Nadeau (2001a) noted that she found ten different types of meanings: (a) statements about what the death was not, (b) statements about how there was no sense to be made, (c) statements about

how the death was unfair or unjust, (d) philosophical statements, (e) religious statements, (f) statements about the afterlife, (g) statements about the nature of the death, (h) statements about the attitude of the deceased toward death, (i) statements about how the death changed the family, and (j) statements about lessons learned and truths realized.

The work of Shirley Murphy and her colleagues (Murphy, 2008; Murphy et al., 2003) has been mentioned previously in this chapter. In relation to meaning, Murphy found that participants' meaning-finding increased over time: none reported finding meaning at four months, twelve percent at twelve months and fifty-seven percent at sixty months. Murphy and her colleagues reported that the need to find meaning was a high priority for bereaved parents – 80% responded to open-ended item about meaning and early responders have had some indicators about the possibility of death.

Numerous themes emerged from this study. Murphy and her colleagues (Murphy et al., 2003) reported that within the first four to twelve months, parents were dealing with (a) unfairness of death; (b) seeking information and explanation for death; (c) making causal attributions based on information attained; and (d) parents' self-questioning of their responsibilities for the death. Between 12-60 months, however, the themes changed to include: (a) establishing rituals & memorials, (b) seeking justice/revenge/fear of personal safety; (c) realistic acceptance of the deceased children's lives as they were lived. At 60 months parents grappled with, (a) gaining new insights into the meaning of life and reordering priorities; (b) existential beliefs; (c) valuing the deceased child; (d) belief that the child's suffering had ended; (e) becoming more altruistic; (f) learning of one's strength in the face of adversity; (f) perceived benefits. Murphy found that the process of finding meaning (which in this study was defined as 'comprehensibility') was a lengthy process. She noted

that, “as parents moved toward meaning as significance, their narratives described rituals being established, realistic acceptance of how their children’s lives were lived, and eventually were able to describe ‘what is important now’” (Murphy et al., 2003, p. 399).

In a series of studies, Matthews, Marwit and their colleagues (Anderson, et al., 2005; Matthews & Marwit, 2003-2004) explored the bereavement experiences of 155 bereaved parents who had lost their children due to murder, illness, or accidents (including control group). Their focus was on the assumptive worlds of parents and the particular differences that emerged when comparing the causes of death and the implications for grieving. Results of the study supported the contention that traumatic deaths affected assumptive worlds and offered some evidence that the type of death may also affect the parents’ efforts at reconstructing meaning. Bereaved parents compared with non-bereaved parents demonstrated more negative views on all subscales of the World Assumptions Scale (WAS; Janoff-Bulman, 1989) – view of self, meaningfulness of world, benevolence of world. Additionally, parents who had lost a child to homicide reported more negative view of benevolence than those who had lost a child in an accident. These, in turn, reported lower scores on the meaningfulness subscale of the WAS, thus implying that they felt they had less control over their world. Parents who had lost a child to a homicide also reported low scores on worthiness, while those who had lost a child to illness seemed to have the hardest time making sense of loss. Regardless of the cause of death, however, the worldview of the bereaved parents predicted the emotional intensity of their grief.

Davis and his colleagues (Davis, 2001; Davis, et al., 2000) conducted a series of studies on meaning-making in the face of loss. The first study was part of a large, multi-wave investigation on bereavement (Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Davis, et al., 1998). A total

of 180 family members participated in four interviews – three, six, thirteen and eighteen months post-loss. The sample was largely female (74%), white (81%), and had lost a parent, spouse/partner, child, sibling or relative to a terminal illness (e.g., cancer, AIDS, etc.). Results from this study indicated that 98% of the respondents attempted to make sense of the death (although only 68% reported that they had found meaning) and 73% had found some benefit in the loss after six months. Three factors predicted the respondent's ability to make sense of the loss – reported religious beliefs, pre-loss distress and the age of the deceased. Respondents were more likely to be able to make sense of the loss if they reported religious and spiritual beliefs, were experiencing less distress prior to the death, and if the age of the deceased was older. The ability to find some benefit in the loss was predicted by dispositional optimism. Taken together, the results of the study lent preliminary support for a mediational model of meaning, in which the two measured aspects of meaning (sense-making and benefit finding) mediated the relationship between several pre-loss variables (age of the deceased, religious beliefs, pre-loss distress, pre-loss optimism) and the composite distress score (symptoms of PTSD and depression and positive affect).

The work of Davis and his colleagues has been quite influential in shaping bereavement-related research on meaning. Two comments, however, seem appropriate at this juncture. Firstly, Davis (2001) has suggested that finding meaning may be a composite cognitive process for two distinct processes – benefit finding and sense-making. The basic structure of this process corresponds well with Freud's (1917/2005) original suggestion that grieving moves between engagement with the loss (sense-making) and re-engagement with life post-loss (benefit finding). Existential psychologists (Längle, 2005a) have suggested something similar by noting that meaning addresses context, purpose and value.

Secondly, it may be worth reconsidering the strong cognitive and functionalist bias of ‘sense-making’ and ‘benefit-finding’. Längle and others (Attig, 1996; Klass, 1999; Neimeyer, 2000) have acknowledged that cognitive processes are part of grieving, but remind scholars that it cannot be reduced to a cognitive process. Grieving is fundamentally a holistic activity, an emotional engagement with the loss and a relearning of the world, and a solely-cognitive conceptualization impoverishes this process. Furthermore, benefit-finding is an overly functionalistic conceptualization of meaning-reconstruction, to which some bereaved parents have taken offense (e.g., Keesee, Currier, & Neimeyer, 2008). A more appropriate framing of this issue might be in terms of values, asking bereaved parents if, in spite of all their suffering, anything ‘good’ had emerged from this tragedy.

Drawing on two separate samples – 124 parents who had lost a child to sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and 93 people who had lost a spouse or a child in a motor vehicle accident – Davis and his colleagues (Davis et al., 2000) explored three common assumptions regarding meaning: (1) that most people engage in a search for meaning after a loss; (2) that most people are able to find meaning in the loss; (3) and that finding meaning is critically important for successful adjustment post-bereavement. Results from these two samples indicated that the three common assumptions indeed did bear some investigation. A significant subset of participants in both studies reported that they had not searched for meaning, and if they had searched for meaning that they had not found it. Furthermore, results also indicated that those who had found meaning were not significantly better off in terms of their psychological adjustment than those who had not entertained this issue (although they were better off than those who had searched and not found meaning). It is also interesting to note that time post-loss was not predictive of finding meaning; Davis et al

(2000) note that parents in the SIDS study who had not found meaning one month post loss were not likely to do so at subsequent interviews (three months or eighteen months). For the current study, it is interesting to note that the worldviews of participants were indeed predictive of the ability to find meaning; those participants who reported being religious were more likely to find meaning in the first few weeks post-loss, and this was in turn associated with decreased distress and increased positive affect.

However, the results of the two studies on sudden death (Davis et al., 2000; Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001), do raise significant issues about the nature of meaning and why, after the death of a close relative, some people do not appear to seek for a greater meaning in the event. Gamino and his colleagues (Gamino, Hogan, & Sewell, 2002; Gamino & Sewell, 2004; Gamino, Sewell, & Easterling, 2000) conducted a series of studies to attempt to address this matter through qualitative and quantitative methods. In their qualitative study, they asked a heterogenous sample of 85 mourners to respond to the question of how they made sense of the death of their loved one. Responses varied between themes which addressed pragmatic and instrumental responses to the loss – such as feeling the absence of the loved one – to more existential and spiritual responses – such as continuing the connection, invoking the afterlife, and going on with life. Gamino and his colleagues (Gamino et al., 2002) suggested that the discrepant meanings of the mourners in this study might explain the controversy over whether mourners search for meaning after the death of a loved one. They noted that, “those mourners who construe concretely the meaning of the death in terms of its pragmatic consequences for their lives may not so much seek meaning as they realize the instrumental meaning of the loved one’s death...Others may engage in a proactive search for meaning at a more abstract level including the pursuit of philosophical,

existential answers through soulful reflection” (p. 810). This explanation maps on well onto the distinction between a received, ontological meaning and the active process of finding situational or existential meaning (Frankl, 1969; Längle, 2005a).

However, Gamino and his colleagues (Gamino et al., 2004) went even further and investigated which types of meaning (focusing on instrumental loss or finding existential meaning) predicted positive adjustment following the loss, and found that those mourners who focused on spiritual themes expressing hope and recovery in addition to (not to the exclusion of) negative, pragmatic themes (such as feeling the absence of a loved one). They noted, that “the key difference was better adjustment among those participants who, despite their grief, still endorsed some dimensions of hope and recovery compared with those who expressed exclusively pain and suffering in their narratives” (p. 413).

In sum, the research on making and finding meaning after death has suggested that meaning-reconstruction is a central aspect for grieving generally (Davis et al., 2000) and for the grieving processes of bereaved parents (Gamino et al., 2004). Although the process of finding meaning is difficult and may at times be unsuccessful, these studies suggest that it is an activity that is central to the grieving processes of most bereaved parents. Those who do not may have consciously or unconsciously found a meaning; searching for meaning is only relevant for those whose worldviews have been challenged by a loss (Frankl, 1969). Studies have also suggested that finding or making meaning post-loss contributes positively to the well-being of bereaved parents (Keessee et al., 2008) and that meaning may buffer against the development of a complicated grieving process. Spiritual and religious worldviews and practices have been found to contribute substantively to the process of finding and making

meaning (Braun & Berg, 1994; Pargament, 1997), and it is to such research that we now turn our attention.

Spirituality/Religiosity and Parental Bereavement

While the research to date has suggested that spirituality and religiosity may contribute substantively to parental grieving (Braun & Berg, 1994), relatively few studies have sought to investigate its contribution to grieving (e.g., Anderson, et al., 2005; Klass, 1999; Matthews & Marwit, 2006; see Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009, for reviews of the role of spirituality and religiosity in bereavement more generally). This may not be entirely surprising, given the lack of research attention to religious/spiritual issues more generally (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003), but it does point to an important gap in the parental bereavement literature. When spirituality and/or religiosity have been addressed, scholars have explored it indirectly while focusing on parental grieving more generally (Murphy et al., 2003; Nadeau, 2001) or in the context of the parents' search for meaning (e.g., Davis, 2001; Matthews & Marwit, 2003-2004; Wheeler, 2001; Uren & Wastell, 2002).

The majority of the investigations into the role of religiosity/spirituality in parental bereavement have found that spirituality and religiosity function as a positive resource during the struggle of parental loss (Wortman & Park, 2008). Spiritual/religious beliefs, communities and practices offer parents a worldview (Benore & Park, 2004; Braun & Berg, 1994), which enables them to find some meaning in their loss and solace in their grief (Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001), an understanding and caring community (Klass, 1999), which can support them in their grieving, and spiritual/religious coping activities (Pargament, 1997; Park, 2005), which provide pre-established ways of dealing with distress.

The death of a child typically violates the assumptive worlds of the bereaved, especially the child's parents (Klass, 1999). Parents are frequently at a loss as to how to make sense of an event that reverses the natural order of birth and death and to find an explanation for the incomprehensible. Some spiritual/religious worldviews may be very helpful in this process as the death of the child and the subsequent suffering of the bereaved parents can be held within a wider, spiritual context. This context may support bereaved parents in finding an ontological ground for such an incomprehensible event, and this ground may assist them in finding a meaning for their loss and their lives. Importantly, the spiritual worldviews of the bereaved need to be able to accommodate the presence of suffering (Rinpoche, 1992; Rohr, 1996). Spiritual worldviews which negate suffering or explain it as a personal moral consequence are not of much use to the bereaved and may be discarded in the face of immense tragedies.

Klass (1999) has suggested that spiritual worldviews need to be held personally if they are to be of value to bereaved parents. This corresponds well with research on intrinsic religiosity (see Donahue, 1985, for a review). General, impersonal or solely cognitive beliefs are too abstract to impact the grieving process for bereaved parents. Bereaved parents are not interested in abstract or metaphysical questions – they are searching for personal understandings and meanings in the aftermath of their loss. They want to know why *their* child has died and why *they* are suffering. Spiritual worldviews may offer an explanation or exhort bereaved parents to find meaning in the absence of a clear-cut answer to their question. A spiritual worldview does not prevent parents from suffering in their loss, as Klass (1999) has noted: “Bereaved parents do not escape from their grief into a purer place called the spiritual, rather the spiritual emerges in the day to day coming to terms with the death of

their child. Their spirituality is not a refuge from their grief, but part of their lives that develops as they grow in their grief” (pp. 19-20).

Spiritual/religious worldviews and communities also offer their adherents the experience of interpersonal and Divine comfort of solace in their grief (Klass, 1999). This experience of some soothing of the pain is grounded in death-specific beliefs, such as the belief in an afterlife, but more deeply experienced in the connection to the Divine and in their continuing bond with the deceased child (Benore & Park, 2004; Klass, et al., 1996). Life, for these parents, does not end with the physical death of their child. Rather, spiritual/religious experiences and practices allow parents to continue to experience the presence of their children in this life, and may offer an opportunity for reunification in the next (Steffen & Coyle, 2010). Klass (1999) suggested that solace and comfort in the midst of the intensive process of parental grieving emerged from the ongoing inner representation of their deceased child within the context of an accommodating spiritual worldview. He noted that “for bereaved parents, solace comes in the sense of transcendent reality experienced in the midst of devastation. Solace comes into the heart of pain. Solace is found within the sense of being connected to a reality that transcends the self. Among bereaved parents, their interaction with their dead children is merged into their other experience of transcendent reality” (p. 95).

Finally, parental grieving – whether spiritual/religious or otherwise – does not take place in isolation. The vast majority of the research indicates that spiritual/religious coping with parental bereavement is fundamentally relational (Klass, 1999; Rosenblatt, 2000). Two basic arguments have been put forth for the relationality of parental grieving. Firstly, most researchers have found that the grieving process for parents involves the social and spiritual support of many individuals and groups – support groups, clergy, counsellors, family,

members of one's spiritual community, the Divine, and so forth (Wortman & Park, 2008). This way of conceptualizing relationality foregrounds the individual as coping with the spiritual and social support of others. However, grieving is also relational on a more profound level. In this approach to relationality, the individual is seen as fundamentally and inextricably in relationship. His or her being itself is relational, is being-the-world, being-in-relationship (Chiari & Nuzzo, 2006; Längle, 2005a; Young, et al., 2002; cf. Heidegger, 1927/1962). This conceptualization of grieving is irreducibly interpersonal, acknowledging the experience of the relationship between parents, between parent and child, and between parents and the Divine. Klass (1999) related this vision of relationality to the transformed, continuing bond between the parent and the child. He noted that, "at its core, immortality is a social reality, not an ontological reality. It is actualized in the continuing bond between parent and child, in the love that does not die. The reality of an immortal child is not in an imagined better world outside this one...In the continuing bond with the parent's dead child, the child remains immortal in the parents' memories, and the parent makes the child real in the life the parent now lives dedicated to the child's memory. So long as this lives, the child lives in the Eternal Now" (p. 124).

Empirical Limitations

The existing research on parental bereavement has offered a rich ground on which to develop a study on parental grieving and the role of spirituality/religiosity. A critical look at the literature, however, reveals several limitations and points to important next steps in the research. Firstly, very few studies have directly investigated the role of spirituality/religiosity in the grieving processes of bereaved parents (Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009). Most scholarship in this area has explored this indirectly while investigating parental grieving

more generally (e.g., Murphy, 2008) or in relation to the process of making or finding meaning (e.g., Braun & Berg, 1994; Davis & Nolen-Hoeksema, 2001; Uren & Wastell, 2002). When spirituality and/or religiosity have been explored, researchers have typically focused on cognitive beliefs (e.g., Benore & Park, 2004) or meaning-making (Park, 2005) or coping (McIntosh, Silver, & Wortman, 1993). However, if we understand religiosity/spirituality as multidimensional constructs, then contextually-sensitive investigations of the various dimensions are necessary to understand them more holistically.

Secondly, the vast majority of parental bereavement research to date has explored parental grieving as an individual, intrapsychic processes (Walter, 1996). This is certainly the case for coping and religious coping research (e.g., McIntosh et al., 1993; Park, 2005) as well as for studies conducted from the perspective of attachment theory (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008) and various integrative models of bereavement (Rubin, 1996; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2005). When relationships have been foregrounded (e.g., Field, 2008; Klass et al., 1996), the focus has been on the relationship between an individual parent and the deceased child. Even Klass' work (Klass, 1999), which explicitly acknowledges communal aspects of parental grieving, has investigated the development of continuing bonds as 'inner representations', thus framing them as intrapsychic processes. A few studies have begun to explore relational or dyadic levels of parental grieving (e.g., Toller & Braithwaite, 2009; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008), and their authors have called for further investigation of the relational dimensions of parental grieving.

Contextual Action Theory

Contextual action theory may be helpful in advancing our understanding of the grieving processes of bereaved parents. Action theory can be considered an integrative

framework – a specific way of looking at human emotional, cognitive, behavioural and relational processes – that draws on a variety of discourses in the social sciences, including, social constructionism, hermeneutics, phenomenology, and narrative studies (Valach, et al., 2002; Young & Valach, 2008; Valach & Young, 2004). One of the chief features of this integrative framework is that it assumes *action* – goal-directed, human behaviour – to be its central construct and unit of analysis. Contextual action theory directs the researcher to view the ways in which intrapsychic elements, and their contextual counterparts emerge in the intentional, joint activities of human beings. As a construct, therefore, action serves principally to synthesize phenomena holistically rather than to fragment them into their individual elements (Young, et al., 2002; cf. Lazarus, 2000). Contextual action theory is based on the notion that “intentional action used by agents can be conceptualized and analyzed as oriented toward the personal and shared conception or anticipation of ends (goals, striving for end states) and toward processes occurring while attaining or attempting to attain these ends” (Young & Valach, 2004, p. 501). Contextual action theory builds on and yet sits uniquely within the wider class of philosophical and social scientific action theories.

Action theory researchers have generally employed the *action-project method* as their method of inquiry (Young, et al., 2005). The action-project method is a comprehensive, team-based, qualitative method that uses video-based research interviews, participant journalling and telephone monitoring strategies to comprehensively monitor and describe individual and joint intentional processes over time. The method follows an interpretive hermeneutic that moves between data and the contextual action theory framework. Importantly, the action-project method was specifically designed for dyadic research and focuses not only on retrospective accounts but on current actions and joint actions.

To date, contextual action theory research has been employed in a variety of domains, including life transitions (e.g., career transition, transition to adulthood through studying family projects; Young, Valach, & Collin, 2002; Young, Marshall, Domene, Graham, Logan, Zaidman-Zait, Mart, & Lee, 2008) and health research (e.g., suicidality; Valach, Michel, Dey, & Young, 2002) and health behaviours (Young, Logan, Lovato, Moffat, & Shoveller, 2005). A recent study examined the process of addiction recovery as it unfolded within a close relationship (cf. Graham, Young, Valach, & Wood, 2008). The central constructs and the research method of contextual action theory offer a useful framework for researching parental grieving as an intentional and shared human activity through the integration of several different perspectives on action.

While not disparaging of sophisticated quantitative research programs – especially those which have been adapted to study grieving as a process – we believe that contextual action theory and the action-project method – offer researchers a lens and research method to understand grieving as a temporal, contextually embedded process (Valach, 1995). As such, a contextual action theory perspective on parental bereavement not only avoids the well-documented pitfalls of coping research (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Oakland & Ostell, 1996; Lazarus, 2000), but also stands to make substantive contribution through the examination of the personal significance of spiritual/religious grieving efforts and its relationship to individual and joint activities.

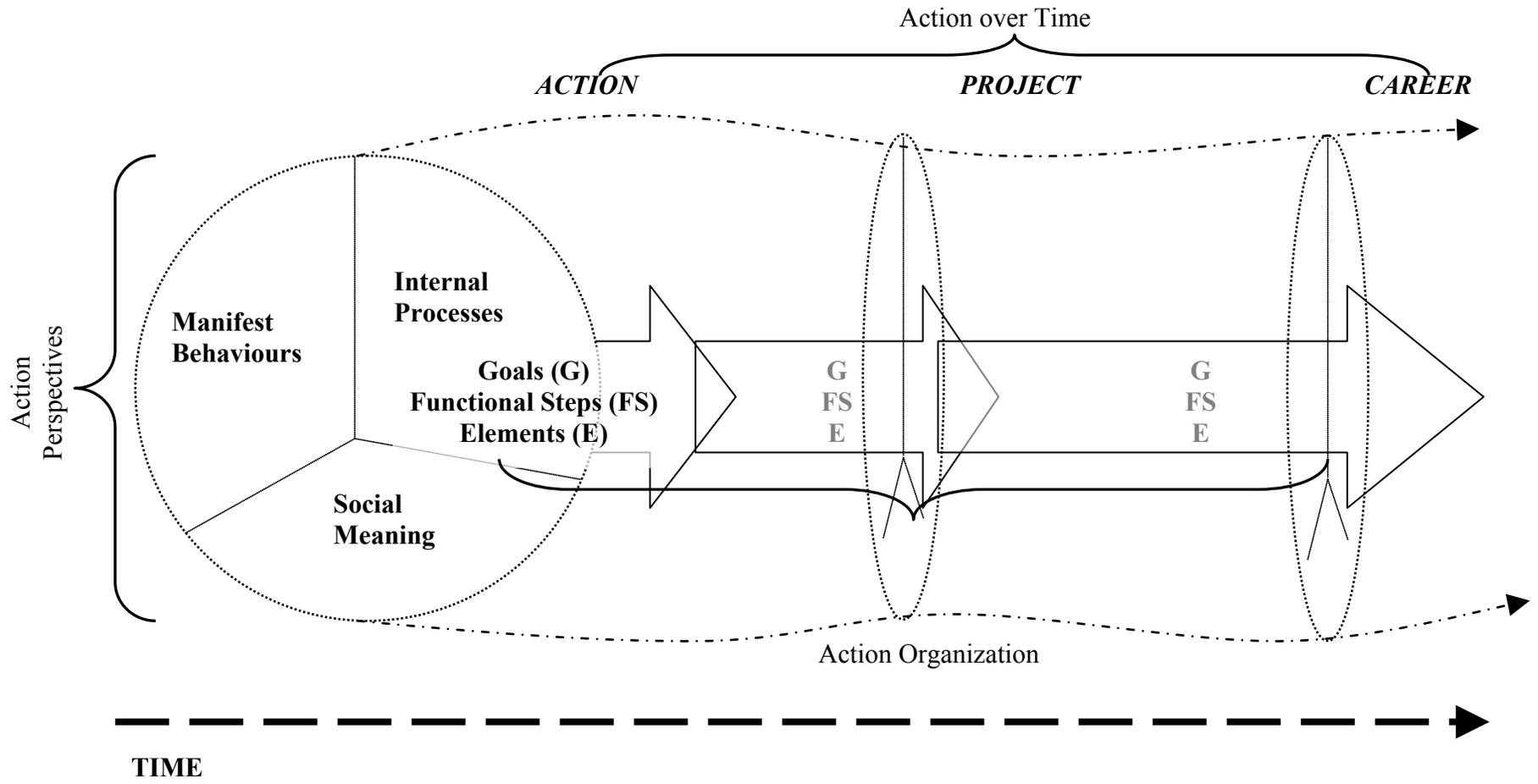
Figure 4 below illustrates how contextual action theory integrates several perspectives and a hierarchical organization into a conception of action as a temporal construct (Klaassen et al., 2009). Intentional activities can simultaneously be understood as embedded within systems in time, be analyzed from the perspectives of internal processes, manifest behaviours

and social meaning and finally be organized hierarchically with meaningful relationships between action goals, functional steps and elements. As an integrative framework contextual action theory thus offers a way to understand human action in terms of its teleonomic, future-oriented focus (i.e. conscious goals or lived, intentional activities), rather than relying on a causal framework, which aims to understand antecedent conditions that give rise to phenomena (Young, et al., 2005).

Action organization. As a framework for understanding human processes, contextual action theory offers a helpful way of organizing intentional and goal-directed activities. Within a developmental trajectory, contextual action theory posits four hierarchically organized action systems in which individual actions can cohere into larger organizing units. These include individual/joint action, project and career (Young & Valach, 2000). Joint and individual actions can be thought of as relatively short-term phenomena, conducted individually or in groups of two or more people, which are “anchored cognitively, socially and environmentally in our everyday lives” (Young, et al., 2005, p. 217).

Project is considered to be a mid-range construct that organizes a variety of actions with common goal(s) or intention(s), structuring them based on shared definitions of specific tasks (Valach et al., 2002). In contrast to the term in a vocational sense, *career* is posited to be the most superordinate construct “that allows people to construct connections among actions, to account for effort, plans, goals, and consequences, to frame internal cognitions and emotions, and to use feedback and feed-forward processes” (Young & Valach, 2000, p. 188). The action-theoretical perspective on an otherwise isolated grieving process contextualizes the individual or joint action within a larger temporal context and relates it to other activities within the lives of the participants.

Figure 4. The Integrative Function of Action. © Brill, 2005, by permission.



Perspectives on action. While contextual action theory is inherently integrative and holistic, it also posits three perspectives on how action may be viewed and researched (Young & Valach, 2008; Young et al., 2005). From an external perspective, one can identify manifest behaviours, such as verbal and nonverbal behaviours, and structural resources/constraints, such as socio-economic status, gender, ethnicity, and so forth. Internal processes, by contrast, refer to the largely intrapsychic processes of emotion and cognition, which energize and direct or steer action respectively. These processes are inaccessible through objective means and require a subjective account of the participants. Finally, action can also be seen from the perspective of social meaning, that is, the personal and social value of the action that arises from the personal and social contexts within which it takes place.

Levels of action. To summarize, we have discussed how actions can be examined from behavioural, cognitive and emotional perspectives, as well as understood, at a higher and integrative level of organization, from the perspective of meaning. Social and personal meaning emerge contextually when actions are understood ontologically, that is, when they are seen as ‘being about’ something (Young & Valach, 2000) and relating to values. Similarly, joint actions can be analysed temporally as projects and/or careers.

The organizing principle for this temporal organization is teleonomic; actions cohere into projects and into careers on the basis of a *common goal or intention*. These goals may or may not be conscious to the person in action at a given time and most certainly may be fuelled also by unconscious features and enabled or limited by structural resources and constraints. However, from the perspective of the actor, even tasks which require little cognitive effort, such as dialling a friend’s phone number on one’s speed dial, are very often purposeful and can be understood, from a contextual action theory perspective, as being in

service of a larger goal-directed project. Young and his colleagues have designated *elements* to be verbal and non-verbal behaviours that form the basic behavioural components (e.g. dialing a telephone) of a larger goal. Several elements may in turn combine into a *functional step*, which “serve to reach a goal and represent the flow and sequence of the action” (Young et al., 2005, p. 217).

Context and process. As is evident from the preceding sections, contextual action theory is an inherently contextual approach (Young & Valach, 2008). Since contextualism is a central theme in this framework, it is important to elaborate briefly on the ways in which contextual action theory sensitizes the researchers to the context of an action, such as parental bereavement. Young and his colleagues (Young, et al., 2002) draw upon the metaphor of weaving to illustrate the ways in which several complex parts of a whole may reveal their interrelatedness. Individual threads, which in isolation may appear chaotic and without direction, gain coherence in the weave only when viewed in relation the other threads and the resulting larger patterns. Action, as the central construct of contextual action theory, serves an integrative function in weaving together intrapsychic, temporal and teleonomic elements of goal-directed, human behaviour. These integrative functions are illustrated in Figure 4.

Contextual action theory understands context as *the field within which action takes place* (cf. Boesch, 1991). This view contrasts sharply with the ‘moderator-approach’, common in most psychological literature, including in bereavement research (Folkman, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2006). Contextual action theory does not consider context as a ‘thing’ or ‘entity’ that exists outside the individual and which is open to statistical control. Rather, context is more aptly framed as emerging in and through individuals (Radley, 1996) as they

act in relationship to themselves, other individuals and groups and their environments. Thus, actions themselves are inherently contextual and individual and joint action simultaneously arises out of and creates a context. Often, the language and research practices invoked when considering parental grieving serves to decontextualize actions. In contextual action theory, however, it is the grieving itself that contextualizes: given all the variables, in this time and place for this purpose, this person grieves (Young, et al., 2002). We consider action as an integrative way to conceptualize and research the ongoing relationship between the individual and context, in this case as related to parental grieving.

Action perspectives offer a way of understanding action at a given point in time depending on whether the goal, functional step (strategy) or elements (operations level) is being considered at either the action, project, or career level of organization. The concept of action takes shape through simultaneous focus on its manifest behaviours, internal processes (such as cognitions and emotions) and social meaning, that is, the reflected-upon and lived value of the action. Action integrates these multiple perspectives on intentional activity into one construct and contextualizes them at the level of social meaning. Importantly, action theory does not postulate the primacy of manifest behaviours, internal processes or social meaning (Valach, Young, & Lyman, 1996).

The basic human processes conceived of from a contextual action theory perspective can be analyzed at the social level, which is the highest level of organization, at a midrange level which includes individual and social cognitive steering and finally at the observable level of manifest action. Specific ways of accessing and collecting data have been conceptualized and linked to each level of process. At a social level, goals are negotiated and strategies are enacted as group action (i.e., social control) through processes such as verbal

and non-verbal communication. This type of information is accessed through naïve observation of social attributions both of the research participants and within the research team (Valach et al., 2002). At a middle level of organization, cognitive steering represents the role that internal processes play in the development of individual goals and the energizing and steering of individual level actions. Within the research method these conscious processes are accessed primarily (although not exclusively) through the self-confrontation interview (see Young, et al., 2005). Cognitive steering includes processes related to plans, strategies, decisions and resolve at the operations level (Valach et al., 2002). Finally, manifest behaviours unfold as observable elements, functional steps or goals that can be identified by systematic observation of at the level of action, whether individual or joint actions. Goals that organize actions serve to provide a coherent account of human behaviour, anchoring it both in one's biographical past and the anticipated future. This has long been evident within the writings of various existential psychologists (e.g., Frankl, 1984; Längle, 2005a). Meanings do not simply arise in a vacuum; rather, they are related to and framed within personal and joint value structures.

Action systems and organization elaborate on the forward-looking dimension of action. Systemically, individual and joint actions cohere into projects, which in turn can be hierarchically organized into careers. In this manner actions are integrated and contextualized over time. However, from a subjective and intersubjective perspective, human beings are intentional and goal-directed beings, who are constantly going about striving for and imagining new ends. Goals, which in action theory can be sub-divided into functional steps and elements, thus are embedded in the functional and temporal context.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to contextualize the current action-theoretical investigation of parental grieving within the wider parental bereavement literature. We began by reviewing definitions of key constructs, such as grieving, bereavement, spirituality and religiosity. Next followed an overview and critique of the theoretical grounding of bereavement research. Subsequently, this chapter went on to review the experience of and research on parental bereavement, including specific research address its health and relational consequences, as well as the role of meaning and spirituality/religiosity in the grieving practices of bereaved parents. Finally, this chapter gave an overview of contextual action theory, which is well-suited to address the relational and contextual limitations in the existing research on parental bereavement. The next chapter will address this issue in greater detail and argue for the value of an action-theoretical investigation of parental grieving.

Chapter 3: Method

This chapter describes the current action-theoretical investigation of the joint grieving actions of religious/spiritual bereaved parents. It offers first a rationale for the study generally as well as for the case study approach and the qualitative action-project method in particular (Young et al., 2005). Next, it addresses the recruitment of participants and describes the five couples who chose to participate in this case study. Data collection and the process of analysis are subsequently explored. The chapter concludes with a discussion of trustworthiness and rigour in qualitative research generally and demonstrates how these principles were addressed in the current study.

Following a thorough and critical investigation of the literature on parental bereavement and spirituality, the author identified the following research question as the focus of this current project: *How do spiritual/religious bereaved parents grieve jointly for their deceased child?* The research question addresses the relational and contextual limitations in the research on parental bereavement and focuses the researcher's attention on a rich description of the joint grieving actions of bereaved parents.

Rationale for the Study

The preceding chapter reviewed the extant literature on spirituality and parental bereavement and revealed several important limitations. Naturally, no one study, including the current one, is able to address all gaps in the literature, but this study sought to address two significant ones: the relationality of parental grieving and the spiritual/religious context in which this grieving took place. The focus of this study was on the joint grieving actions of bereaved parents or the ways in which they grieved together for their deceased child. The study also sought to understand the spiritual/religious context for the bereaved parents and

the ways in which the spirituality or faith of the bereaved parents emerged in their grieving actions. It was hoped that this study would not only add substantively to our collective understanding of parental bereavement the grieving process, but also would offer important theoretical contributions.

The focus of this study was on the joint grieving actions of bereaved parents who had lost a teenage or adult child. This limitation deserves a brief explanation and justification. While some researchers have explored the grieving experiences of older parents (e.g., Rubin, 1989-1990), most research on parental bereavement has focused on bereaved parents who have lost younger children. Thus, a study on the grieving actions of bereaved parents of older children/adults provided some balance in the literature. More substantively, however, this study was focused on the joint grieving actions of spiritual/religious parents, and scholars (e.g., Pargament, 1997) have suggested that spirituality/religiosity are more likely to emerge as necessary grieving resources when the worldviews of bereaved parents have been challenged. This challenge is most salient when bereaved parents experience a sudden, unexpected and violent loss. And this in turn tends to correspond to the deaths of teenagers and adults. As we will see, indeed all bereaved parents in this study suffered such a loss.

The instrumental case study approach. This study employed an instrumental case-study approach to the action-theoretical investigation of the joint grieving actions of spiritual/religious bereaved parents (Stake, 2005). An instrumental case study offers a distinctive approach to qualitative research, as it employs specific cases in the service of understanding a given phenomenon or process – in this case joint grieving actions of spiritual/religious parents. This implies that, although individual cases are inherently

important, they are employed in the service of understanding the larger process and of theoretical elaboration.

As is evident from the research question, this study conceptualized a case as a parental dyad, and thus the focus for this study was on the joint grieving actions of the parental dyad over time. The action-project method, as outlined below, is highly compatible with the instrumental case study, as it generates significant amounts of data from multiple sources over the duration of the study (e.g., three sets of interviews, telephone logs, participants journals, researcher analyses and self-reflections) and thus enables a rich description of the joint grieving actions of bereaved parents.

The qualitative action-project method. The action-project method (Young et al., 2005) is well suited to explore the joint grieving actions of spiritual/religious bereaved parents over time. In fact, the developers of this research method developed it in concert with contextual action theory (Valach et al., 2002) as a method for conducting dyadic-level investigations, which would lead to theoretical formulations that were grounded in the actions of the research participants. Since the action-project method includes multiple sources of data, including individual interviews with participants, joint interviews with participants, joint conversations between participants, telephone conversations with individual participants and individual participants journals, it is well suited to understand the relational and contextual dimensions of the joint grieving actions of spiritual/religious bereaved parents over time. The action-project method also provides a conceptual framework within which to interpret the results and thus stands to make a theoretical as well as empirical contribution to the parental bereavement literature.

Participants

Five bereaved parent couples were recruited through email advertisements and posters throughout the region (see Appendix A). Support groups for bereaved parents were contacted and asked to make announcements at meetings or distribute invitations to participate to their members. Additionally, an email was distributed through a list-serve for the United Church in British Columbia, since many of the bereaved parent support groups hold their regular meetings in local United Churches. Furthermore, counselling agencies, which specialize in grief counselling, and professional contacts of the author in the Greater Vancouver area and Fraser Valley were contacted.

Posters and emails directed interested bereaved parents to contact the author via email or phone call. Once a bereaved parent contacted the author about the study, a time for a screening conversation was set up, or was conducted immediately on the phone. The interested participant was given a brief synopsis of and a rationale for the study. He or she was also told about the expected time commitment for participation in the study, as well as the potential risks and benefits for participating in the study. Finally, the caller was told that since this study involved research into the relational dimension of parental bereavement that the couple would need to be able to participate jointly in the research process.

Screening for the inclusion in the study was conducted in a conversational manner with each individual participant. The conversation included a description of the focus of the study as well as an elaboration on the selection criteria for study inclusion. Selection criteria (see Appendix B) for the participants included the following: (1) The couple must have experienced the death of a teenage or adult child (16 years of age or older at the time of

death); (2) the couple had to identify that spirituality and/or religion has been an important resource in their grieving and adjustment post-loss.

Five heterosexual bereaved parent couples met the screening criteria outlined above and agreed to participate in the study. The mean age of the male participants was 60 years ($SD = 4.29$), and the mean age of the female participants 61.5 years ($SD = 7.66$). At the time of the study, all parental couples were married and living together. Four of the couples had remaining biological children and one couple had two remaining adopted children ($M = 1.2$; $SD = 0.4$). Three of the couples also had grandchildren. At the time of the study, two of the couples had retired from their professions, while both partners for the other three couples remained employed in various occupations. Three of the five female participants had earned undergraduate college or university degrees, and one female participant had earned a graduate degree. Two of the five male participants had earned undergraduate college or university degrees, and one male participant had earned a graduate degree. One of the retired male participants had elected to return to seminary and was engaged in theological studies at the time of this project. All of the bereaved parents identified themselves as Protestant Christians. Two couples attended Evangelical churches and three couples attended mainline Protestant churches. One of the male participants did not attend his Mainline church regularly, and indicated that he was still exploring his spiritual commitments. One female participant stated that, in addition to attending a mainline church, she was also interested in exploring Aboriginal beliefs and practices, to which she had been exposed at her place of work. All other participants stated that they had been practicing their faith since childhood.

All couples had lost one biological child (one female child, four male children). The causes of death were sudden and violent for all children, and included two motor vehicle

accidents, one accidental fall, one suicide and one sudden and unexpected heart attack. The mean age of the deceased children at the time of death was 21.2 years (SD = 2.56) and the average time elapsed since the time of death was 10 years (SD = 4.6).

Data Collection

As outlined in Table 1, the process of gathering data followed the typical pattern for the action-project method (Young et al., 2005). A visual depiction of the various stages of data collection is available in Appendix J. Following the ethical approval of the University of British Columbia's Behavioural Research Ethics Board, the data collection for each couple included interviews, telephone calls, and journaling.

The data were collected by the doctoral student and by three paid graduate students, who had received extensive training the action-project method. All in-person interviews for Couples 2, 3, 4 and 5 were conducted in research rooms on the campus of the University of British Columbia. Interviews for Couple 1 were conducted in their private work offices to accommodate the limited availability for this couple. Interview protocols are found in Appendix H and the personal reflections of the researcher on parental bereavement (bracketing) are found in Appendix G. Couples received \$30 after the first two sets of interviews and \$40 after the final set of interviews to assist with travel expenses and to provide a small remuneration for their efforts.

Table 1: Purpose and Duration/Number of Research Procedures

Procedure	Purpose	Duration/number ^a		
		M	SD	n
Initial Warm Up Conversation	Introduction to parents and deceased child	60.40	13.70	5
Initial Joint Conversation	Record joint conversation	20.00	0.63	5
FP ^b Self-Confrontation Interviews	Collect data on internal processes accompanying action	76.40	4.41	5
MP ^c Self-Confrontation Interviews	Collect data on internal processes accompanying action	87.00	9.14	5
Member Check Interviews	Negotiate identification of joint grieving project	75.00	14.18	5
FP ^b Telephone Monitoring Interviews	Monitor projects, actions, and internal processes	1.40 ^d	0.80	5
MP ^c Telephone Monitoring Interviews	Monitor projects, actions, and internal processes	1.60 ^d	0.49	5
FP ^b Journal entries	Monitor projects, actions, and internal processes	4.60 ^d	3.07	5
MP ^c Journal entries	Monitor projects, actions, and internal processes	2.60 ^d	3.38	5
Final Warm Up Conversation	Evaluate project	11.00	2.49	5
Final Joint Conversation	Record final joint conversation	19.20	3.18	5
Final FP ^b Self-Confrontation Interview	Collect data on internal processes accompanying action	61.20	22.82	5
Final MP ^d Self-Confrontation Interview	Collect data on internal processes accompanying action	73.40	25.14	5
Final Joint Debriefing	Debrief couples	12.2	4.07	5

^aIn minutes, except as noted. ^bFemale Partner. ^cMale Partner. ^dNumber of telephone monitoring forms or journal entries completed.

Initial set of interviews. The first set of interviews included four phases – an introductory phase and three phases of the interview (Young et al., 2005). The initial orientation or warm up phase was designed to orient both parents to the study and was

conducted jointly with two researchers and the parental couple. Following the interview (see Appendix H), the warm up began with a casual conversation about the process of coming to the study, and both participants were be reminded of confidentiality, its limits, and the rights of participants to omit any questions and withdraw at any time. Additionally, the participants were asked to complete the demographic information sheet (Appendix D) and sign the informed consent form (Appendix C). These forms had already been sent to the couple prior to this meeting for review.

Following this initial part of the warm-up interview, the researchers asked the couple to share about themselves, their family and their deceased child. To encourage this process, the parents had been offered the opportunity to bring in photographs of their family and their deceased child, as well as other memorabilia. All couples brought in numerous pictures, and thus introduced the interviewers to the child and to their family. This introduction allowed research participants to become comfortable with the setting and establish an initial rapport with the interviewers. All parents spoke extensively about their family, their spiritual lives prior to the death, and their relationship with their deceased child prior to his or her death. They also spoke about the death of their child, their initial reactions to learning of this death, and their grieving in the aftermath of the death and the funerals of their children. As might be expected, most parents were deeply emotionally involved in the retelling of their child's death, and many participants expressed their intensive emotions through words and tears. Parents also spoke about their ongoing grieving for their child, and addressed the role of their faith or spirituality¹ in this grieving process.

¹ The terms faith or spirituality were used interchangeably, depending upon how the couple identified their spiritual practice. Four of the five couples identified their spiritual practice as a "faith".

Once the parents were sufficiently oriented towards the topic and had begun to talk about their individual and joint grieving activities, the couple was asked to continue this conversation on their own for approximately 20 minutes. In particular, the parents were asked to speak about the ways in which they grieve together for their child and to speak about the role of their faith or spirituality in this grieving process. The parents were encouraged to think of themselves as sitting around the kitchen table or on the living room couch and to engage in the type of conversation that they would have in their home. This conversation was videotaped, but not simultaneously viewed by the researchers, and the participants were informed of this fact. The main purpose of this part of the interview was to facilitate a joint-conversation between both parents as an example of their joint grieving for their child. After approximately 20 minutes, the researchers knocked on the door of the interview room and inquired if this might be an appropriate time to interrupt the joint conversation. All couples agreed and elected to take a 15-minute break at this point in the interview process.

Following the break, the researchers explained the individual self-confrontation interview procedure to the couple. During this phase of the interview each parent individually viewed the video of the joint conversation with one researcher (in separate rooms) and had an opportunity to comment on their internal processes, that is, what they were feeling and thinking, during meaningful units of the conversation. The researcher clarified any questions with the individual participant and then each researcher-parent dyad began viewing the tape of the joint conversation. After approximately one minute, the researcher stopped the video and asked the participant what s/he was feeling and thinking during the last viewed portion of the tape. This procedure was repeated until the entire joint conversation had been viewed. At

the end of the viewing, the participant was asked about his/her overall goal or intention for this conversation as well as for what they hoped to accomplish by participating in this study.

Following the individual self-confrontation interviews, the researchers and parents convened jointly in a common room, where the researchers gave the parents time to speak about their experience and ask questions. All parents commented on the emotional intensity of this first set of interviews, and several noted that this had been the most emotionally intensive experience that they had had since the initial phase of their grieving. The researchers concluded the first set of interviews by outlining the next research procedures and promising to be in touch to schedule the next set of interviews.

Analysis of the initial conversation. Following the first set of interviews, the researchers conducted an initial analysis of the individual and joint grieving actions for each parental couple. The data analysis procedure followed the steps developed by Young, Valach and their colleagues in a successive series of publications (Valach et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005). The analysis for each set of initial interviews was conducted by the author in consultation with the co-researchers and the supervisors. Following the analysis, the author then drafted individual grieving narratives for each parent and a joint grieving narrative for the couple. The joint grieving narrative culminated in the joint grieving project, a sentence-long summary of the joint grieving actions for the couple. The revised version of the three narratives, as outlined below, was incorporated into the second set of interviews.

To begin the analysis, all parts of the first set of interviews were transcribed by the author or a professional transcriptionist. The author then immersed himself in the data, reviewing both transcripts and video/audio recordings of the interviews. The transcriptions and video and audio-recordings were then analyzed from an action-theoretical perspective,

with the intention of identifying goals, functional steps and elements for each joint conversation. This top-down analysis procedure was aided by a review and analysis of the self-confrontation interviews, as well as by additional contextual data gained from the initial warm up conversations and the concluding conversations. The purpose of this immersion in the data was to develop an understanding of the overall intentional framework for the joint grieving project for each couple and how the joint grieving was enacted in their lives.

The next step in the analysis inverted the process and included a detailed analysis of each minute of the joint conversation. This analysis was aided by the use of HyperResearch, a software tool designed for qualitative research. Each minute of each the observed joint action – the joint conversation between the parents – was coded in terms of its goals, functional steps and elements. The aim was to develop an understanding of the intentions of the grieving actions of bereaved parents. Supporting information for the coding was identified in the relevant sections of the self-confrontation interviews and, as relevant, from the warm-up conversations. The supporting segments of the self-confrontation interviews or warm-up conversations were then copied into HyperResearch analysis program, and served as supporting information for the identified grieving action. The supporting information pertained not only to the internal processes – thoughts and feelings – of the parents, but also included additional contextual information about the joint grieving project. The master list of codes, which had been developed through previous action theory studies, was employed in this process. This list of codes is available in Appendix I.

On the basis of this analysis, the author, in collaboration with the assistants, wrote three narratives for each couple, which described their individual and joint grieving actions. The narratives were written in the linguistic style of the participants and were supplemented

with key quotations from the first set of interviews. The first paragraph of each narrative summarized the life situation of the research participants. Following paragraphs elaborated on key grieving processes for each parent (in the individual narratives) and for the couple jointly (in the couple narrative). The joint narrative identified joint grieving processes and patterns of interaction for each couple. The final paragraph of the joint narrative included a tentative written statement which summarized the joint grieving project for each couple. The individual and joint grieving narratives were approximately two to three pages in length.

Narrative feedback and member-check interviews. The second set of interviews was conducted approximately two to three weeks after the first. The main purpose of this shorter set of interviews was to provide participants with an opportunity to review and provide feedback about the identified joint grieving project and to orient the participants towards the ongoing monitoring period. The meeting began with a brief orientation to its purpose and procedures. Following this introduction, each individual parent joined a researcher for the reading of the individual narratives. These readings were conducted in separate rooms and afforded the participants the opportunity to comment on or offer corrections to the individual narrative.

Following this process, the parents and researchers came together in a common room and the joint grieving narrative was read. The author read the narrative out loud and paused after each paragraph to allow participants the time to respond and offer any corrections. Special attention was given to the reading of the final paragraph, which identified and summarized the joint grieving projects for each couple. Following the reading, the parents were asked to comment and discuss its accuracy and to refine the description of the joint grieving project. Each parental couple gave helpful comments, and the descriptions of the

joint grieving projects were modified until both researchers and parents were satisfied that they accurately represented the joint grieving actions of the bereaved parents.

The second set of interviews was concluded by an explanation of the procedures for the monitoring period. Each participant was given the choice of receiving either a physical journal or a word processing template, which they could use on their personal computer. Two parents opted for a physical journal, while the others chose to employ the word processing template. The researchers explained the use of the journals, in which parents were to record joint grieving actions during the monitoring period. The researchers also oriented parents to the telephone monitoring conversations and set up the first set of phone calls with each parent. The researcher who had conducted the self-confrontation interview and had read the individual grieving narrative also contacted the appropriate parent by phone.

Monitoring period. A monitoring period of approximately 4-6 weeks, depending on couple availability, followed the second set of interviews. Each participant was given a personal journal (see Appendix E) and asked to log joint grieving actions on a regular basis. Although no specified minimum number of entries was required, the participants were encouraged to journal as regularly as possible and were reminded to make use of their journals during the monitoring phone calls. The templates were focused on joint grieving activities, their meaning for the participants and the accompanying feelings and thoughts and intended goals. Although all participants had agreed to journal their joint grieving actions, only seven of the ten participants chose to do so. In addition to the participant journal, the researchers scheduled bi-weekly, individual telephone conversations to discuss the ongoing progress of the joint grieving projects and address any questions or concerns. The researchers

made detailed notes during and after each conversation and these were added as data for the study (see Appendix E).

Final set of interviews. Following the monitoring period, the researchers and parental couple scheduled a final set of interviews. These interviews basically followed the outline of the first set of interviews. They began with a short introduction and initial warm-up interview. During this introduction the participants were oriented to the procedure for this final set of interviews and were asked to reflect retrospectively on their joint grieving actions throughout the monitoring period. The parents readily engaged in this dialogue with the researchers and were then asked to continue this conversation in the final joint conversation. As in the first set of interviews, this joint conversation took approximately 20 minutes and was video-recorded. Following a 15-minute break, the researchers reviewed the recorded joint conversations individually with each participant, stopping the video recording approximately every minute to inquire about the parent's thoughts and feelings. The lower mean values and higher standard deviations are due to the shortened set of interviews with Couple 5. As will be elaborated in the following chapter, this couple experienced a personal crisis during the final set of interviews and elected to shorten their involvement in this set.

The final set of interviews was concluded with a final meeting with both researchers and both parents. This final conversation was designed to give the couple a final opportunity to voice feedback about the research procedures or to make a substantive comment about their joint grieving project. The researchers thanked the participants for their involvement in the research project and encouraged participants to contact them with any questions or concerns that emerged. No additional communications were received from the research participants.

Data Analysis

Following the final set of interviews, the entire data set for each couple was compiled. Relevant sections of the member-check interviews and the entire set of final interviews were transcribed by the author and a professional transcriptionist. The data set included the previously-transcribed interviews, the member-check interviews, the final set of interviews, the telephone monitoring logs, the participants' journals and researcher reflections.

In sum, the analysis for this project included a within-case analysis, which focused on an action-theoretical description of each case and the changes to the joint grieving project. A between-case analysis addressed similarities and differences across the cases. Following Stake (2005), the researcher, in consultation with the supervisors, constructed assertions for each couple and key assertions across the cases. Assertions represent a distillation of the research findings for a particular case or for the cases as a whole and have the potential to inform further theoretical developments.

Within-case analysis. The purpose of the within-case analysis was to describe the identified joint grieving projects for each couple over the course of their involvement in the research project. The within case analysis generally followed the steps of analysis detailed for the analysis of the first set of interviews, including an intensive review of the video-taped joint conversations and warm up conversations, the audio-taped self-confrontation interviews and member-check interviews, and a review of all journal entries and phone logs (Valach et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005). The review was conducted through an action-theoretical lens, seeking to understand the internationalities of joint grieving actions of each couple.

This top-down analysis was complemented by a minute-by-minute analysis of the final joint conversation for each couple, supported with additional information from the

member check interviews, the telephone monitoring logs, participant journals and researcher notes. The coding for the final joint conversation was again conducted with the aid of the HyperResearch software package. As with the analysis of the first set of interviews, the analysis of the joint conversation focused on identifying elements, functional steps and goals for manifest behaviours of the joint grieving action. This was supplemented through information on thoughts, feelings and additional contextual information that emerged from the other sources of information. In the analysis of the final joint conversation, particular attention was paid to the ways in which the joint grieving project for each couple had shifted throughout the course of their involvement in the study.

Following the detailed analysis of the final joint conversation between the parental couple, an action-theoretical summary for each case was created. This summary included the following components: (1) an overview of the data sources for each couple; (2) a statement summarizing the demographic information; (3) an analysis of the interactional pattern, goals and functional steps for the initial joint conversation (supported with relevant quotations from warm-up interviews, self-confrontation interviews, member check interviews, telephone logs and participant journals); (4) a summary of the member-check interview; (5) summaries of the telephone logs (written by the researchers); (6) individual journal entries from the parents; and (7) an analysis of the interactional patterns, goals and functional steps for the final joint conversation (supported with relevant quotations from warm-up interviews, self-confrontation interviews, member check interviews, telephone logs and participant journals). The action-theoretical summaries were then written up as narrative summaries in which the author sought to demonstrate how each case answered the research question.

Throughout the within-case analysis process, the author consulted regularly with his doctoral supervisors and with the co-researchers. The goal of these consultations was to remain faithful to the process of analysis as well as the grieving stories and actions of the bereaved parents. Following the instrumental case study approach suggested by Stake (2005), each within-case analysis was concluded by several assertions. Assertions are considered summary statements concerning what the author has found to be important about a specific case.

Between-case analysis. A between or cross-case analysis can yield additional information, including commonalities and unique processes between joint grieving projects. The between-case analysis began with a comparison of how each case had answered the research question for this dissertation project. Secondly, the analysis process at this stage then identified significant similarities between cases and also some unique aspects of the grieving actions and projects. Similarities and unique aspects of joint grieving projects were supported by quotations from warm-up interviews, joint conversations between parents, member-check interviews, participant journals, and researcher phone logs. Further assertions, described as key assertions, were distinguished on the basis of this analysis process. These key assertions represent the author's understanding of the important findings across cases.

Trustworthiness and Rigour

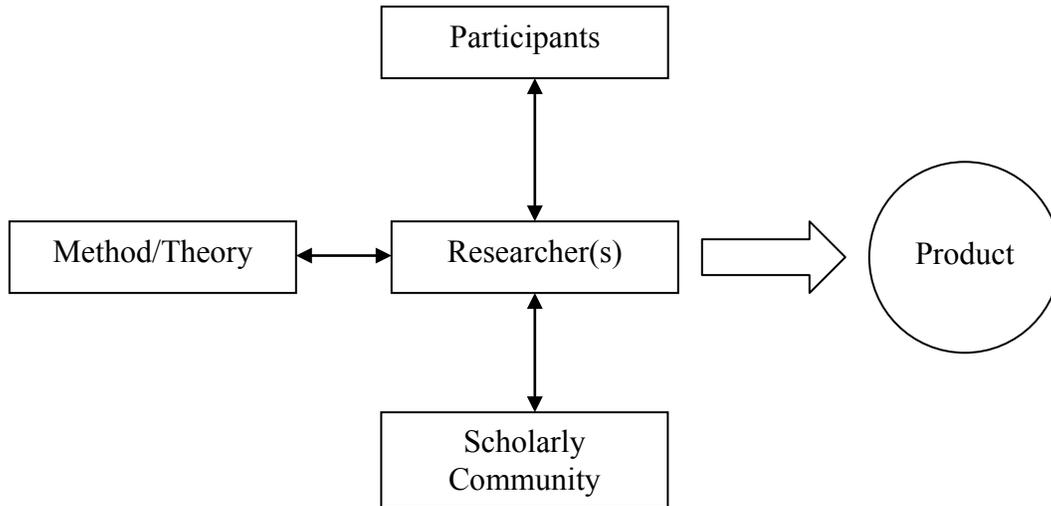
Qualitative researchers have given serious consideration to the development of standards of rigour and trustworthiness in qualitative research (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Arguments have been offered that rigorous research should pay attention simultaneously to common as well as to method-specific factors that enhance the trustworthiness of qualitative findings (DeWitt & Ploeg, 2006; Morrow, 2005).

One way of conceptualizing rigour in qualitative research, which is very germane to the action project method, is to understand it as a four-way conversation between the researchers, the wider scholarly community, the research participants and the established method or research process (Klaassen, McDonald, & Graham, 2004). This is presented diagrammatically in Figure 5. Rigour here is viewed as fidelity to three important constituents.

The researchers or research team has an obligation, first and foremost, to the participants who have willingly shared their experience in the process of research. The current project, following the action-project method (Young et al., 2005), conducted member checks at various points in the data collection process. This included in particular the member-check interview, at which point summaries of the individual and joint grieving processes were presented to research participants both individually and jointly. The telephone conversations and the process of journaling also afforded the research participants the opportunity to offer feedback about the process and content of the research project. Researchers regularly summarized their understanding of the joint grieving project to research participants on the phone and asked participants for correction/elaboration on whether this description remained viable for them and, if not, how it had shifted from the initial description at the member-check interview.

The value of qualitative data depends heavily on the extent to which research participants feel open to and are enabled in expressing their thoughts and feelings. Researchers are responsible for setting a dialogical and open tone for the research process, which invites openness for research participants and encourages them to be forthright in their disagreements.

Figure 5. Rigour as fidelity to participants, method/theory and scholarly community



Significant efforts were made during this project to encourage open feedback from research participants: (1) All researchers were trained counsellors and had been involved in counselling and qualitative research projects prior to their work on this project. (2) The study was specifically designed, with prior consultation with bereaved parents and experts on parental bereavement, to allow time for the development of rapport between researchers and participants. This is particularly evident in the initial warm-up phase of the first set of interviews, which was nearly four times as long as in most action-theory studies (Young et al., 2005). The purpose of the extended warm-up interview was to allow parents time to tell researchers about their deceased child, their individual and joint grieving actions thus far and the role of their spirituality in grieving. (3) When relevant, researchers modelled respectful disagreement with one another, which in turn also encouraged participants to voice their disagreements. This occurred typically during the member-check interviews. (4) When participants did in fact object to some portion of the individual or joint narrative, researchers openly expressed their appreciation for the correction offered. It was encouraging to the

researchers that each couple offered numerous suggestions for refining the description of their joint grieving projects. (5) Finally, the research participants themselves noted frequently that they were deeply emotionally engaged with the interviews.

The following quotation, taken from the first moments of the initial joint conversation for Couple 3 was a typical process comment on the intensity of the interview process. After recalling the details of the suicide of their son in the warm-up interview, the male partner, Lance, began the initial joint conversation by asking the female partner, Merle, how she was feeling. Merle responded that she was feeling exhausted and 'full', feelings that for both partners harkened back to their early grieving experiences. She explained:

FP1: Exhausted. Brings back all those feelings of fullness. Almost as though 18 hasn't gone by [crying]. You did say that you were so glad for counselling from [therapist]. And it was, it was very important, very confirming as to when we were in those weeks, just after 3 months that we started. (FP₃IJC)

A brief caveat about the ethics of conducting emotionally-intensive interviews with bereaved parents might be in order at this point. Bereavement researchers (e.g., Stroebe, 2003) have explored the topic of the ethics of conducting research with bereaved individuals. A central ethical concern when conducting research on a sensitive topic and with vulnerable individuals is to approach the data gathering in a way that respects the rights of the participants to full and informed consent. Informed consent in a research project is best understood as a process in which the participant is informed about the risks and benefits about participation and which extends throughout the duration of their involvement in the study (Kitchener, 2000).

As is evident from the quote above and from the findings in the following chapter, all participants were deeply engaged in the research process and emotionally-involved describing their grieving. In terms of research ethics, the action-project method (Young et al.,

2005), appeared to be a highly appropriate method of inquiry with bereaved parents. Parents were informed about the process of research and their rights prior to their participation in the study. In addition to signing the consent form, the multi-interview research process and the bi-weekly phone calls also gave researchers the opportunity to check on the well-being of participants and, if germane, to remind them about the option of discontinuing or shortening their participation. Indeed, Couple 5 elected to shorten their final set of interviews. However, the vast majority of participants noted that they experienced personal and relational benefits from their involvement with this study and expressed their gratitude for their involvement at various points throughout the project.

Secondly, researchers have an obligation to be faithful to the established method, and that choices to deviate from it are acknowledged and justified. As described in the process of analysis above, this qualitative action project method included a detailed audit trail that allows outsiders to follow each step in the research process (cf. Young et al., 2005). Data were elicited from numerous sources (conversations, interviews, telephone logs, journals, researcher notes) over time, thus yielding a rich description of the joint grieving projects of bereaved parents. Analysis strategies, as well, were rigorous, triangulating the results between top-down and bottom-up procedures and involving multiple researchers.

Finally, the action-project method encourages the researchers to situate the project within the larger research dialogue on the given subject and to ensure an ongoing hermeneutic process between research findings and action theory. Thus, the analysis involves a back-and-forth process between research findings and the interpretive framework, illuminating both the findings in light of the theory and allowing for the research process to shape the framework.

Chapter 4: Findings

The dissertation sought to explore the question: How do spiritual/religious bereaved parents jointly grieve the loss of their child? The focus of the study was to understand how the participants' faith or spirituality emerged in their joint grieving actions. It is worth repeating that neither the grieving literature (e.g., Klass, 1999; Stroebe et al., 2008) in general nor this author deny the well-documented fact that there is an individual or intrapsychic dimension to grieving. Indeed, this perspective has been the focus for the vast majority of the research projects to date (Stroebe et al.). This study, however, was interested in the relational dimension of grieving and particularly in understanding how couples grieve jointly and how their faith or spirituality is expressed in these grieving actions.

This chapter will begin by offering brief summaries of the analysis procedures and findings for this study. Then, the findings will be reviewed in greater detail, beginning with the within-case analyses for each couple. These are followed by the between-case analyses, focusing on the similarities and differences between the cases. The chapter is concluded by six key assertions, which represent a distillation of the central findings of this study.

Summary of Analysis Procedures

The process of the analysis was informed by Stake's (2005) instrumental case study approach. In the case of this current study, this design served to guide the researcher to understand each case as valuable in-and-of-itself and contributing also to potential theoretical advances. As discussed in the previous chapter, the method chosen for this project was the qualitative action-project method (Young et al., 2005; Valach et al., 2002). Following the analytic procedures outlined by the method, this chapter begins with the within-case analyses for each couple. These include background information, a summary of the joint grieving

project and then a detailed description of the joint grieving project. This is followed by a description of the change in the joint grieving project over the course of the couples' involvement in the study. Each analysis is then concluded by a project summary in action-theoretical terms and by several assertions, which summarize the way in which the particular case answers the research question. The within case analyses are followed by cross-case analyses, which highlight perceived commonalities and differences in the joint grieving projects and suggest tentative theoretical postulates concerning joint grieving of spiritual-religious couples.

A brief comment about the terminology in this chapter might be in order at this point. Readers may be unfamiliar with the terms used in this study if they have not yet encountered other action-theoretical studies. To the author's knowledge, this dissertation represents the first application of action theory and the action-project method to the context of grieving. In particular, readers may wonder about the term 'grieving project'. A potential misunderstanding may emerge from the colloquial understanding of 'project' as a planned activity, which is designed to achieve a particular aim. It is important to note that the action-theoretical definition of "project" encompasses both conscious and unconscious action, for which the intentions may not be within the immediate grasp of the individual (Valach et al., 2002). Goals, similarly may be accessible or not to consciousness. For this reason, the author has generally elected to use the word "intention", which connotes more of an aim or process rather than the object of a person's pursuits.

Summary of Key Findings

This study explored relational and spiritual dimensions of parental grieving. An action-theoretical analysis of grieving stories and actions of bereaved parents revealed

patterns of joint grieving for all couples in the study. Joint grieving was described and enacted as a goal-directed activity for the participants in this study and included both planned and unplanned grieving actions. Planned joint grieving included rituals, which frequently took place on anniversaries and which marked the passage of time since the death of the child. Some planned joint grieving rituals took place on a daily basis. Unplanned grieving emerged at surprising moments in the parents' lives and occurred more frequently than planned grieving. Joint grieving actions were intended towards the development of an ongoing representation of the deceased child within the dyadic relationships and also oriented towards the maintaining and developing relationships with the partner and the Divine. Joint grieving was facilitated through engaging in joint grieving rituals, sharing individual grieving actions with one's partner, and accepting the grieving style of the partner. Joint grieving was impeded by experiences of disconnection from the significant others, and various life stressors. The joint grieving projects of the bereaved parents in this study were irreducibly related to their spiritual lives. These spiritual lives of the bereaved parents in this study were multidimensional and shaped the continuing bonds with their deceased children. Bereaved parents received comfort from and expressed intense emotions towards the Divine, searched for meaning and engaged with faith communities.

Within Case Analysis

Couple 1. Couple 1 consisted of a 57-year-old man (Tom) and a 52-year-old woman (Carole). Both partners were of Anglo-Canadian heritage with English as their first language. Both described themselves as Evangelical Christians who had practiced their faith since childhood. The couple noted that they had two children, one of whom (Sonja) was deceased. The other child (David) was married and living in the Philippines with his wife and their

daughter. The couple worked together as a pastoral team in an evangelical church. Carole indicated that she was also involved in municipal leadership in her community. Both Carole and Tom stated that they were considering leaving the pastorate. Their deceased child (who, according to both parents, is “in heaven”), Sonja, died at the age of 21, on May 10, 2002, in a motor vehicle accident while on vacation in Europe.

Joint grieving project. Tom and Carole described their grieving as consisting of both individual and shared grieving actions. Following the first set of interviews, the interviewers analyzed and described the couples’ joint grieving project. This description was presented to the couple in the Member Check Interview (MCI) and after some discussion and minor alterations, the couple concurred with the following description.

Deeply appreciating and benefiting from the partner’s individual grieving style while finding joint comfort and assurance in God’s ongoing love and goodness.

During the telephone monitoring phone calls both Tom and Carole agreed repeatedly that the description of their joint project remained accurate throughout the duration of the research project.

Tom participated in the joint grieving project in numerous ways. He expressed his appreciation for the ways in which his partner’s steadfast attention to the grieving process (through rituals and activities) drew him outside of his normal comfort zone and encouraged him to engage more deeply in his own grieving actions. Tom repeatedly noted an unwavering faith in God’s continual care for their deceased daughter Sonja and an anticipation and hope of being reunited with her. Throughout the research project, Tom and Carole reiterated their ongoing faith in God and Sonja’s ongoing life in heaven. They stated that this belief in Sonja’s ongoing life offered them comfort and hope. Carole was grateful for her partner’s

unwavering faith in the midst of emotional turmoil and his steadfast character in grieving, and stated that this had a calming and stabilizing effect on her. Carole sought to be true to her own experience of pain and sadness and expressed these freely in her individual and joint grieving. In this way, her grieving actions differed markedly from Tom's, as Carole expressed her sadness and longing in both words and tears, while Tom's grieving actions focused on recalling positive memories of his daughter, imagining her ongoing life in heaven, and imagining their reunification in the afterlife. The couple frequently reflecting jointly on their varied grieving actions and expressed appreciation for these differences. The grieving project for this couple was also situated within a relationship career with their remaining son and his wife, who frequently called home from the Philippines to grieve together.

Over the course of the couple's research participation, some aspects of their joint grieving project began to shift and this influenced the ways in which the couple grieved both individually and together. These changes were acknowledged by both partners in phone conversations, journals and in the final set of interviews. Tom expressed the realization that his increased attention to his grieving-related thoughts, feelings and actions revealed that he was grieving more frequently than he had previously acknowledged. Carole agreed with this assessment, but added that she believed that Tom's increased realization of his grieving actions had been accompanied by an actual increase in individual grieving. Carole expressed joy and appreciation for Tom's new awareness and increased grieving actions, and asserted that this had impacted their joint grieving project.

Detailed description of the joint grieving project. The following section represents a detailed description of the couple's joint grieving project. This project includes regularly

enacted grieving rituals, as well as unplanned and surprising grieving actions. The project is shaped by the deeply-held faith of both partners, their individual grieving styles, and by an appreciation for the ways in which each partner's faith perspective and grieving style contributes to their individual and joint grieving projects.

The joint grieving project was characterized by a variety of planned grieving actions or rituals as well as by grieving actions that emerged in everyday life and were largely unplanned. The most significant planned grieving ritual was the couple's annual grieving 'pilgrimage', where they took time to cultivate their relationships with each other, their deceased daughter and with God through various joint grieving actions. Tom and Carole described this grieving ritual in the Initial Joint Conversation (IJC).

MP1: One of the things I was thinking is when we go to [a town] every year. Yeah, so [the town] is just, it's kinda been our yearly thing, because it was the same and it's always on when your AGM conference is on. And one of the things, we always go for walks there. And we have one particular bench where we've always sat down on our walk.

FP1: That's really good, I'm glad you remembered that.

MP2: Yeah, we sit there and we pray, we pray for our son, but we also talk to Sonja there, and talk to God about Sonja and talk to Him just about the things. What Sonja's doing now, trying to have some kind of an imagination of maybe what's happening in her life now.

FP2: Yeah, it feels like a pilgrimage, eh? Don't you think? [yeah] Yeah.

MP3: Yeah, so that's a yearly time at least, sometimes we go to [the town] more than once a year. (MP₁IJC & FP₁IJC)²

Tom and Carole elaborated on the context of the significance for their annual trips, noting that, (1) this specific location was meaningful because this is where they went for a month as a couple immediately after the death of their daughter (who was killed in a motor-

² The following abbreviations will be used throughout the rest of the chapter: MP = Male Partner; FP = Female Partner; IWU = Initial Warm-up Interviews; IJC = Initial Joint Conversation; ISC = Initial Self-Confrontation; MCI = Member Check Interview; FJC = Final Joint Conversation; FSC = Final Self-Confrontation; MPISC = Male Partner Initial Self-confrontation; MPFSC = Male Partner Final Self-confrontation; MPcall = Male Partner Call Log; MPJournal = Male Partner Journal Self-report; FPcall = Female Partner call log; FPJournal = Female Partner Journal Self-report

vehicle accident in Europe), and (2) because they used to take family vacations in this location with both of their children. Carole spoke about the meaningfulness of the location in the Initial Self-Confrontation Interview (ISC), noting in particular that she connected the location to their ongoing healing and grieving for their daughter. She elaborated in the ISC:

FP2: Yeah...so in particular what he brought up was so...it's a lovely memory because we used to go up to [the town] with the kids too, but I think...and there are lots of memories connected to [the town]. And things like...you know, when we'd eat, we'd all go to the [restaurant]. You know, places that Sonja discovered that she took us to. But in particular I think because it just feels like a healthy healing place to both of us. And as part of our early journey in grief it feels...I was glad Tom remembered it because I don't think I would have thought of that as grieving together, but it is. And...we definitely...when he was talking, I can picture the walking up that hill to get to the bench and kind of the anticipation every year that you feel as you get closer. Thinking, oh good, that's familiar and this is what we do and, and then thinking of the many times we've sat on that bench, and...it was good. (FP₁ISC)

Carole also elaborated on the ways in which they, as a couple, found rituals to be helpful in their joint grieving process. In the Initial Joint Conversation (IJC) she remembered a grieving ritual that took place where Tom would find flowers and would then bring them back to the couple's condo. These flowers – in particular daisies – were especially meaningful because Carole and Sonja had chosen to get matching daisy tattoos. Carole remembered the ways in which they as a couple had created a ritual of picking flowers and putting them out as a way of grieving for their daughter. She reported in the IJC:

FP14: ...And I remember that daisies became really important, because that was her tattoo. And so we'd often pick daisies and put them out. And the other thing, I think when we go up to [the town] and you get me a flower every day. Somehow, in some way, like cause you went on your walk and you'd find one and pick one and bring it back to the condo. In some way that was an observance of Sonja - don't you think? [uhumm, yeah]. Although I'm not sure we really talked about that [yeah]. (FP₁IJC)

The couple also elaborated on various individual and joint grieving actions which took place more regularly and which were closer to their home. Tom noted that these proximal rituals were particularly important to them because their daughter's death in Europe

prevented them from visiting the site of her death on a regular basis. The couple recalled numerous joint grieving rituals, including hiking a local hill, visiting their daughter's grave site, observing anniversary dates together, or jointly watching the video of their daughter's funeral. Tom commented on the importance of having local and easily accessible locations for their joint and individual grieving, noting in the ISC:

MP5: [Name of a hill] was such a part of Sonja and my life especially. We had talked about that event and burying the ashes...but then just as we talked more, realizing for Carole's mom, she could probably never go up there. And for us when we got older we could never go up there so...We have adopted a bench in [a town] and a bench in [a local park]...And of course with her being killed on the other side of the world there isn't that location for us. So I guess that's maybe why we picked something here...a memory of life. (MP₁ISC)

While grieving rituals were clearly important to both partners, the interviews, telephone conversations and individual journaling also revealed that their joint grieving most frequently took place in everyday and frequently unexpected ways. Carole first raised this perception in the IJC, noting that there is a 'mundane' pattern to their grieving, and that the ways in which they remember their daughter were not just tied to significant, annual pilgrimages. She noted in the IJC:

FP7: Yeah, I think our grieving is more, well, not like this of course, when you're in a structured room and people looking at videotapes and things. Obviously, but we do talk quite a bit and I think we have remembrances throughout our day. Like Sonja's name may come up once or twice in conversation with each other. We'll - like the other night, I can't even remember what it was when we were sitting on the couch and you said something. Oh, I reminded you about the time when there was a spider going across the floor and you threw a cup over top or killed it or so you thought and Sonja was terrified of spiders. And when you lifted it up it was alive and she flew up to the top of the couch screaming, right? And I don't know what brought that up - you threw a book on top of something crawling across the floor or something [a bee] - a bee, yeah. And that brought it up. And I think, it's just she's so much apart of our everyday lives, that it's not like, it's not like you set aside necessarily special - you do that, too - but it's more like everyday we'll find something to talk about her. (FP₁IJC)

While the grieving rituals were important for their joint grieving project, Carole in particular found that her life was inextricably linked to her individual and joint grieving. In this regard, she noted that speaking about grieving as a separate ‘project’ did not feel normal to her. Rather, Carole noted in her journal that grieving “becomes a filter through which you experience the world”. Individual and joint grieving actions emerged spontaneously and unexpectedly in everyday life, and this was not something that could be planned. Tom agreed with Carole in this regard, describing how their grieving was frequently triggered through unexpected and surprising encounters with people or events that reminded them of their daughter. He stated in the ISC:

MP19: I think we're just thinking about some of those reminders. Just like often you're at the mall or somewhere and you'll see a girl up in front of you and it just is Sonja, eh? That same hair, same shape and...so you just get those reminders lots of times. If you didn't know that she'd died, because even then you're almost, wow, that could be her. (MP₁ISC)

Throughout the various interviews, both partners indicated that their individual and joint grieving actions were not limited to their relationship but frequently included encounters with others who would remember their daughter. They attributed this public grieving to their activities as pastors and, in the case of Carole, as a municipal politician. Both partners noted that they felt a deep appreciation when people would talk about the way in which their daughter’s life had impacted them. Tom addressed this in the following way in the ISC:

MP68:...Carole just ran into someone again who is going to [a church] now and it was Sonja’s testimony at [her workplace] that had started her on that path and now she's serving God. And so you kind of...love those times. You know, but we got lots of letters and stuff too of people who felt at that point anyway, there lives were really changed from Sonja's testimony and from what happened and you kind of hang on to those kind of things. Her life was a value in that way, too. (MP₁ISC)

Both partners also perceived their joint grieving to be impacted by their strong relationship with their daughter and the ways in which their values and faith were aligned. The couple spoke about their daughter's legacy, remembering her impact on her peers and her mission trips. Carole commented that this knowledge about their daughter's legacy not only has personal implications for her (i.e., evoking feelings of pride), but also deeper personal and spiritual implications as she was able to witness her daughter's actions as consistent with her Christian faith and this in return providing her reassurance about the her daughter's ongoing life in heaven. She said in the FJC:

FP11:...Just remembering her spirituality and the kind of, the things that she taught us along the way. That was cool. Thinking about the legacy that she left behind when she put her tips from [restaurant] towards the poor. I think about her in Africa, doing missions work with [a Christian mission]. Like all of that stuff...well, I know you don't get points when you get to heaven, but it sure makes you feel secure as moms and dads that she was on the right path, that she was doing the right thing. And...so that's a very big part, too. It wasn't just our spirituality that was part of this. It was her spirituality, too. I think it would have been dreadful if she had not followed our faith. That would have been difficult for us, I think. Well, I know it would have been. Not, I think. I know it would have been. (FP₁FSC)

Tom added his agreement and extension in the FSC, noting in particular his perception of their positive relationship with their daughter and of the importance of his spirituality for him in his grieving. He stated in the FSC:

MP35: Yeah, I think just the legacy that Sonja had. She was very...our thoughts are just good thoughts about her. She definitely was a good kid and did good things and it's nice having those memories. Cause I think for lots of parents there was years of hurts and lots of negatives that happened, where we don't have that at all. And the other one was just again that hope of our spirituality, that, as I said, I don't know how parents handle it without that. I think that would be devastating to be, to think that there wasn't that hope. You just love your kid so much, eh? To think that it's just over. (MP₁FSC)

Throughout their involvement in the research project, the couple repeatedly commented on the importance of their faith for them and on the ways in which this faith

shaped their joint grieving project. Both Carole and Tom commented in various interviews, telephone calls and journal entries that they frequently sought and found comfort through their faith. Tom spoke about the way in which their joint grieving actions included imagining their daughter's ongoing life in heaven. Reflecting on their joint grieving project stated in the FJC, he stated:

MP10: The spirituality part for me, it was again just huge. Cause, it's grieving with hope and I can't imagine, and I can't imagine grieving where there is no hope that you're not gonna see your child again or your child you believe is going to be in hell. To be able to grieve, knowing she's in heaven, and knowing one day we're gonna be in heaven. It makes it a little easier. (MP₁FJC)

Both partners also spoke of the way in which understood God as taking over their parental desire and duty to protect their daughter. Tom spoke about this poignantly in the ISC, reflecting on the ways in which their faith comforted them and offered them the security of knowing that their daughter could not be harmed anymore. He stated in the ISC:

MP13: Yeah, it's definitely comfort for me. 'Cause I think part of your father's heart is that you want to protect you little girl. And to know that she's in a place where she can't be hurt, she can't experience pain. To me the loss is there, but that gives me huge comfort to know that she can't be raped, she can't be....have an abusive experience and...the loss is huge but to know that it's so good for her and that one day we'll join her. (MP₁ISC)

Throughout the study, both partners also acknowledged various contextual factors that contributed significantly to their joint grieving project. These factors included the current social and spiritual contexts for the couple, as well as their spiritual histories, both of which continued to shape their joint grieving. Carole's first quote, from the ISC, addresses the social and spiritual context of their grieving, while her second quote, from the FSC, speaks to their shared spiritual history of being raised in a conservative, Evangelical church community. The couple noted that both current and past faith communities shaped their joint grieving project in significant ways.

FP16: ...and the other part to that is that what I have discovered, being a pastor is that often times people are...people have some pretty defined opinions about whether you should go to a grave or not go to a grave and all those kind of things. And I remember when my...our fellow pastor committed suicide two years before Sonja died, and I remember being at his grave, and someone had written: Why seek ye the living amongst the dead? Which was of course a question that was in the Bible about Jesus resurrection and someone else said at that point and I remember with [our fellow pastor], I don't know why you go to his grave so much? Why do you, because he's not really there. And I remember saying back to them, but the part that I hugged is...you know, that shell, whatever you call it, the part that smelt so good at one time and felt so good, is there. And that's why I like to go there. So I think kind of in faith circles maybe death isn't talked about as much as it should be or could be. (FP₁ISC)

FP25: Well, I think I'm wanting to talk about in this part, wanting to talk about spirituality and what kind of, what is a foundation of, that brought us to that day and a, and a profound gratefulness for our relationship but also deeper than that...a thankfulness for the people that gave us our foundation. You know, because our early church experience was quite legalistic and I know we've kind of talked about that but one of the good things that that did was it taught us how to respect people and how to make a marriage work. Where I watched lots of my friends that don't have that spiritual foundation so it wasn't just a, and I think I say this, it's not just that our spirituality helped us in our grief. It kind of gave us a foundation as a couple to be able to do that...Because the early part of my faith, when it's grounded in legalism, it's really difficult to give thanks for any part of that, you know. But realizing that there, there were some things that were very helpful in that...it's maybe like wading through a pile of shit and finding a diamond, maybe. (FP₁FSC)

One of the important joint processes that emerged for this couple in their grieving project was the fact that each of them grieved in their own way and still they experienced their grieving as joint action. The ability to find a togetherness in their separate ways of grieving was clearly evident in all interviews. Examples of this include Tom talking non-defensively about the way in which his son and his partner were able to share their grief and the way in which Carole appreciated the Tom's "sameness", "stability", "groundedness" in his grieving. Tom, in turn, spoke about the way in which the Carole's frequent grieving actions would draw him into joint grieving with her, and how he perceived this as being "good" for him. The diversity in their joint grieving processes seemed to emerge on two separate, but related dimensions – emotional expression and perceived jointness in grieving.

The contrast between the Tom and Carole's grieving styles was addressed by both partners throughout the interviews, telephone conversations and journaling. In fact, during the pre-interview screening conversations both partners wondered about their appropriateness for this study because they perceived their approaches to grieving as so divergent in terms of their emotional expression. These joint reflections on their differences seemed to be a regular part of the couple's way of understanding their grieving and their conversations about this difference seemed to serve the purpose of helping the couple reflect on and appreciate the differences in their grieving. On the whole, Tom characterized his grieving as not as connected to emotional pain, focusing mostly on the 'positive' aspects of their grief, as a way of comforting both himself and his partner. He explained in the ISC:

MP26: Yeah, because I think I would...I would sooner just move on because I don't like sad things so much. Like for me, or for Carole even, she loves movies and loves a tear-jerking movie. Where I only like happy movies. I kind of don't like to go to scary places, sad places. I just like to be happy so...again totally different personalities and...to see Carole there so long and so much and ya. I'm just realizing that everyone's different, eh? It takes way more time to deal and...not that you're ever done dealing with it. You are always dealing with it. But it's over 6 years. It's gotten easier for her, but still. It's still much harder for her than it is for me at this point. (MP₁ISC)

Carole, by contrast, described herself as a deeply emotional person, whose grieving often involved expressing these emotions through tears. This kind of emotional expression also took place during various interviews, and while Carole reported feeling comfortable in expressing her emotions in this way, Tom admitted some ambivalence about his partner's frequent and open expression of emotion. On the one hand he noted that he felt somewhat uncomfortable with his partner's expression of emotion as this was foreign to his own experience. On the other hand, however, Tom frequently noted his desire to remain connected to his partner during these emotional expressions of grief. He elaborated on this in the ISC:

MP23: I think because Carole is getting quite choked at that point, thinking of David and not having either kid here. I think...that's probably one of the harder things for me as a husband. I've got this feeling like I need to fix something. You can't fix anything. And just... over the years just wondering...how can I be a better husband. (MP₁ISC)

The recognition of their diverse ways of grieving is echoed also in the Carole's perception about their grieving. She commented at various points in the research process on their different ways of grieving, but likewise expressed a deep desire to remain connected to her partner in these times. The following statement from the ISC expressed Carole's gratitude for the difference in their grieving and acknowledged the ways in which Tom's emotional stability and unwavering faith positively impacted her own grieving:

FP32: This is really Tom. When you see this it'll look like he's preaching, but he's not. This is all the stuff he says to himself. He finds most of his comfort is in Scripture and in thinking of the afterlife. His faith is so profound, so deep, that he never even has a question of...what will happen in the afterlife... Yeah, but he's so grounded and so...his faith is so deep and so real...[And] it feels familiar. When he talks, when he does this it just feels familiar. Just sameness. Sameness, stability. It just, you know, that's one of the things I love the most about Tom is just how stable and level-headed and down to earth he is. I love it that he's not emotionally fragile. I really like that. There's a strength in that. (FP₁ISC)

Throughout various points in the research process, Carole elaborated on the way in which she experienced both the intense pain of the loss of her daughter, as well as the comfort that came from her faith. She elaborated most freely and poetically on this pain in her journaling:

It's deep, it's dark and it's ugly. Sorrow is an emotion that I'd rather live without but it seems that for these last few days memories of my daughter refuse to be locked away. It started with a simple task. I was cleaning out the nightstand by my bed. In it was a book that I had not picked up for years. As I thumbed through it a card fell out - a card from Sonja. In it she had penned "I love you so, so much and I'm thankful that God has blessed me with the bestest mom in the whole world. I can't imagine how the world would survive without you. You've blessed a lot of people but especially me." As I read these words tears poured down my face. The loss hit me once again with such force that it took my breath away. It's amazing but the intensity is sometimes so great that my chest actually aches. I wish this could all be wrapped up in a tidy package, but after six years that hardly seems likely. (FP₁Journal₃)

A second divergence in the couple's grieving project was related to the frequency of grieving reported by both participants and the perception of joint grieving. Carole reported frequent individual grieving— listening to music, going to the cemetery, lighting candles around the house, watching the funeral video or journaling – and indicated that she understood their grieving to be mostly separate, as these were most frequently enacted individually. Tom, however, understood their grieving to be mostly joint, as he tended to grieve most frequently with his partner. In the ISC, Tom described how Carole frequently drew him into grieving actions. He reported that he experienced this drawing-in as a process that might not be 'natural' for him but one that he is grateful for. He commented on his partner's perception that their grieving happens "mostly apart" in the ISC:

MP66: Where she said "mostly apart" - it's probably true that we do...talk little bits here and there, but...she would grieve so much more than I would, [so] that for her it would probably seem mostly apart. Where for me it might feel like it's mostly together because I just don't do it much. But for her...anytime she's alone, driving alone, just listening to music and...it's all a part of her grief. (MP₁ISC).

In spite of this divergence in the frequency of individual grieving, Tom and Carole's joint grieving and ongoing relationship did not seem to be adversely affected by their individual styles. Tom commented on the interviewer's perception that he did not seem to be withdrawing emotionally from Carole while she was crying in the IJC. He stated in the ISC:

MP59: No, I would want to be there for her and walk through things together in whatever way we can. And I think it's probably good for me that she kind of pulls me along into some of those things because I'm not sure if I'm just avoiding things because I don't like pain. So it's probably good that I go to those things with her. (MP₁ISC).

Carole, too, expressed her gratitude and delight in their diverse ways of grieving at numerous points in the research process. For example, in the MCI, she responded to a description of their joint grieving project, in which the interviews had described their joint

grieving as including an appreciation for the other partner's grieving style. Carole insisted that they not only "appreciated" each other's grieving styles but in fact "delighted in" each partner's unique way of grieving. Both partners saw this as a key to ongoing emotional in their relationship post-loss.

Change in the joint grieving project. As the couple's grieving project unfolded over the course of their research participation, two related changes became evident. These changes emerged initially in the phone conversations, journals and were confirmed in the final set of interviews. Both partners agreed that Tom gained new awareness about his own grieving-related thoughts and emotions, and Carole suggested that this in turn led to additional individual and joint grieving actions. The changes in awareness and action were enacted when, to the surprise of the couple, a friend gifted them a portrait painting of their daughter.

Both Tom and Carole noticed that Tom participated very diligently in this study and that this resulted in an increased awareness of his internal processes and an increase of individual and joint grieving actions. For example, in her second phone call, Carole reported that it has been a "gift" to her to be able to see Tom participate so diligently in the study and she has been delighted for Tom to share his experiences with her. She noted that it has been "just really lovely" and that she did not know what was "down there". She indicated that it had "been cool to watch" Tom participate in the study and that she in turn has gained more awareness about his experiences. She also noted that she felt privileged to be able to be an observer of his grieving, such as the time that he went to Sonja's grave by himself and talked about it with Carole. (FP₁Call₂).

Tom confirmed these changes in his phone calls and journal entries. For example, in his second phone call, he reported that this study has caused him to become increasingly

aware of his own interior life. He noted that this came about mostly as a result of the journaling that he had been doing. As a result of this increasing attention paid to his thoughts and emotions, Tom reported that he realized that he was indeed grieving more by himself than he had realized. Previously, he had stated that he did not believe that he grieved a lot on his own, but these exercises reportedly allowed him to come to the awareness that he was indeed grieving more than he had previously assumed. (MP₁Call₂).

In the FJC, both partners then also talked about the way in which they had seen Tom's grieving change over the course of the research project. Tom expressed his realization that, contrary to his previous assertion, he did grieve on his own. He stated in the FJC:

MP1: Yeah, I think for me looking back over the 8 weeks it was probably, well maybe a little different than what I expected. Just cause I thought probably more of my grieving...I probably didn't think that I grieved much and more of it was when you would talk to me about something and I would get in a conversation that way. And I think we probably didn't do that much of that over this stretch. (MP₁FJC)

Carole expressed her support of her partner's realization and offered additional contextual information when spoke about her understanding of Tom's changes in the FSC:

FP1: Well I guess in our, in our marriage I've always wondered why, like Tom is, seems to get things, through things fairly unscathed. He's lost both of his parents. His mom when we were newly married and, and so if I would ever ask about him missing her, his answer was always "I don't really think very much about it." So for me this was kind of eye opening to think well maybe he does, he's just not so aware. And I think the other side of that is that maybe naturally he doesn't. But the work that he's been doing in this has kind of forced him to the place and, and I think that was really good for him. I think he, I think he really actually enjoyed doing it. (FP₁FSC)

Carole also challenged and Tom's new awareness by suggesting that his participation in the research project had not only expanded his awareness but had also led directly to new individual and joint grieving actions. She explained in the FSC:

FP20: Well, Tom's a high achiever and I know that part of what he's doing here wasn't for him. It was for you guys. It was to make sure that there was some journaling and some things that...so you know, he never would have done those

things had it not been for the work that needed to be done. So I'm kind of, you know, I'm happy for the fact that we got to do this and I guess, I'm always really proud of him. I'm proud that he wants to do things right, that he doesn't slough things off ever, that he's, yeah. So he was more aware, honestly, he's more aware of it for the project than for his own kind of grief. (FP₁FSC).

In the FJC, the couple commented on a novel joint grieving action towards the end of their conversation, in which both partners had noticed a rabbit had “snuggled” up to a statue in their garden that had been given to them in memory of Sonja. Both partners noted that they believed they were able to experience this because of Tom’s increased awareness of his grieving experiences. Carole commented in the FJC, noting also the fact that their motivation to participate in this study has switched from being focused externally (helping with a research cause) to an internal reward (participating in the study to receive something themselves):

FP16: Yeah, it just kind of was touching, but we never would have even talked about that, or you probably wouldn't have even been aware that you were thinking when you were looking out there. Or you might not even have thought it. But because of this work and this aspect of our grief, it was kinda cool, eh? Yeah, so I guess really...while this might have been for Derrick and Carey, it really was a gift to us. (FP₁FJC).

One of the most significant joint grieving actions for the couple took place during the monitoring period, a few days prior to the final interviews. Both partners commented extensively on this event – in their individual journals, telephone calls and in the FJC and FSCs. Tom and Carole indicated that a professional painter in their church had painted a picture of Sonja and had given this picture to them as a gift. Tom described the picture as the artist’s portrayal of Sonja on the banks of the Jordan River. Tom understood this event as “being ordained by God” and indicated that it was deeply moving experience and a real surprise. He indicated also that he had talked to Carole about this painting and that they had decided to hang it up in their bedroom (MP₁Call₂). Tom also recalled this event in his

journaling, “we were really touched that he had taken the time to do such an amazing portrait for us”. He stated further in his journal that the painting “helped me in the grieving project because it is such a visual reminder of Sonja smiling and waiting for us on the other side. Once we join her, we will have all of eternity together. It was also a reminder that God directs other Christians to be a part of our healing process. It was amazing to us that he brought the painting over right at the end of our grieving project. It just seemed to be so set up by God” (MP₁Journal₄).

Carole, too, commented on the receipt of this gift in the phone call and in her journaling. In the phone call, she explained that the timing of the picture was “remarkable” as they had received this picture in the midst of their anonymous participation in a research study on parental grief. She indicated that she thought it was “so cool that God connects you to other people”, noting in particular that the painter of the picture had not known Sonja. She said further that she was amazed about the timing of when the picture was delivered because it was delivered on the day after they had finished their journaling for this research project. Carole understood this as a divine intervention, noting that after they had finished the reflective part of the project that the “Holy Spirit puts nudges in his [artist’s] heart”. She noted that she felt that “the Holy Spirit is so sweet” and that she sees this picture as a gift from God who is “intimately aware of your emotional needs”. Carole noted that this experience had reinforced her understanding of God/Holy Spirit of caring about her emotional needs. Carole indicated that she had enjoyed watching the reaction of other people to seeing the picture. She noted that she loved watching Tom get “choked up” and that her mother had seen the picture, stepped back, and kept saying “oohhh”. (FP₁Call₂).

In her journal, Carole commented further on this momentous event for them in their grieving journey. She stated:

I came home from a meeting this evening and was greeted by Tom who carried a rather large, flat box. He told me that one of our friends from the church had dropped by with this box and told him to wait 'til I got home to open it so that we could do it together. I felt extremely nervous. I had suspected for sometime that this friend, who is a well-known artist, might be painting a picture of Sonja for us. I tried to brace myself for what it might look like. I am not the least bit artistic, however, I suspect it must be difficult to capture someone on canvas that you've never met. Tom gently cut open the box and lifted back the lid to reveal our girl. Our beautiful girl. Her eyes shine, her smile is broad and she is dressed in a simple white robe. And it is her. How did he do it? We both cried – I couldn't stop. Such love. The hours that he must have spent pouring over pictures posted on the internet. I cried a lot tonight and I feel touched by something so beautiful. It makes me think about Sonja in heaven, and it makes me wonder if that's what she'll look like when we get to see her again. Somehow [the artist] seems to have added a bit of maturity to her face – and a peace. How did God ever plan something so wonderful for Tom and me? This painting is priceless. What I will treasure about this is the moment that Tom stood behind me after he opened the picture. His eyes were full of tears and we both struggled for composure. I felt strength as I realized that not only were Tom and I in this together, but people who are on the periphery of our pain are still, after six long years, trying to comfort us. What an evening, and what a beautiful ending to this time of recollection and journaling. God has been kind. (FP₁Journal₄)

Project summary. From an action theoretical perspective, this joint grieving project emerged within the pre-existing faith and relationship careers for both partners. The grieving project included multiple related goals and intentions, which at times emerged explicitly in the grieving actions of the couple but at other times remained more implicit and unspoken. Both partners saw their grieving as related to their pre-loss personalities, social and spiritual contexts and as such the joint grieving project did not represent a radical departure from the couple's relational career or their individual personalities, but rather was embedded within it. Both partners – and in particular Carole – also viewed their joint grieving project as related to their ongoing relationship career with their son and his wife.

The intentional framework for this couple could be described as seeking comfort, hope and greater intimacy with each other and God through their joint grieving. Goals and intentions in the joint grieving project included fostering an ongoing connection to their daughter, living out their vibrant faith in an authentic and hopeful way, and deepening their appreciation for the other's uniqueness – which emerged in part in their joint grieving project – in their relationship. At times the grieving project seemed to dominate the focus of their relationship while at other times it seemed to be subsumed within the everyday activities of the couple. For Tom, the relationship between his faith career and grieving project seemed to focus on seeking personal and joint comfort and hope. His frequent remembering of the “positive” and imagining their eventual reunification as a family in heaven also seemed to serve this purpose. Carole, too, sought hope and comfort through her faith, but at times also acknowledged the pain of having lost her daughter and her longing for immediate reunification. In such moments, she experienced her faith and Tom's steadying personality as comforting and stabilizing her in her grieving. Both partners also acknowledged that their goal for participation in the research project focused on “helping” the researchers with their project and potentially assisting other bereaved parents. As the project moved on, both partners acknowledged that they developed more intrinsic reasons for participation as they found something of value for their joint grieving in the research project, which they understood as an unexpected “gift” to them.

Grieving strategies for this couple included both planned and unplanned actions. Planned strategies included grieving “pilgrimages”, engaging in grieving rituals at home (e.g., watching video of the funeral, going to the grave, commemorating important dates), and seeking to “appreciate” and “delight in” the unique personality of their partner and the

way in which this personality emerged in their joint grieving project. For Tom, this uniqueness was expressed in recalling positive memories of their daughter, remembering her life and its impact on others, imagining what she might be doing in heaven, and looking forward to being reunited with her in the afterlife. He also sought to offer solace and emotional support to his partner through reiterating beliefs about the veracity of their faith and the way in which he continues to hold onto it through their grieving. Carole's unique grieving was expressed in the way in which she simultaneously acknowledged her pain and sorrow over the loss of her daughter with an ongoing faith in her daughter's ongoing life in heaven, the hope of reunification with her in the afterlife, and the deep appreciation for the steadfastness of her partner's faith.

Manifest behaviours for both partners included describing themselves, their partner, as well as past and present situations related to their individual and joint grieving. Both partners also expressed a variety of emotions, including gratitude, sadness, joy, ambivalence and a sense of connection to the other. They also frequently expressed beliefs (often faith-related), opinions, new realizations, and asked and answered each other's questions. Both partners at times expressed agreement and disagreement with the other, described hypothetical situations (often related to the afterlife), and made numerous making humorous statements and laughed together. At times Carole also expressed her sadness and longing through crying, and at these times Tom would sit silently with her and seek to offer emotional support.

Assertions. The joint grieving project was embedded within the couple's ongoing relationship and faith careers. Both partners described their grieving as central to their lives, and noted that it affected all aspects of their lives, including their faith and relationships.

Joint grieving included both planned and spontaneous actions and was facilitated by their common faith and acceptance of their individual grieving styles. As the joint grieving project unfolded, Tom became increasingly aware of his individual grieving actions, which in turn informed and energized joint grieving.

Couple 2. Couple 2 consisted of a 68-year-old woman (Clara) and a 63-year-old man (Hank). Clara described her ethnic heritage as German and Scottish and Hank described his as German and Ukrainian. Both identified English as their primary language. Hank and Clara described themselves as mainline Protestant Christians who had practiced their faith for over 30 years. Clara was regularly involved with her church, where she taught in the Sunday school program. Hank had recently returned to graduate training in theology at a local seminary. He was frequently involved in his church and occasionally led worship services or delivered sermons in other congregations. Hank had previously worked as a high school principal for approximately 30 years. Clara was a retired English professor at a community college. She noted that she was involved in teaching creative writing workshops for bereaved parents and giving leadership to a local lay-support organization for bereaved parents.

The couple reported that they had 3 children, one of whom was deceased. Their biological child, Max, died at the age of 17, on December 12, 1997, from an accidental fall from the roof of a tennis facility. Their other two children – Susan and James – are biological siblings and were adopted by the couple as infants. They noted that both of their adopted children struggled with mental illness and substance abuse, and that this had an effect on their ongoing parenting activities as well as their individual and joint grieving projects. According to the couple, Susan lived with her biological daughter (Julie, 7 years old) and was expecting a second child. Hank and Clara had co-parented their granddaughter since

birth and that she typically spent weekends with them. They felt very close to Julie, but had distanced themselves emotionally from their adopted children. Finally, the couple reported one additional loss – their daughter who died 12 hours after her birth. This perinatal death reportedly took place in the 1980s while the couple was studying in the UK.

Joint grieving project. Following the first interview, the interviewers analyzed and described the couples' joint grieving project. The following description of this project was presented to the couple in the Member Check Interview (MCI) and the couple concurred with the description. During the telephone monitoring calls, both partners agreed again that the description of their joint project remained accurate for them as a couple. The joint grieving project for this couple was described as:

Striving/searching for an authentic and ongoing relationship God, each other, and their son through their individual and joint spiritual grieving practices.

This joint project focused on the efforts of both partners to engage in individual and joint grieving actions that would facilitate their ongoing sense of connection to their deceased son, Max. These grieving actions were situated within several other ongoing relationship careers – primarily with each other and with God. These primary relationship projects were complicated by a variety of other complex relationship careers in the couple's lives – with their adopted son, daughter and her daughter (their granddaughter). Both partners expressed their feelings of sadness and hopelessness about the lives of their adopted children, and the recurring crises in their lives were perceived as interfering with their joint grieving actions and their ongoing relationship with Max. For Clara, the crises were also seen as interfering with her relationship with God as they engendered “bitterness” in her. Hank, by contrast,

noted that his relationship with God was not affected in the same way, but generally voiced support for and understanding of the Clara's experience.

Over the course of the couple's research participation, some aspects of their grieving began to shift and this influenced the ways in which the couple grieved both individually and together. The most notable shift in the grieving project related to news that the couple received from both of their adopted children. They reported that their son James had confessed to them that he had started to use substances again. The couple also stated that their granddaughter Julie had reportedly accused one her mother's ex-boyfriends of sexual molestation and that they were in the middle of a criminal investigation into this matter as well as seeking to assist their granddaughter in coping with this trauma. Both partners reported that these events increasingly interfered with their ongoing grieving for and relationship with Max, and particularly Clara noted that she had become "bitter" with God for allowing these events to unfold. The couple also reported that they found that the participation in this research project increased the frequency of their joint grieving actions and thus resulted in a deepening understanding of their own and their partner's grieving process.

Detailed description of the joint grieving project. The following section represents a detailed description of the couple's joint grieving project. The joint project was constituted by numerous actions, including engaging in joint grieving rituals, and attempts by both partner's to draw the other into their individual grieving actions. The faith of both partners was central to their joint grieving project and also revealed the ways in which both partners engaged with each other and with God in their grieving.

One of the most meaningful joint grieving actions for Hank and Clara were their joint visits to ‘Max’s Post’, a wooden sign that they had placed in the location near the river where they had released his ashes. Although both partners had commented on this in the Initial Warm Up (IWU) phase of the first interview, they did not talk extensively about this joint grieving activity in the first set of interviews. However, during the monitoring period both partners spoke and/or journalled about their visit to the post for Mother’s Day. Clara recalled that they wanted to visit the post but also felt pressure to include this joint grieving action into a full schedule on Mother’s Day. She also recalled that she felt “bitter” about the way in which these other activities interfered with her grieving of her son. She described this joint grieving action in her second journal entry:

On mother’s day we drove the 45 min. drive on the [highway] to bring flowers to Max’s Post by the river. As usual, it was a squeeze, church in the morning, lunch with Julie, driving her home (she cried – she wanted to come to the post, too), then having to rush back to cook supper for [friends] (& Julie). Susan is 28 now – will it ever occur to her to cook Mother’s Day supper for me? (or on any other day?) Whoops, there’s that bitterness. I guess I’d rather spend all the time I want wondering the river from Max’s Post. There’s a beautiful stillness there – the sound of the rushing river only emphasizing the quiet. And bird song, though no eagles at this time of the year. I was delighted to find a bank full of forget-me-nots in this otherwise bleak setting. I planted a little bunch the first spring after Max died. They’re in the poem “The Post”. In the early years, my life was consumed by my grief. Now I have to squeeze it in. Hank played a favourite CD of Max’s (name? _____) there & back, & basically, we didn’t talk. Good. On driving trips elsewhere we discuss daily business or exchange recent happenings that occurred when the other wasn’t there. On this drive, we remain quiet, each absorbed in their own thoughts, knowing that they are about Max, or about the pain of his absence. I can add, “the pain of growing old without him”. Reading about myself as a 68-year-old female, I felt the weight of the years. Sometimes Hank has said, “who will look after us when we’re old?” We have no one. On our walk along the river bank we were spread out – Hank many paces ahead, throwing a ball for our dog. And I’m content to trail behind, observing the spring growth of leaves – it used to pain me so. Life reviving itself without Max. Now it’s more a melancholy I feel. (FP₂Journal₂)

A second important joint grieving action for both partners were their visits to the monthly support group meeting. In the first interview, Clara indicated that they used to make

these visits more regularly together. However, as of late, Clara stated that she has been involved in the support group organization, while Hank joined her in the group only on occasion. As a result of the IJC, the couple decided to attend the next support group meetings jointly. In her second journal entry, Clara made the following comments about this joint grieving activity:

On May 14, Hank kept his promise made at our bereavement interview and accompanied me to the [support group] meeting. It felt good to be driven there. When I drive myself, I feel lonely – it's up to me, I think, to assure that the meeting works - & to have something to say that night helps others who are new, or at least newer, on this journey. When it was my turn to talk, I explained how I couldn't attend last month's meeting because I was too full of grief. There's logic for you – can't go to a grief meeting because of grief. What happened was that I felt the full impact of our loss again because of our interview with Derrick. And a heavy, heavy tiredness. This journey has been so long & the loneliness is so hard to bear – the longing for my beloved son. I didn't want to show my failing or defeat with these I'm supposed to be helping. The more recent losses: the deaths of our lifelong friends [names] weigh heavily on my, too. When Hank shared he spoke of attending a Squamish Nations' grieving ceremony & lamented that in our society we didn't have the opportunity/invitation to grieve openly. They keen at these ceremonies. (I was remembering how Hank's sobs over Max in the coffin shook the funeral home). I had to flee, I couldn't take it – so maybe that's a strange sign of togetherness – seeing/hearing the pain in the partner, on top of one's own pain, is too hard to bear. The topic (at the meeting) of carrying the ashes of the dead child came up & I recalled in my mind how Hank offered Max's to me as we walked to the river to scatter them. At first I refused, then I did carry them, held close to my womb – my dead child, now the weight, about, of a newborn. On the way home, from the [support group] meeting, Hank said as he holds my tummy in bed, he remembers me holding the ashes. I never knew, he never told me. Again the catalyst of being at the sharing meeting with others opened a channel. (FP₂Journal₂)

Throughout the research process, it became evident Hank and Clara negotiated relational dimensions through their grieving. Both partners at times perceived their grieving to be “separate” – for Clara this happened when she attended support group meetings alone and for Hank when he would retreat to their cabin (“Max's Cabin”). However, both partners also were deeply interested in and engaged with their partner's individual grieving. Both of them regularly inquired about their partner's individual grieving actions and made attempts at

drawing the other into their grieving actions. The couple enacted such a joint grieving process during their IJC.

MP6: ...So, you know, that kind of, there is a common point where we grieve, when people like [a friend] comes to visit and we spend some time...

FP7: She phoned last night [MP: isn't that great?], and I said, I've been feeling depressed and Hank said that I should phone you, you should phone your friend [name], she'll cheer you up and she said, well, I would try. And then she started babbling away about this and that. She had a specific reason for phoning me, it was a [support group] contact [in an area] where there was a similarity, the boy was 17, he died in a fall, the mom's name is Clara, and it's only been a year, not quite a year, and so she wondered if I would phone her...

MP7: Well that was, yeah I think, so there are points even with your friend [name] when we had those discussions [yeah], around whether Jesus should be mentioned at all [FP: should be allowed...] within her earshot [laughter], when I think, those are points where we grieve...I mean, if we work at it, may be we don't spend a lot time commiserating, I think we're through the commiseration [uhumm] part of our grieving process with each other...And yet, I mean, here you are crying, I'm telling stories and you're weeping, so maybe we should spend, dedicate some time to that. You tell stories and I will weep.

At various points in the study Clara expressed her desire to increase the frequency of their joint grieving. During those times, Clara would challenge the jointness of their grieving. Hank responded numerous times to Clara's opinion about the separate nature of their grieving. One of the most elaborate responses was made in the MCI, where he spoke about the ways in which he joined in her grieving:

MP5: When we have dinner parties at our place, who cooks? etc. etc. The thing is...I find Clara's involvement in [the support group] and her ongoing preoccupation with grief - whether she's doing a workshop on writing or inviting people to our home - whatever it is - a part of our corporate life. And I share in that. I don't necessarily go through a grieving process or some kind of emotional evacuation of anything. I'm supportive of it and I feel it's worthwhile and I feel it's good for me too, you know. It's not something that I'm doing - I take Julie away so that she can so she can have some people come by to do some grief writing or something. But to me I see that as a kind joint project, not balanced in any stretch, but certainly I am part of it. (MP₂MCI)

Throughout their research involvement both the partners commented on how their joint grieving often involved actions aimed at encouraging the partner to join them in their grieving. For Clara, the typically involved asking the Hank to join her at support group meetings, while Hank would request that Clara join him at Max's Cabin. In the following quote, Hank responded to what he believed to be the motivation behind the Clara's comments in the IJC. In the ISC he expressed his belief that these statements were intended to persuade him to grieve more jointly with her. He stated in the ISC:

MP76: Well, I think it's that lingering resentment in a way that she grieves alone that goes back to that original opening where she said, I pray... You know, there's no compulsion element on my part that I should be in the same place that she is. I honour her and her grief, and I respect her, and I'm trying to find ways to demonstrate to her that I do connect with her grieving. And then I say the first thing that comes to me is grief... I mean what am I gonna pray for today? (MP₂ISC)

Hank went on further to comment on his understanding of Clara's intentions at this point in the conversation, as well as his response. He stated in the ISC:

MP81: I'm feeling, that she wants to disconnect in a way, it's a dynamic where you put the couple in the room and you make them wrestle, she pushes until you push the other away. In a way it's that kind of dynamic, she's pushing me away and I'm hanging on. Yeah, I don't want to be pushed away. But at the same time, I don't want to be in a way totally enmeshed or somehow become some kind of a blend of her, I still want to be myself. (MP₂ISC)

Clara confirmed in the IJC and the ISC that she was indeed feeling resentful and that her comments were motivated by her longing to feel more connected to Hank in their grieving. The first quote is from the IJC, where she expressed her longing for Hank to join her in attending a play on parental bereavement. The second quote addressed the Clara's internal processes about this statement.

FP8: For instance, I would have liked you to have said, yes, I'll come to the play with you, because the play on Thursday night is about bereavement after child loss. And I know you're too busy, so I'll go with Rita now [sigh]. But you did go to your book club, we did go to your hockey night, so I feel... (FP₂IJC)

FP49: Well it's resentment. Yeah. And since he just said, oh maybe we should do, take some time to grieve together. And I say, well you're not going to go to the play. (FP₂ISC)

While there was some disagreement about the frequency of individual versus joint grieving, both partners agreed that much of their grieving was undoubtedly shared. As their participation in the research unfolded, the couple identified various levels of joint grieving. During certain grieving actions, both Clara and Hank were engaged in the same grieving action and at times shared their thoughts and feelings about this action with each other or walked in joint silence. At other times, however, the couple grieved more relationally, that is, one partner engaged in a grieving action, which was witnessed by the other and in which there was an emotional connection for the partners. An example of this relational grieving emerged in the IJC. In the following quote, Hank commented on his thoughts and feelings as he recalled witnessing the Clara's nightly ritual of praying in their bedroom in front a picture of Max. He stated in the ISC:

MP1: Well - she's talking about her kneeling, I'm imagining our bedroom and where Max's picture is. There's always a candle in front of it, there's always a flower behind it in a vase, and it is...and Clara would kneel at that place every night for 12 years before she went to sleep... You know, in a way, as we age, one of the things we talk about is that we do grieve differently, every person does of course, and men and women definitively grieve differently. And in a way her preoccupation with grief has become her central..., and in a way she carries such a huge burden of it. It's like she kinda absolves me of the responsibility... And I'm watching her kneeling, right, and it's her intercessory prayer, in fact. I would be lying on the bed while I'm reading, I often read before I go to bed, and so I'm in bed, and she's kneeling at this kind of, sacred spot, it's just above where I keep my underpants in the drawer, right, it just happens to be on the top of this chest of drawers. (MP₂ISC)

Both Hank and Clara noted that various stressful events in their lives – such as the substance abuse/dependence of their adopted son, the ongoing interpersonal problems of their adopted daughter, the alleged sexual abuse of their granddaughter – interfered with their

individual and joint grieving actions. These complications were explored in the IJC, ISC, telephone calls, journal entries and most strongly in the FJC and FSC. In fact, one of the most significant ‘complications’ for this couple occurred in the midst of the research process and was, by and large, the central topic of conversation for the couple in the final interviews. The revelation of the sexual abuse of their granddaughter was such an impactful event that it arguably represented a significant shift in the grieving for this couple, a shift that further sidelined the couples’ ongoing joint grieving for Max and required most of their attentional and emotional capacities. However, even in the earlier parts of the couple’s grieving both partners acknowledged that the ongoing struggles of their adopted children complicated their grieving for Max. Clara’s following quote from the IJC is an example of the impact of such complications on their grieving.

FP1: ... You know the whole thing with James and our hopes for him and having our hopes dashed...and Susan having this baby which - I should love the birth of a baby - and I'm even bitter about that, but I think my bitterness, well those disappointing circumstances interfere with my simple love for Max [crying]. But you know, tomorrow night is [support group] and I'm not chairing, [name] is, so I could stay home, but I'll guess we'll go cause I feel that's kind of my duty to the newly bereaved. [sigh] [silence] And I know you shouldn't do volunteer things except for out of love, but I guess I'll go again...And the new pain with our friend [name] dying and my confusion over my role with Jordan [her daughter], where I've sorta become a substitute mom. If you've seen, I've put the picture out of Max and Jordan together, and Julie looked at it and said, who are these kids? [laughter - that's so good] And I said, that's Max and Jordan when they are four, they were younger than you are now, so in a way I feel like just [sigh] just stuck on the happiness of the past [crying]. And thank goodness for tennis, cause I was quite happy batting the ball today. [sigh] I feel worn out. [silence]. And listening to you now, talking about how wonderful he was, and you're talking with such enthusiasm, and it's just making sadder and sadder [crying more] cause he's not here. (FP₂IJC)

Throughout the research project, both partners repeatedly spoke about the importance of their faith for their grieving process. The first substantial discussion of the impact of their faith on their grieving occurred in the IJC. After listening to and honouring his partner’s

expressions of grief for several minutes, Hank then asked Clara to comment on her relationship to Jesus. Clara, laughing at this point, replied humorously and then added a more serious point about her longing for a simple and uncomplicated faith in the IJC:

FP2: Oh, Jesus [laughter], Jesus, morning Jesus, Jesus in the evening, Jesus at supper time...yeah, Jesus. I don't know, I'm fed up with that, too, about all that talk about, you know, was he miraculous or not, was he a result of Mary being raped by the soldier, I'm just tired of it [sigh]...I wish I knew Anne Lamott, cause I like her simple Christianity. (FP₂IJC)

Clara elaborated further on her desire for a 'simple faith' but also analyzed her faith as being 'distant' and removed. She stated in the ISC:

FP16: Do you hear my reference to Anne Lamott? Do you know her work? I feel very close to her and as late as she came to Christianity and as kooky as she is she could answer, oh I love Jesus. He's with me all the time. He helps me. And she turns to Jesus when she's in a tight spot and I guess I still don't have that faith, which is...quite incredible because I've been going to that church since Max was 6 and he should be 32...And I don't even question am I a hypocrite if I can't say, oh I know Jesus loves me to a friend but then I go on Sunday and tell the children that Jesus loves them. I don't think I'm being a hypocrite because I feel it. Maybe it's all my years of teaching literature, you know? 33 years of teaching literature that I'm always analyzing everything as if it's in a story and there's a certain distance for me. I stay out...I think that's a characteristic of myself is that I want to keep a distance and do analysis all the time. I'm analyzing myself. (FP₂ISC)

Clara noted frequently in the research process that she saw herself as the one who doubted and that she often relied on her husband's faith to sustain her in times of doubt. She acknowledged the relational nature of their faith in the ISC, as she commented on the Hank's faith, her doubts and how she saw these related to their joint grieving. She explained in the ISC:

FP24: I think in the dynamics of our relationship he's sort of the strong guy that knows...how to make decisions and stick with them. I'm always vacillating. And I don't think that's necessarily, it's not a male/female thing. It's just our characters...Well, I'm ambivalent because...in many ways I resent Hank's strength. And so a few minutes ago I just told you that it was reassuring to hear him doubting. And now I'm beginning to think, oh oh. He's doubting. (FP₂ISC)

Hank also spoke frequently about his faith and how he saw it related to his ongoing joint grieving project. He stated at various times that his daily activities as a student minister and theology student were intricately connected his ongoing grieving for his son. The following quote is one example of where Hank addresses his perceived relationship between his studies, his personal faith and his grieving project. He commented in the ISC:

MP56: ...I did a paper on Corinthians 15, which is entirely about the resurrection...My little peeve is with just the last four verses, but in order to get to the verses I had to look at the entire chapter, so it's a sustained argument for the resurrection. And one of the reason that I chose that passage is because I'm so preoccupied with the my son, with the resurrection in terms of my own life, my own grief life, the loss of my son, the loss of my daughter, that we had for less than 12 hours in [a city], and so the resurrection, of course, is absolutely central, it's a central piece to our Christian faith. Without a resurrection we are just a rotary club, right, and so, which is not a bad thing, but it's not a faith, you know, the resurrection as a central piece...And grief, last night I was writing, actually at 4:15 this morning I was writing a paper really on healing, wholeness, practices and traditions in grieving, and memorial stuff, you know, so I was actually reviewing Max's memorial, right at 4:30 this morning, his memorial service and how intentionally it was. And so it is very much part of my life at this point, it so happens coincidentally, that I'm talking about the fact that we had a casket actually at the funeral. And Max's funeral was an open casket, we had a viewing right before but then we actually had a casket there, and we had his friends carry the casket. There was a cortege of his friends and a procession, there was 6 kids carrying the casket and about 20 kids behind him, they were like honorary casket barriers, right? Placing the casket in front, and you could have wheeled it in, but they had to feel the weight of that body to say 'good-bye' to him. So all that, you know, has been on my mind right now. I'm very much tied, and it's also part of my faith, very much, I believe I was drawn to the place, I'm mean I'm in my spiritual autobiography. I mean death has been very central to me being drawn into my faith. Back to try and understand, not that primitive contingent faith that I was added to as a child, but a more mature and reflective and metaphoric kind of faith that I can accept as a foundational to my worldview. (MP₂ISC)

Part of Hank's ongoing faith development and grieving project included at times expressing his doubts about the veracity of his faith and his son's ongoing life after death. For example, he stated in the IJC that at times he doubted whether his faith in God and his son's ongoing life might not just be "a bunch of crap" (MP₂IJC). He elaborated on these

doubts in the ISC, noting an interesting parallel to Clara when he spoke about the impact of engaging with his faith on an academic level. He stated in the ISC:

MP59: I'm thinking that there's a real need to hold onto hope and to give meaning to those things that are incomprehensible. And then I'm talking about preparing prayers...and then at some point it becomes a kind of academic exercise, you know, it just becomes like it's a paper you have to write or an exercise you have to complete, you know, something like that. And then I do, and then you go, this is a load of crap...I just finished this paper on Psalm 126, the first two lines are when Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream. And it's like and the power there is to imagine salvation, these are post-exilic Jews living, returning to Jerusalem, thinking about what it was like in Babylon. And so you think that and they were like we were, those who were dreaming of restoration, and you can hear Martin Luther King going, I have a dream. So there was a power and so there are times when that happens and it's just like, you know you just want to get up and preach it, you be able tell somebody. And there are other times when you just go, what a bunch of shit this is, you know... (MP₂ISC)

The joint grieving project for the partners frequently included discussions about their experience of Max's ongoing presence in their lives and in the lives of others. These conversations seemed motivated by ongoing individual and joint efforts to live out their faith and relationship careers authentically. For both partners the presence of their son was intimately connected to their faith and their beliefs and doubts in the resurrection. This topic was most strongly addressed in the first set of interviews. Following his statement of wondering whether the resurrection could be true, Hank returned from the academic exercise of writing a paper, which elicited doubts about the ongoing life of his son, to his experience of the ongoing presence of his son. He stated in the IJC:

MP3:...But then there's stuff like, like I'm working on this paper right now, and as I'm writing this stuff down and thinking about, I mean how present he is, and how I don't think I could approach this stuff without having some sense of his presence, that he's still around, you know, he's with us. I have this little picture of him wearing your tea cosy hat in front of me on my desk, right, with him on one side and [a friend] on the other, and that to me that's his continued presence, I mean, in terms of my picture, cause that used to sit on my desk at [his former school], and all the tough kids...Like I remember when [student] came in and said, whose that? And I said that's my boy. He said, that's your boy, oh man, and [the student's] like a major criminal now, and

for him to have this sensitive, you know, it was that attachment, that immediate attachment. (MP₂IJC)

After listening to the Hank's experience of the ongoing presence of his son for him, Clara expressed her doubt about whether their son will remain present after their death. She stated in the IJC:

FP4: Isn't he around because we're still around thinking about him and feeling him? What about when we die? (FP₂IJC)

Hank reaffirmed his belief in the ongoing presence of his son and spoke about several incidents that were related to the ongoing memory of their son. He elaborated about how he continued to sense his son's presence and how he viewed Clara as struggling to do so at times in the ISC:

MP67: I'm [silence] in a way convinced that he is still with us and that in a very visible way...I feel like he's still with us...it's very reassuring for me. [But] with Clara's, the difference I mean with her, there's a sense that he's not there, that she has to continually hang on and reaffirm that he's there. And for me, he's there. You know, I don't have to worry about that, there's always evidence for that, like when I turn here, there's evidence that Max is there, I turn there, there's even to the point where people who never met him and know who he is, are building tributes to him, it's amazing. (MP₂ISC)

Change in the joint grieving project. Throughout the duration of the research interviews, several changes in the grieving actions of the couple were described by the couple in their telephone calls, journal entries and in the final interviews. The most significant occurrence, which took place between the second and third set of interviews, was the revelation of the identity of their granddaughter's abuser. Both Hank and Clara reported that this incident was yet another loss in their life – this time not the loss of a life but rather the loss of their granddaughter's sexual innocence. Furthermore they reported that they believed that this incident, as well as their daughter's poor parenting decisions, were already and would continue to impact Julie's mental health negatively. The couple reported that they

had previously assisted their daughter in her parenting duties, but also felt somewhat hopeless about whether they could have any significant impact on Julie.

The FJC began with Hank telling Clara about a joint grieving action with their granddaughter, Julie, after she had revealed the perpetrator of her sexual abuse to a counsellor at school. In the FSC, Hank elaborated further about his reasoning for sharing this story, noting that part of his reason for sharing it was because he had not spoken to Clara in person about it. Another part of the Hank's goal for sharing was to express his grief and sadness and disappointment over his two adopted children, who, in contrast to their deceased biological child Max, had chosen to live their lives according to vastly divergent values. He explained in the FSC:

MP1:... So, what I'm thinking...I'm just going to tell this story because I only told it to her once on the phone. I think we talked on the phone and what was happening at the same time, this is always complex. You know, one of our complexities, is that we adopted these children and these adopted children have now produced children. Well, at least Susan has...I got a phone call from Susan and she was completely distraught because Julie had disclosed to the counsellor that she had been sexually molested by a friend of Susan's, during a babysitting occasion... And so what I'm reading there...Susan, she was pregnant. She was 8 months pregnant at this point. And she's just completely...just in a state of dislocation. She's crying and she's chortling and I mean, it's like, she doesn't know what to do. So, I go pick Julie up from school and bring her home with me, right? And keep her so that she, you know, because she just doesn't know how to deal with this, right? So I went to school that afternoon, just on the Wednesday and picked her up. And then, I mean she has a room at our place. It's not unusual for her to stay there. So that's, that's a very routine part of her life. We've been basically co-parenting her since she was born, right?...And so there's this....so Clara has left for [retreat centre], I'm alone with Julie and....and before Clara left, Julie was very curious about Max and wanted Clara to read the Max book to her. And talk about Max. She's been asking Clara lots of questions about her own past and about the family's past, right? And so she knows that Grandma wrote a book [about Max]. (MP₂FSC)

Hank then went on to reflect on his motivation for sharing this information with the interviewer and talked about how he sees all of these tragic life events as connected to his ongoing grieving for Max. He stated further in the FSC:

MP8: I guess numb would be a good way to put it or...you know, this is an opportunity. I mean, here I am telling you, right? And you know, and for whatever reasons this is a part of, you're getting this information whether you want it or not (laughing). It's like...it's just life is complex...and sometimes I say to myself, like am I just...why am I doing this Greek thing? Right, it is so intense, so hard. And...I'm going, do I really want? But then on the other hand...it seems important to me, it seems important. So, and it's not that I'm trying to escape anything, like I'm not running away from James or Max or anything like that. I'm not running away from anything. I just...you know, it's just that's my life, that's how complicated it is. (MP₂FSC)

Hank explained that Julie had requested that he read her poems from Clara's book about their son. He stated that he had attempted to read to her from this book, but was soon unable to do so. He noted that he instead decided to read to Julie from the Bible. He described the situation in the following way in the FJC:

MP2:...And I couldn't read anymore. I didn't want to be...I mean she was already under stress because...it was all about this revelation of the...abuse and stuff, right? So (sigh) I stop reading and I said what would you like to read? She said I'd like to read a Bible story...So I went and got...the Eerdman's Illustrated Bible Dictionary. And then I started looking through it and I found the story... and so eventually we got to Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar and I started reading it but it was too complicated even for her...And so I told her the story of Daniel and his...how he wouldn't give up his faith. And...he wouldn't change his story because he told Nebuchadnezzar the truth about his dreams and the true interpretation. And Nebuchadnezzar...and so he sat...and the lions didn't eat him. And so...anyway...the point there was that I found myself...not being able to read a book without being captured by emotion. So...that's what my journal entry was about. And I think part of it was my...own thoughts and part of it was also my sorrow for Julie and kind of, the kind of death in a sense that she experienced right then, you know? And how...I just didn't want to add to it. I didn't want to add the death of her uncle, a child already with a heavy burden. You know, and then the Daniel story seemed to affect her that if you trust in God then even the lion's don't eat you. So I was trying to bolster her saying, you know, give her a sermonette. [both chuckle]. (MP₂FJC)

Hank elaborated further on his intention for telling this story, as it related not only to conveying information about their adopted daughter and granddaughter to Clara, but also to their roles in their ongoing grieving for their son, Max. He explained in the FSC:

MP12: ...As I'm talking to her, she's not saying anything, but I'm sensing that she's [Clara] cognizant of the fact that I've been moved by her poem and that she's...in

some way responding to me emotionally even though she isn't doing very much.
(MP₂FSC)

Hank commented further about his perceived impact on Clara in that moment in their joint conversation. He stated the following about his feelings over the Clara's reaction in the FSC:

MP13: Well, I'm feeling good about that. I'm feeling that she is a good woman...And she is the one who is the...articulator of our grief in a way. And I'm pleased about that because, you know, she's the chronicler and the voice through that [her book]. And in particular I know that poem so well because I...it was on...it's on his [Max's] program, on the funeral program. And I just used the funeral program in one of, in this paper I did for [the professor], when I was doing this stuff on culture and grief (mm). And so it's fresh, it's very fresh...So anyway, and I'm sure that's probably one of the reasons why I'm triggered. And I have not looked at this book. I cannot say that I've read the poem for maybe 5 years and I've actually held it in my hand. So... it's fresh and I'm sharing this with her even though I know she's heard the story before. You know, and she's very attentive. And so, that's how I'm feeling. (MP₂FSC)

A second significant stressor in the couple's life was their concern over their adopted son's history of substance abuse and his reported current substance abuse. The couple reported in their final interviews that they had received a phone call from James in which he had admitted that he was once again using drugs. The couple indicated that in the past they had assisted him financially but stated that at present they were unsure about which course of action to pursue. Clara addressed this topic in the FSC:

FP10: I think because we've just come from this...hurried lunch where I'm asking him questions about what James said. Because we haven't been in contact with him. He doesn't do any contacting with us and I'm trying to...visualize and be there in China with...no family, no job, no money, no passport, etc. It seems like a life thrown away. He wants us to send more money but when we send money it doesn't do anything.
(FP₂FSC)

All of these ongoing stressors in the life of this couple seemed to have a significant impact on their ability to attend to their grieving actions for their biological child, Max. Both partners spoke about this extensively in their phone calls and wrote about it in their journals.

For example, in her first journal entry, Clara recorded how she had heard about the reported abuse while giving a writing workshop at a retreat centre:

Travelling the Grief Road: alone and together (& faith?). Spent last week alone (well, that means without Hank) at [a retreat centre] on [a gulf island]. A writing workshop. I vowed (before I left) that I would not share my 15-year-old grief with strangers. So, guess what, at the first breakfast there, when asked if I had children, I told about my dead one. I also referred to grandchildren, 7-year-old Julie, as a source of joy...But by Wed night (I had arrived on Sun. night), I was missing Hank. I phone home to discover Julie there. Yet another crisis. Really, it's like another death: she has revealed who her molester is. Susan is freaking out. Grandpa is babysitting. I couldn't sleep that night, so left my beautiful restorative retreat and workshop 2 days early. When will this suffering be over? [a quote from an Ontario writer – writing from the point of a Cath. Priest in an impoverished and sickly northern town]. My faith here? Shit! I'm angry at God this time. Another destroyed child! "Damaged goods" as Hank's brother always says of James and Susan, our adopted children, when their behaviour again outrages us. Poor Julie. Now, as I write, she is not allowed to play with the other kids at lunch or recess. She has a child care worker all the time. This last action came after, on Friday [the day after I retired) she asked a grade one boy to come for a sleepover & she would put his penis in her mouth. 10 mothers have complained, acc. to Susan. So I'm supposed to be writing about my grief as a bereaved parent. Now I'm a bereaved grandparent. Self pity – there it is again! "God, don't let me be bitter!" was my prayer after Max died. Now it's "God help me in my bitterness". (FP₂Journal₁)

Hank, too, spoke about his ongoing feelings of sadness and disappointment with his adopted children and his reason for engaging in theological studies. He stated in the FSC:

MP75:... Well, I can use that analogy. You know, the fact that there's no harvest here. You know, if you think of children as the seeds which you continue to nurture. You know, cultivate. Eventually, you know overtaking the model that we live with. You know, it's sort of our biblical model is that...you sow and then as we age these trees, if you will, or these plants bear fruit, right? And they reward us with fruit, right? So, you have children who graduate from high school and they marry and they have other children and they accomplish things and so on. And you're living proof of that to your parents, right. You know? So there's this cycle of replenishment, right. Storehouses filled again. I mean you draw and sometimes you go through periods of drought and periods of need and somehow you know, it comes back. And you have...but it doesn't seem right now in our lives. It doesn't seem. It's not coming back...So I think you find ways. My theological study is one way of doing that, to say I'm really interested in...I'm curious about faith, I want to know more. And so I'm going in and I'm building in that area, right? Clara's got her [support group], she enjoys her tennis and so she's engaged in that and she's got her writing group. She's starting another writing

group. And so she's engaged in that. So she finds other ways to, to build some capacity where the natural cycles of capacity are not coming, right? (MP₂FSC)

A third notable change in the couple's grieving actions, which was expressed in telephone monitoring calls, journal entries and in the final interviews, was the perceived increase in joint grieving actions as well as a sense of connection between both partners. In her first phone call, Clara commented on her thoughts and feelings in this regard and stated that in the past she had sometimes resented the Hank's strength and independence, but that the participation in this research project has helped her to realize additional dimension of Hank's relationship with Max, which he had not previously "felt the need to voice" (FP₂Call₁). This increased sense of connection between both partners as a result of participating in the research project was also reiterated and enacted in the final interviews. In the FJC, Clara spoke about how she felt positive about participating in the research project and noted that it afforded them the opportunity to be more explicit about their joint grieving. She stated in the FJC:

FP10:...So...I think this whole process with Derrick's research...and I talked to Derrick about that on the phone, has been very good for you and I. So that we're talking to each other about our feelings instead of just buzzing around doing our own thing. (FP₂FJC)

As part of their joining with the other partner in grieving, Clara and Hank both shared their individual grieving actions with each other. After listening to Clara's account of listening to and sharing her friend's grief over her husband, Hank shared an emotionally and spiritually significant grieving experience that was for him related more directly to his grief over his deceased son Max. Hank elaborated further on the significance of this grieving experience at the cabin, connecting it again to his wife's writing about their grieving and to

Max's ongoing legacy and impact on people. He elaborated on the context for excitement over seeing the ospreys in the FSC:

MP33: Once again, it's about the book. This is, the book that Clara wrote [about Max]. It sits in our cabin. It sits in the window sill. It's there for people and Clara's written an inscription on it because...well there's quite a significant part of...this part. I mean the photographs in it are and drawings often. [The cabin] is really apart of our life, this place we have right. And Max loved it up there. He just loved it, he told us. And it was...and...he was a good artist...He used to keep a kind of a sketch book. And he drew this picture of this snag, this tall cedar snag. It's about 68 ft. high. And on the top of it was an osprey's nest. And he actually drew a picture of this osprey bringing this snake in its talons to the nest. Now osprey's are fish hawks, typically fish but in this case with a snake. And...so that is in the book...And so as we were getting in the boat, I saw a pair of ospreys out. And that's, you know, they're not as vigorous as eagles. They're rare...[and] so now 20 years later, suddenly, there's a pair of osprey. (MP₂FSC)

Hank then elaborated on his reason for sharing this story with Clara. He explained in the FSC:

MP37: As I'm talking to Clara, I think it's important for her to know, and I think it makes her feel good and it makes me feel good to know that she feels good. That her little book can evoke those responses from a young man. Possibly, although I'm not really checking him out. I didn't...ask him any questions. I'm just observing as he's reading the book. And he stayed with the book all night. And also, I...know that, as I'm telling her, it is making her feel good to hear that her book is still enhancing people. And that it makes me feel good to know that she feels good. And it makes me feel good to know that somebody can read about Max and feel good about that or be curious about that. So it's just a way of, of cementing all that. Or kind of...galvanizing that in a way that's affirming. That this isn't...you know, that there is something eternal about this. (MP₂FSC)

Clara listened with some interest to the Hank's story of his time at the cabin and the connections that he is making to their grief for their son Max. She explained the connection that she was envisioning as she was listening to Hank in the FSC:

FP29: ...So this is Hank introducing the young man...whose no less a stranger to us...to our innermost...loss. But it's...you know, but Hank being a principal of a high school all those years, that...he really relates well to younger people, in particular younger men. I was thinking oh, there's Hank longing for his lost son in a way, by befriending [the young man] and having a deeper relationship with [him]. (FP₂FSC)

Project Summary. From an action-theoretical perspective, the grieving project for this couple emerged within multiple ongoing careers and projects. The careers included relationships with each other, their two adopted children, and their granddaughter, as well as their longstanding commitments to their common Christian faith. The relationship careers with their adopted children and their grandchild were frequently foregrounded throughout the research project because of various crises, and this in turn was perceived by both partners as detracting from their ongoing joint grieving project for their biological son. Both partners also viewed their grieving project as intricately intertwined with their faith careers. As an academic, Clara's faith career frequently included questioning various aspects of the Christian faith, which seemed to parallel her wondering about the ongoing presence of her son. Hank's faith career likewise included moments of doubt about the veracity of the Christian faith, however, these doubts were balanced by his confidence in the experienced ongoing presence of his son. Hank's faith and grieving were also impacted his graduate theological training.

The intentional framework for this couple can be described as striving for lasting and authentic relationship with each other and God, while managing commitments to other relationship careers in their lives. Goals and intentions for the couple included deepening the intimacy in their relationship careers with each other, their deceased son and with God. At various points in the research project, both partners sought to draw the other partner into their grieving actions through implicit or explicit requests. At times, these grieving-related goals were temporarily backgrounded in order to attend to various crises in the lives of their adopted children and their grandchild. For both partners, these additional challenges further

highlighted the immensity of the loss of their son, a son who would have been “loyal” to their values and who would have “rewarded” their investment of time and love.

Grieving for this couple included both individual and joint actions. Joint grieving strategies included explicit joint grieving actions, such as visits to “Max’s Post”, attending the parental grieving support group and having conversations about both grieving actions. Additional strategies also included witnessing the partner’s grieving individual grieving actions, honouring him or her in these actions, and seeking to support the partner by inquiring about these grieving actions. For Clara, this included asking Hank to speak about his visits to the cabin and listening intently about the Hank’s spiritual experiences of sensing Max’s presence at the cabin. For Hank, this included witnessing the Clara’s nightly prayer ritual in front of Max’s picture, as well as assisting the Clara in leading the support group and inquiring about the support group activities.

Manifest behaviours for this couple included a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal communications. Non-verbal communication included listening, smiling, nodding head, crying, laughing, and sighing. Spoken communication included asking/answering questions, agreeing and disagreeing with the partner, describing self, other, past situations, expressing emotions, such as sadness, anger, bitterness, uncertainty, ambivalence, joy, disappointment, expressing beliefs, opinions, perceptions, judgments, and describing hypothetical situations.

Assertions. The joint grieving project of this couple was inextricably linked to multiple, complicated relationship careers, which either facilitated or hindered the grieving project. The grieving project was likewise related to the couple’s faith careers and paralleled each partner’s individual spiritual development. The grieving project began to shift over time

and seemed primarily affected by additional complications in the relationship careers with their adopted children and grandchild.

Couple 3. This couple consisted of a 70-year-old woman and a 67-year-old man. The female partner (Gwen) was born in New Zealand, of English descent, and her first language is English. She indicated that she has lived in Canada for 43 years and came to Canada to pursue her profession of nursing. She described herself as a Christian who has been practicing her faith for most of her life. The male partner (Lance) was born in Egypt, but noted that he spent most of his childhood in New Zealand. He indicated that after completing his university studies in New Zealand, he moved away to England. He has lived in Canada for 42 years and described his ethnic heritage as Scottish. He described himself as an Evangelical Christian who has been practicing his faith for 55 years.

Together, the couple had two children, one of whom was deceased. Their deceased child, Joel, died at the age of 21 on January 25, 1990, as a result of suicide. The other child, Richard, was married and living in the Lower Mainland in British Columbia. Both partners were retired from their respective professions – sales and nursing – and continued with various recreational activities in their lives.

Joint grieving project. Following the first interview, the interviewers analyzed and described the couple's joint grieving project. The following description of this project was presented to the couple in the Member Check Interview (MCI) and the couple concurred with the description. During the telephone monitoring phone calls, both partners agreed again that the description of their joint project was still accurate for them as a couple. The joint grieving project for this couple was described as:

Giving each other the freedom to express their individual grief freely, while finding joint comfort in the daily practice of their faith and in the spiritual experiences of ongoing connection with their son.

Following the advice of their grief counsellor, both partners allowed each other to express their own manner and timing. This grieving project was characterized by a variety of ongoing joint and individual grieving actions, which were shared within the context of the marital relationship. Both partners acknowledged that their joint grieving project served not only as an ongoing connection with their deceased son and with each other, but also focused on protecting the memory of their son. Their joint grieving was likewise focused on caring for their remaining son, who, following his brother's death, had struggled with depression and substance abuse problems. Additionally, their ongoing relationship career with their remaining son was presently in the process of shifting as a result of his recent marriage. Both partners also acknowledged that their joint grieving project and relational careers with each other and their remaining son were embedded within a larger individual and joint faith careers, careers which were sustained through regular individual and joint spiritual actions and, occasionally, through individual and joint mystical-spiritual experiences. Although the joint grieving project remained fairly stable over the course of the couple's research participation, both partners acknowledged minor emotional shifts and an unfolding change in their relationship career with their remaining son.

Detailed description of the joint grieving project. The following section represents a detailed description of the couple's joint grieving project. This project included remembering and protecting their deceased son, as well as caring for their other son. The joint grieving

project was intimately connected to their individual and joint faith careers and was invigorated by spiritual-mystical sense-of-presence experiences.

Throughout the research project, the couple commented that their individual and joint grieving was frequently focused on remembering their son and protecting his memory. For example, in the first set of interviews both partners talked about how their grieving for their son involved actively ensuring that his memory was not forgotten. Lance stated in the IJC:

MP4: So I think Derrick said, how are things not so much how have things changed, but how do we handle it today? What do we do today? We, I suppose, we try to talk about Joel as much as we can. We don't want ever for his name to be forgotten. We talk when we're together with family, we try to talk about him, remembering happy times. And how we...what we do is we pray. (MP₃IJC)

In the ISC, Lance elaborated on the internal process that accompanied his comment about remembering Joel, and wondered about whether they remembered him frequently enough:

He stated in the ISC:

MP19: You know, I think I'm going through wondering process of...do we talk about him enough? You see me sort of stumbling a bit. We try to talk about him here and there and other places. That's what I'm doing. Do we talk enough? Do we know sometimes how to talk about him? Because...sometimes people ask about your family. They would say how many children have you got, we always say we have two children, but we lost one. And that sometimes, people just shut down. They don't know what to say anymore. Other times, they want to talk with us, that's good. So...I'm wondering. I suppose I'm saying, are we doing enough? Are we doing enough talking? (MP₃ISC)

At various other points in the research process, both partners acknowledged their intentional efforts at ensuring that Joel's life was acknowledged. These efforts included explicit acknowledgement of their Joel's memory at special occasions, keeping in touch with Joel's friends even after 18 years, and through their daily spiritual practices of joint prayer. In the IJC, Gwen noted tearfully that she frequently prayed to God not only for her living son,

but also thanked Him for who Joel was. She elaborated on this way of constantly remembering her deceased son in the IJC:

FP4: When I pray on my own I find I frequently at the end of my prayer will thank the Lord not only for Richard but I thank the Lord for who Joel was [crying]. Those two wonderful boys. (FP₃IJC)

Lance commented on his understanding of Gwen's desire to continuously remember both of their sons in her prayers. He spoke about this as follows in the ISC, noting also the spiritual connection that he observed here because of his belief Joel's ongoing life in heaven:

MP21: Gwen is experiencing the pain of saying that she always, when she prays for Richard, she never wants to forget to thank God for Joel as well. A sense that I don't have one child, that I have two. And I'm recognizing that I think. I'm acknowledging his ongoing life as I talk about that we don't see Joel as, his life as ended in the grave and that's it. That's not the end. (MP₃ISC)

The couple acknowledged that throughout their joint grieving project they have sought to protect themselves and the memory of their son from hurtful comments. At various points in the research process the couple acknowledged that they remained very sensitive to how other people think of their son and to the opinions that these people have about them as parents. This was particularly salient for this couple as they were very conscious about their and other people's thoughts about suicide. Lance commented on his thoughts during the IJC, noting in particular their desire to protect their son from external judgment and their despair in realizing that this could not be done. He stated in the ISC:

MP9:... What was so painful in those early days. It was the...as you've heard me say, the mixture of embarrassment and sort of a shame that was unexplainable. We could look at each other and say we've been kind, caring parents. And I think we still believe we gave both our boys a very loving upbringing. But the sense that other people would judge us differently. But then...not just us and you see I shifted my focus to, away from us, to the fact that we wanted to protect Joel. We were so proud of that boy. And we hadn't mentioned, he was...also an excellent pianist. He'd reached...I forget the grades now. The Royal Conservatory. His next exam would have been the licentiate. So he was up to the top...He'd passed the grade 12...so you know, there were all these things that we were so proud of. And he was a handsome

guy. I mean, you know, every parent's dream of a young man. And...I wanted to protect him. We wanted people to still think highly of him. That's what I'm...that's how I'm feeling again there. What am I feeling? It's that feeling of...despair as to how do we deal with this situation. (MP₃ISC)

Gwen, too, spoke about her ongoing desire to protect the memory of their son. She elaborated in the ISC on her spiritual beliefs and the theological implications of suicide in her faith. She spoke initially about the spiritual implications as well as her concerns about how Joel would be remembered. She stated in the ISC:

FP10: I think it was wanting somebody to understand that feeling of first of all I felt guilty. For feeling in a way, about how Joel's death occurred. I felt that Joel would be ashamed of me for feeling like this. But it was so overpowering and we had to work through it. We knew that taking your life, somebody taking their own life was a sin. I mean I know what it is in the Catholic church. It's...the sin unto death. And with Catholic friends, I didn't even want to go near it. You know I...and some of our very close friends in the church that we went to in New Zealand, not the same church, Lance and I lived in different cities, but...when I those very close to us. I told them what had happened, I actually got no response. They didn't say a word. They just thanked me for the letter, hoped that we were, each day was getting better and the general feeling...and even my own auntie who...was you know, we went to church, she was a non-believer, she wasn't afraid to tell us that. She just ignored it. And that pain just compounded. (FP₃ISC)

In addition to their care for their deceased son, the grieving project for both partners also involved caring for their remaining son, Richard. This care emerged in several ways – in part in the way in which they recalled their attempts to assist him in his grief for his brother, but also in the way in which both partners sought to protect him presently. They also elaborated jointly – and in the individual ISCs – on how they had initially sought to protect Richard from the difficult emotions associated with grieving through hiding their grief from him. In the following passage Lance and Gwen remembered how they balanced their own emotional well-being with the care and protection of Richard. Lance recalled Richard's reaction to the death of his brother in the IJC:

MP3: Hiding and part of denying it, the part of, what's the right word, it's burying it. We didn't want to bury the grief, we knew we had to work through it, Richard did.

And what has changed in Richard, obviously, is that he got to point of his life where in effect he got to hit rock bottom. And when under treatment he began to be able to talk about his grief, the pain in his life and that's why he was taking drugs. The pain and that healing began to happen. And then finding God, finding the Lord and becoming a believing Christian. (MP₃IJC)

Lance went on to share further contextual information about Richard and his problems with substance abuse, but also mentioned his sense of gratitude to God, as he perceived God as actively involved with Richard's ongoing recovery. He stated in the ISC:

MP17: Yes, now I'm moving the pain into the sense of gratitude...to God. And you know, it's more than gratitude because...as far as we're concerned, it's a miracle. We used to say to Richard, Richard you know, we're praying for you. We're praying for a miracle. This is when he was still, still in with the drug addiction. And he used to say, come on Mom and Dad. It's not that easy. A miracle doesn't solve these things. It's, you know, the chances of my getting off of it are not good and all these sorts of things. He wasn't prepared to believe that there was a way for it...and we believe it was a miracle because it was...God changed his life. Not just God, but the professional help, too. (MP₃ISC)

The couple's ongoing efforts to care for and protect Richard also continued in the present. For example, in the FJC Gwen elaborated on a newspaper article about stress and thought it might be helpful to her son, Richard. She stated in the FJC:

FP1: Going back to the newspaper article, when I started to read...I wanted to read it from the point of view...is this article going to be helpful for Richard? I'm thinking of his pressures at work. Not realizing the extent that this article would go into...on page two. So that's how it really started out was, you know, looking at the stresses and knowing what stress...did to me when I was working in the early years. And the pressure and what it could do mentally...I don't know if that's how you saw the article in the start. (FP₃FJC)

Gwen went on to explain in the FSC that her reading of the article was motivated by her ongoing concern that Richard may relapse into depression and her desire to help him to prevent it. For Gwen, all of this was grounded in her early experiences of grieving and the ways in which she used work to cope with her feeling of sadness at the time. She noted in the FSC:

FP2: ...I want to read this in case this is something that I can help Richard with because he seems to be our focus in our life. You know, the fear of depression and what pressures at work can do because he's, he's a hard worker and works long hours when needed and will often go back in on a Saturday morning and I know there are dangers there. 'Cause I did the same thing when I went into administrative work and if something wasn't during the day, I finished it at night. And then after a while you find, it's taking a toll. It's taking a toll on your health. It's taking a toll on the fact that you're not getting other form of relief from work. No entertainment. And it's hard on your partner. And now I go back and I think, I don't want him to fall into that trap because it's an easy trap to fall into. Learning to do the job. But I also think that from my point of view, my job became something for me to bury myself in. And I didn't have to think too hard. I could bury myself in work 'cause there was loads of it to do. (FP₃FSC)

Both partners stated that their ongoing care for their remaining son served to unite them as a couple in their grieving. At various points in the interviews both of them commented that their individual and joint grieving actions of researching depression served not only the purpose of understanding Joel's suicide, but also assisted them in caring for and understanding Richard's reaction to Joel's death. For example, in the FSC Lance commented about their desire to be informed about the potential signs of depression in order to be able to recognize them in Richard and assist him:

MP3:...the concern about depressive behaviour in Richard has been very prevalent since Joel died. The first few years he seemed to be...fine outwardly and then began to...recognize the signs of depression and became very alarmed by that. So...fortunately Richard was prepared to seek medical treatment. He got good medical treatment. But...how much of the depression in Richard was caused by...Joel's death and not being able to grieve properly or be able to...get the real issues out on the table. We don't know...it wasn't really until he....became drug addicted and received treatment in [a location]. I think they really penetrated the heart of what was going on. And it seemed to be that the...the depression lifted for him following getting to the bottom of the issues surrounding Joel's death for him. So back to what you said...your reason for wanting, was very well mine too, was that what pointers did this have for Richard? (MP₃FJC)

Throughout the research process, both partners commented repeatedly on the importance of their faith for their grieving and on the ways in which they sought to nurture their faith development through individual and joint actions, such as prayer and Scripture

reading. This daily practice at times also included reading additional books on faith and grieving, as well as attending lectures in the community on these topics. In his first phone conversation, Lance described their practice of reading Scripture and praying together daily. He stated that after reading they often prayed together and in these prayers spoke to God about Joel. He stated that they also acknowledged that Joel is in God's presence, although they did not really have a clear understanding of Joel's ongoing life in heaven. (MP₃Call₁)

Although the couple acknowledged that they did not have a clear understanding about heaven, significant portions of their individual and joint grieving actions involved thinking and reading about heaven. Both partners repeatedly spoke about their belief that Joel's life was ongoing in heaven and how they experienced their faith in their son's life as a source of comfort and solace in their grieving. For example, in the IJC Lance spoke about his belief in Joel's ongoing life with God, and noted their frequent wondering about what their son may be doing in heaven. He stated in the IJC:

MP5: And we also see Joel as his life going on. We don't see him as a life that is past. It is past in this earth, it is past in terms of interaction with our family. But we have these beautiful visions of or thoughts, I suppose, not visions so much as thoughts, of Joel doing all sorts of important things in God's kingdom, meeting people. (MP₃IJC)

Gwen commented on her thoughts and feelings as she listened to Lance talk about her son's life in heaven. She stated the following in the ISC in response to a question about her feelings at this point in the conversation:

FP24: It's relief. That this brilliant young man, his life just didn't end there, but it's continuing on. The girl that Joel used to date, her father said after Joel died, I can't believe what he knew. He hadn't been to law school but he could quote this and he could quote that. And he was better than any lawyer, you know. He would make it his business to find out something. This man had his own trucking business and he asked Joel something. Joel would make it his business to find out. That all added to the pride and it also added to the fact that...in some ways this wasn't normal. I started to realize that he was driven. And when you see young people studying today, you sort of feel they're just doing you know what you have to do when you're studying. You

have to the grindstone and work until you know what you're learning. But it helped me understand that there was a sick mind behind this striving always for more knowledge and more knowledge. And whatever that knowledge was going to do for him, whether it brought him some sort of relief, pride, I don't know. (FP₃ISC)

The couple acknowledged that their belief in Joel's ongoing life in heaven was sustained in part by reading and meditating upon certain passages in the Bible. In particular, both partners commented repeatedly on the significance of the parable of the prodigal son. In her first journal entry, Gwen recalled her felt experience of comfort after reading this passage in Scripture and praying with Lance. She recorded in her journal:

We were reading again from the parable of Jesus about the prodigal son and his return home to his father. We talked about what a gift it was from God that this parable was preached about at our church the night Joel died, our sister in New Zealand read it in her Bible that night, and it was our reading for that day in our Daily Light book. We reflected on how this parable spoke to us of how God the Father ran out to meet Joel as he came home in death. It also spoke to us of how God had already forgiven him for the act of suicide. This passage has spoken to us powerfully in dealing with the enormous burden of suicide in our family. In faith we do not have to wonder about Joel's fate – we know that he is alive in God's presence, forgiven, restored and healed of his depression. Further to what we have said above, we went back to something that we recorded in a journal soon after Joel died. We re-record it here: "Joel died today of depression. He made the final choice to die. The Lord, who could have intervened, chose not to, but rather allowed his child to come home. We know where he is, that was settled long ago. He is enjoying the companionship of God. He knows and sees and enjoys God's love and light and peace – and he has health. He doesn't hurt anymore. Someday we'll see him again, and although he has already heard the words of affirmation from his Heavenly Father, we'll still add our own "thank yous" for being who he was, for his giving spirit and his soft kindness." (FP₃Journal₁)

In the FJC Lance, too, commented on the importance of this parable for their perceived sense of comfort in the midst of grieving. During a particularly difficult point in the FJC, he attempted to offer some spiritual comfort and solace to their sadness and pain through recalling their consolation through Scripture. He stated in the FJC:

MP7: And we have the image that was so vivid because the times that was rarely spoken about around the time of Joel's death, the parable of the prodigal son, of the son returning to the Father. And the Father running out and to meet him. And as Jesus says out of this parable and says that the Father fell on his son's neck and kissed him.

And we are reminded every time we read that of the image of God, of Christ accepting...Joel into his heart, into his arms and seeking him out. Forgiven...for that wrongful act of taking his life. Forgiven, accepted and that Joel, that God allowed Joel to come out. He could have stopped it. We keep coming back to that, don't we? And like you, I think it's only natural to keep asking God why? And...I think of...Wolterstorff's words, as he said, God can be found in the questions, not just in the answers. But we ask God the questions and we simply hear silence and yet we seem to know that God is there. And that he seems to be saying to us...I can't provide you with an answer that you would understand. Trust me. And it comes back to our knowing our trust that ordered our lives, Joel's life. Richard's life. (MP₃FJC)

In the FSC, Lance commented on his purpose for offering the statement above in the FJC. He spoke about the way in which he saw this parable as relating to the Gwen's vision on the night of Joel's death. He explained his intention as follows:

MP37: I'm endorsing I believe what Gwen has just said because I remember very vividly...I don't know whether it was the night that Joel died or whether it was in a day or two following that she talked about how clearly she had sensed the Lord speaking to her and saying, Joel is safe in my hand, in my hands. And she, even in the depths of her sorrow, she felt that overwhelming peace. And I'm reaffirming it by saying that I know you're right because these were my experiences, too, and these were our experiences as we thought about the acceptance of by God of Joel, despite the wrong end of taking one's life that he was forgiven through, through the redemptive work of Christ who had been the one who ran out to meet him as he, as he came home to God. So my emotions there are experiencing with Gwen the, the peace, the knowledge that God has made these promises to us and God has given us these assurances through our faith in Him. And we don't treat those lightly. I think that they're very core of the peace that we experienced. (MP₃FSC)

While the couple spoke frequently about the sense of peace and solace that they received from their spiritual practices, they also acknowledged that they continued to live with ongoing questions about the meaning and purpose of their son's death. In this regard, the Lance stated several times that their varied individual and joint grieving actions had led them to the understanding that they could find God's presence and peace not only in the answers but also in the question of 'why'. The following quote is one example of when Lance addressed the question of searching for spiritual meaning in his son's suicide. He stated in the FSC:

MP42: ... There is a peace that we don't have to get an answer to these questions. It's not hammering at God's door, demanding an answer and getting increasingly angry that we don't get one. But the peace that even in our questioning, God is there, saying, you're not getting an answer to that question, but trust me. And that's, and that's peace... It's emotional in the sense that to question is at the very core of your being. We spend all our lives questioning, don't we? I mean, from, when the children can first speak - why this, why that? You know? Every question leads to another question. So questioning is at the core of our being... And so it's emotional. We say that this huge event, this huge loss, this huge tragedy has happened in our lives and, and, and we're trying to understand it. We're trying to understand why God, our loving heavenly Father, would permit this. So it's emotional but it's saying, even in all this emotion, we've learned that there is peace. There's not an answer, but there's peace. (MP₃FSC)

While the couple spoke about the importance of their daily spiritual joint grieving activities, they also acknowledged that they experienced individual and joint spiritual-mystical events that they interpreted as evidence for the ongoing life of their son. The couple recalled three distinct events – one of which was joint and two of which were experienced solely by the Gwen. The joint experience took place during a drive through the US and was recalled by Lance in the IWU as follows:

MP8: ... Joel always wanted to spend time in [a US state] where the two of us had had quite a few holidays. And we went to [a monument] and we put a rose there. And it was on that drive, wasn't it, that drive, that day driving towards [the monument] from [a US city], and we both apparently had this experience that Joel was sitting with us in the car in the back seat. It didn't last long, but there was a sudden sense, and this was probably even in the first year, that Joel was quietly sitting in the back and we said that we both felt a sense of peace. And we didn't discuss it for some hour or ½ hour later when we both discovered that we both had the same experience. There were other places that we left flowers and perhaps it doesn't matter, but these were things that we did. (MP₃IWU)

Gwen also spoke about her two individual spiritual-mystical experiences throughout the research project. She recalled the first such experiences in the IWU, remembering how on the night of her son's death in which she had seen a bright light in Joel's room and experienced a sense of comfort:

FP6:...So Richard and I set off to go down and it was like that much snow and ice and it was just starting when Lance came home from a business dinner that night. So the three of us went [down the road] and we were met by Police. And [crying]. I think I've gone as far as I can go. That night was a night that will never be erased from my mind. I prayed a lot during that time and my prayer was, as I left the house the afternoon, I asked the Lord to put protective arms around Joel, protect him til I got home. And of course that was, that was the thing that shocked me, angered me, that God would let me down. The one thing I asked was that He protect my child and He didn't. So of course when we didn't see Joel, the Police came back with us to our home, stayed with us 'til about 3 in the morning. I was in very deep shock, I just was like a block of ice. I couldn't react to anything. They asked a number of questions, and cause my mind just couldn't, wouldn't focus. At 3 o'clock they left, making sure that were ok. We thought that they were extremely helpful, comforting. And so I went on upstairs, and as I came to the top of the stairs, Joel's room was on the left. Something drew me into that room, and it was a like a white light, a white vision. And the Lord said to me, He said, he's in my care now, Gwen. So there was the answer to asking for protective arms to be around him. You don't have to worry, he's in my care. And it just, the light just disappeared, and I guess I couldn't even tell Lance that. Cause in shock you don't really know what's taking place. And then I went off to bed and I guess I slept somewhat until the next day. (FP₃IWU)

During the IJC, Gwen elaborated on the third mystical-spiritual event, which she had experienced individually but subsequently shared with Lance. During the IJC Gwen recalled this vision of her son. She then proceeded to add further context to the vision in the ISC:

FP26: Well that happened in church about two Sundays ago. There's an English bishop who was preaching that morning and he was...talking about the radiance of Christ in our lives and he was talking about Moses and how his face must have shone after seeing the glory of God pass by. And how when he came down the mountain his face was still glowing. As he was saying that, Joel's face lit up besides the bishop's face. And it was like radiance, and he said wouldn't you like to meet Moses? And that's when I got this vision of Joel's face smiling at me from way over where he was preaching. And then that radiance was there. (FP₃ISC)

Lance, too, commented on the experience that Gwen recalled in the IJC. He noted in the ISC that he believed that these experiences were real and not imaginary and that they were connected to his faith. He stated in the ISC:

MP27: I haven't had any of those experiences, but I believe that they're real. We both have that experience where we sensed Joel's presence in the car. And I know that this is not altogether uncommon. I think and I know it needn't necessarily occur within a

faith perspective, but that is really what I believed. The sense was real and we know he was. But a sense that he was there was real. (MP₃ISC)

Subsequent discussions about these experiences led the couple to elaborate more about their understanding of these events. In the MCI, both partners expressed their preference for the term “mystical-spiritual” because they both believed that these experiences could be understood within the framework of their faith. Lance stated that he believed that God allowed them to experience these spiritual-mystical experiences for a purpose. Both partners confirmed that they had a personal faith, which enabled them to believe that these experiences came from God and which helped them make sense of them. Lance commented the mysterious nature of these experiences in the MCI, noting:

MP6: I think there were times, early on in our grieving, when I tried to make it happen. I would sort of say, in a prayer not very well formed, that...God, please let me see Joel, let me talk to him. And it didn't happen. And so I knew that I couldn't call up any sort of mysterious thing, where I would chant or burn candles or things like this. I knew I couldn't call it up. And when it's happened, it's just thankfulness that it happened. (MP₃MCI).

Change of the joint grieving project. In the final set of interviews, both partners reflected on the changes in their joint grieving over the two months. Both partners spoke about novel emotional experiences and commented on recent insights into their joint grieving project throughout the course of their research involvement.

The first change that was noted by both partners related to questioning God and expressing their disappointment and sadness. Gwen initially postulated that not much had changed in their grieving, but then corrected herself and commented on her renewed questioning of the meaning of Joel's death. She stated in the FJC:

FP5: Maybe we should talk about...has our faith in anyway changed over these last two or three months? Have you noticed any changes? I would tend to feel...that it hasn't. That it just confirms how my faith was during these past 18 years. But...I must say that once or twice I've...I've questioned God again. Why did you cause this to

happen to Joel? I thought I'd gotten past that stage and accepted what had taken place. And I didn't want to dwell on it very much but...it's still there. Why did you cause this to happen? [crying] And it is His words keep coming back to me from that very first night. The Lord spoke to me and said...Gwen, he is in my care now. That's where I have to leave it. (FP₃FJC)

Likewise, Lance commented on the re-emergence of the question of meaning and the feeling of disappointment that accompanied that question. He explained in the FSC:

MP34: Yes, and I don't think perhaps we've used the word disappointment in the question, there's also disappointment with God. That comes into your mind. God, I'm disappointed that You didn't work these things out differently. Why? And as you say, it's an ongoing thing that you, in a sense you resolve it and then the question is back and you go through the resolution process again on a not really resolved because you don't resolve it in the sense of getting an answer and I think I begin to talk about my favourite author [laughter] again in a moment. (MP₃FSC)

Lance commented further on his perceived sense of unity with Gwen. He noted in particular that for him there is an ongoing process of questioning that is beyond resolution. He stated in the FSC:

MP35: I'm feeling a oneness with Gwen there in that sense that yes, I'm recognizing that I'm always questioning it to some extent. The questions come back...I mean there are some questions in life that you get an answer for and you never ask the question again because the answer's been finite, complete and understandable. Not so here. (MP₃FSC)

In addition to the re-emergence of the question of meaning, Gwen also commented on her recent realization that she had been irrevocably changed by the loss of her son. In the FJC Gwen spoke about a meeting with former nursing colleagues who shared pictures of their grandchildren with each other. Gwen, who did not have grandchildren, commented on her feelings of sadness and realization of the lasting impact of her son's death. She stated in FJC:

FP3:...The children are coming and....it also triggered that on my way home that day, it triggered that...feeling of...how would I be a different person and how would....would I be much happier, much more jolly? I came to the conclusion that...I think I would've been. A lot more bubbly. I seem to have withdrawn. I just withdraw from these conversations and just become a listener because there is nothing to say and in this stage of your life...these friends who were great support for me those early

years, they don't want to hear me say...that I haven't got any grandchildren yet. I may never have grandchildren because Joel died. (FP₃FJC)

While noting these changes to her personality, Gwen also expressed her realization in the FJC that she had recently begun to view herself as a survivor. She noted initially that she had associated surviving with a lack of achievement, but then spoke about the realization that her survival as a bereaved parent constituted a significant accomplishment. She elaborated on this realization in the FSC:

FP46: Yesterday I can remember sitting outside, I was around the table and having a drink and Lance was saying to me, we'd listened to a church service from Seattle yesterday and there was young woman who got on and I had on first, of her involvement in student work...And watching young kids grow up and develop and change and, and he said you used to be in a music program. I was the organist and used to put the music together. He said, I guess we were busy in those days but he said it seems we're doing nothing now. And I looked at him and I said, Lance, I'm just surviving. I was surprised to hear myself say that. 'Cause there's a part of me that still wants to be more than a survivor. I still want to be achieving more. There's a lot of questioning going on in my life.... But you know, I think, coming back to the point of the word survivor, I came out and I think to myself, I'm glad I am a survivor. And I guess that's an achievement, a big achievement in itself. (FP₃FJC)

Lance responded to the Gwen's claim of being a survivor in the FJC, commenting also on his the sense of permanence of the loss, his being "crippled". He noted in the FSC:

MP49: I'm reflecting on Gwen's use of the word 'survivor' and I'm not particularly happy with the word 'cripple'. I now want to just because, why, because it's almost a politically incorrect word today but you know what I'm saying there. Unable to do...the permanence, there was a sense of a permanent crippling...I'm going through that thought process, saying, yes, I remember, I relate to what this crippling sort of effect of the loss was. And you know, I can only believe that it has to be worse when, when you're grieving the death by a suicide because there's, there are so many other aspects to this death that just, I shouldn't say 'just a death' but if it's a traffic accident, it's terrible but it was unplanned by anyone. It was a result of illness or any other aspect so. I simply have read the course that homicide and suicide are the two most difficult...So that was, that was the focus there. Gwen's talked about survivor. I've gone back to the opposite. I believe it is the opposite of surviving and that's being permanently crippled. (MP₃FSC)

A second insight that emerged for both partners in the process of the research was their perception of grieving as continuous throughout their life. Lance commented on the fact that in a way their grieving for their son remained fresh as they continued to encounter situations in which they missed Joel's presence in a new way. Lance also spoke further about the nature of a more current 'loss', the sadness that they have felt over the 'loss' of Richard at his wedding. He compared and contrasted these two losses in the FJC:

MP5:...Richard got married last August, we've been dealing with a natural loss of a son in the sense that he has a wife and it's completely...normal and right that he now belongs to his wife, not to us and she to him. But...because we protected him for so many years and....probably too much so since Joel's death, we feel that he's left us. He has left us according to nature, God's will. That's what...makes us feel more alone than we would have felt before. Perhaps that even more impacts your conversations, or at least your presence in conversations when grandchildren are talked about. Your focus becomes...we don't have any children at home and I don't have any grandchildren and it does make you withdrawn. It would certainly be the same for me. (MP₃FJC)

Project Summary. From an action-theoretical perspective, the joint grieving project for this couple emerged within multiple ongoing careers and projects and consisted of numerous goal-directed actions. The careers included relationships with each other and with their other son, as well as their longstanding commitments to their common Christian faith. The couple reported that for many years the relationship career with their remaining son was foregrounded in their grieving as they sought to assist him in coping with his depression and substance abuse problems. More recently, however, the couple's relationship career with their son had taken on different characteristics as they experienced his recent marriage as an additional 'loss' in their lives. Both partners viewed their grieving project as intricately intertwined with their faith careers. These faith careers, although often tested in the midst of their grieving, were sustained through regular joint spiritual practices as well as through

occasional joint and individual spiritual-mystical experiences of the ongoing presence of their son.

The overall intentional framework for this couple can be described as seeking to live out their grieving authentically in the context of faith and relationship careers. This intentional framework was constituted through multiple overlapping goals for the couple, including deepening the intimacy in their relationships with each other and their remaining son. Additional joint grieving goals included remembering Joel, protecting his memory as well as offering support and care to Richard as he struggled with depression and substance abuse problems. Finally, the couple also sought to find psychological and spiritual meaning in the death of their child through enhancing their understanding about depression and through searching for a spiritual meaning of their son's death.

Grieving strategies for this couple included a variety of individual and joint actions. Joint grieving strategies included attending grief counselling, having conversations about Joel on a regular basis and publically remembering their son at special occasions (e.g., birthdays, Mother's Day). Additional grieving strategies included striving for an authentic faith through regular individual and joint regular prayer and Scripture reading, reading and discussing additional books on faith and grieving, regular worship attendance and emotionally authentic engagement with God through prayer (e.g., voicing doubts, anger, disappointment, joy, etc.). All of these strategies were sustained through the experience of individual and joint mystical-spiritual experiences, which energized ongoing reflective conversations about their faith and jointly imagining their son's ongoing life activities in heaven.

Manifest behaviours, which were observed in the three sets of interviews, included a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal communication actions. Non-verbal communications included listening, smiling, nodding the head, crying, and laughing. Spoken communication included asking/answering questions, agreeing and disagreeing with the partner, describing self, other, past situations, expressing emotions, such as sadness, anger, uncertainty, ambivalence, joy, disappointment, expressing beliefs, opinions, perceptions, judgments, and describing hypothetical or imagined situations.

Assertions. The joint grieving project of this couple was focused on authentically living out their grieving in the context of relationship and faith careers. Of particular salience were the individual and joint efforts in protecting and caring for their sons, as well as the individual and joint faith practices, which encompassed an ongoing search for inner peace and the meaning of their son's death. The joint grieving project shifted slightly throughout the research project as the couple continued to question the meaning of their son's death and feelings of disappointment, sadness and anger emerged. Additional changes included new understandings about being a "survivor" and a realization about the ongoing novelty of grieving.

Couple 4. Couple 4 consisted of a 56-year-old woman (Sandra) and a 56-year-old man (Fred). Sandra was born Canada, and identified her ethnic background as Swedish and Romanian. She worked as a counsellor with an agency for Aboriginal people with mental health problems. She described herself as a Protestant Christian who attended the United Church and had been practicing her faith throughout her lifetime. Fred was born in Canada, and described his ethnic heritage as English. He identified himself as a Christian, although he

noted throughout the various interviews that his personal, spiritual search had only recently become important to him. Fred worked in sales for a large technology company.

The couple said that they had two children, one of whom was deceased. Their deceased child, Steven, died at the age of 25, on May 15, 2003, from a heart attack during a sports event. Following the death of their son, the couple moved from Northern BC to the Lower Mainland, where they have been living now for five years. Their other child, Melanie, was completing graduate studies in the United States at the time of the interviews. She had recently become engaged and was planning on living in the United States after the wedding.

Joint grieving project. Following the first interview, the interviewers analyzed and described the couple's joint grieving project. The following description of this project was presented to the couple in the Member Check Interview (MCI) and the couple concurred with the description. During the telephone monitoring phone calls, both partners agreed that the description of the joint grieving project remained accurate. The joint grieving project for this couple was described as:

Allowing themselves to grieve together as they jointly searched for spiritual connection in their grieving.

For Sandra this joint grieving project involved sharing her individual spiritual experiences of connection at work and church with Fred. Particularly meaningful to her were the ways in which her mainline Protestant faith was complemented by her experiences and understanding of Native spirituality. She expressed her excitement about Fred's recent interest in spiritual matters and sought to support him in these explorations during their joint grieving actions. For Fred this joint project involved beginning to explore the mystery of the connection between various events in his life and his own grieving actions. These

experiences of synchronicity were also highly meaningful to Sandra and represent a point of commonality between their individual grieving journeys. Both noted that their grieving projects had become more shared over the past months.

Detailed description of the joint grieving project. The couple's involvement in this current study took place as they reached a significant grieving milestone – the five-year anniversary of their son's death. In light of this milestone and the opportunity to reflect on their individual and joint grieving thus far, the joint grieving project witnessed as part of this research project included numerous realizations and reflections by both partners. Both noted that their grieving had become increased joint over the past months, and this was facilitated mainly through common discussions of their grieving actions and Fred's spiritual explorations. The joint grieving included comparing and contrasting their early grieving actions with those in the present, which led the couple to the joint realization that their grieving would not end and that their relationship with their deceased son would likewise continue to evolve. Both partners also came to the realization that their grieving would continue to be triggered by various life events, such as conversations at work, sports events and visits with their daughter and their future son-in-law.

One of the joint grieving actions that emerged during this research project involved conversations in which the couple remembered how they had grieved early on and compared it to the ways in which they grieved at present. This joint grieving action was documented during the first set of interviews as well as in the journal entries and phone calls during the monitoring period. It was evoked for both partners by the realization that they had recently passed the five-year milestone since the death of their son. In the IJC the couple reflected on their perception of the change in their individual and joint grieving over time. Fred

commented specifically about the way in which their grieving has become more joined over the last months:

MP1: I felt that...initially it was just overwhelming, completely. And then...as the weeks went by and the months went by, it seemed like...it was more of an individual thing, we're apart possibly. And you'll hear later on when Sandra's saying you know at work or during this period of time or where she might have been or where I recall myself a different times just feeling overwhelmingly sad and...sometimes from different triggers you know. And sometimes it would be an obvious one and sometimes...more of a thought, more of a time issue or you know that kind of thing. Then as the years went on...it seems of late anyway, it's more of a...this recent 5 year anniversary thing was more of a joint thing happening close to the same time for both of us.

FP1: Yeah. I think there are times when, I know for me, I'd be surprised at some of the times when, not surprised by the grief, but surprised by the timing. So, you know, it would be like, I don't know, the start of the hockey season or something like that. And it's like...cause it's not, that's not my framework, and so, you know, I would sit there and think - oh, I should have been more sensitive to that, or I should have realized that. But... (FP₄ISC & MP₄ISC)

Sandra agreed with Fred that their recent grieving actions had become increasingly joined. In the ISC, she commented on the ways in which each other's grieving has become more familiar and predictable and how this learning has allowed them to become more aware of each other's grieving triggers. She stated this as follows in the ISC:

FP36: I really had a sense of we're kind of building this together. And so...the kind of back and forthness a little bit...we are much more aware of when it can happen. It becomes more predictable. Even though it's painful and stuff. I think, and so in my head I was kind of reflecting and thinking oh...that's what we've done. We've normalized the unpredictability of it. Right, because it's, because we know each other's triggers now. We know...we're more likely to know when...things are going to...when we're going to respond to something or what might set things off. And just kind of...knowing that...allows us to be more aware. Right, and so...that was kind of a new thought. Right, we hadn't talked about that before. And so it was kind of like, it's no longer unpredictable because it's more predictable, you know. And we've got a shared history over time about grief, you know... Well, it felt safer... You know, it moves out of the realm of...totally unknown. And...he's saying that too, right? And so this is kind of how it's working out. And you can't always know but...there was kind of like a...I guess I would call it a validation. Right...this is what's going on. And we're both seeing it at the same time. (FP₄ISC)

As part of their joint reflections on their grieving, Fred began to explore a growing realization about the ways in which they had cared for the other even during the early stages of their grieving. He hypothesized in the IJC that they may have initially staggered the timing of their intensive grieving in order to be able to be present with and comfort the other partner. Sandra listened to and agreed with her partner during the IJC and then elaborated on her thoughts and experiences in the ISC:

FP10: ... You know, some of the initial stuff was so...we were both so alone in it. And...you didn't want to break down because the other one had broken. So you're always kind of...holding back your response because...you wanted to support the other person. But now it's much more...we can both be crying and that's ok....[And], you know, I felt comfortable talking about it and these are conversations that we've had before and so this seems pretty familiar. Right, and so it felt good and...and you know like...we're both kind of on the same page with it so...Yeah, I also agree with what he was saying. It just felt kind of...it felt good. Yeah, this is where we are. (FP4ISC)

While the couple spoke a lot about their joint grieving actions, both of them also commented on how these individual joint actions intersected with their relationship with their daughter and other family members and friends as well. Both partners commented on their awareness of the grieving of various family members during the interviews, phone calls and in their journaling. Fred also extended his realization about staggering their grieving to the relationship with their remaining daughter, noting that as parents they sought to stagger their intensive grieving in order to ensure that someone was able to comfort their daughter on the phone. He stated in the ISC:

MP21:....Same thing with Melanie, thinking about...as parents...and one child remaining...., you're weary of what your kid's are doing, what they're thinking and... You don't want to see your kids injured or...in suffering emotionally or physically at all. And...as it goes on we're kind of reflecting on Melanie being away...and making a lot of phone calls...And we were comforting her, trying to support her over the phone...I remember at that time thinking, geez, a person has got to try to stay with it as much as possible to offer some support to my child, you know.

And always was that thought, you just have to because this is the only child left. And that thought is still pervasive today. (MP4ISC)

During the final set of interviews, both the couple extended the intersection of their joint grieving project to their relationships with their daughter and future son-in-law. They noted in the FJC that Melanie and her fiancé had visited with them recently, spending time looking at old photo albums and planning for their wedding. Sandra commented on her internal processes that emerged as they reflected on this joint grieving action in the FSC:

FP107: Again it's about the Melanie and [her fiancé] coming up from [a US city] to visit us for ten days and then trying to let [her fiancé] know who Steven was and, and what he meant. And of course [her fiancé] is looking at how beautiful Melanie was as his fiancé and all that stuff. 'Oh you're so cute when you were a little girl. Cute. So happy.' You know, and we're seeing Steven there, right? His interaction and how he always had his arm around her and looked after her and stuff. And so that's no longer there either. Her big brother or her protector or her person that's going to help out if anything happens. So that's, that's been difficult to see. (FP4FSC)

As the couple shared their joint grieving throughout the research process, they reached the realization that they will never really achieve 'closure' in their grieving. Sandra commented first on her realization and Fred then responded in the FJC:

FP11:...I've always kind of given things time frames or figured out that there were time frames about...closure and stuff like that. And I just don't see any closure coming. (FP4FJC)

MP12: No just changes. But there can never be closure because your mind will never close on it. So...you know, in those reports they talk about closure and such and such but they're just talking about the physical one. Closure, in your body. Like in a murder or what have you but...that's just the physical end of it. It's not...there's lots more to it after that. (MP4FJC)

Fred elaborated further on his thoughts and feelings during this part of the joint conversation.

He stated in the FSC:

MP61: Yeah, I was just thinking when she had mentioned that word 'closure', I was thinking that there isn't any. I can do this last task and this and that, it's like, that would be a physical closure and that part of it. But as far as the other aspects -

emotionally and so on - there is no, I mean it never ends. It changes but it doesn't really close out, you know.

As a consequence of the ongoing grieving, the couple acknowledged that their relationship with their deceased son also continued to change. Sandra in particular expressed her growing realization that her relationship with Steven continued to change and that she continued to learn from him about how to grieve. She commented on the changing nature of her grieving and her ongoing relationship with Steven in the FSC:

FP85: It is continuing. And you know, I mean, he's my first born. He taught me everything about being a parent. Everything that I know, you know, everything was a new experience. Even his death was a new experience for me...And still happens, you know. My relationship with him changes. It's quite remarkable. (FP₄FSC)

Another important aspect of this couple's joint grieving related to the spiritual dimension. This was documented in the various interviews as well as in the phone calls. In the IJC, Sandra initiated this the conversation on this topic, noting her bewilderment at the perceived connections between various events that surrounded Steven's death. She elaborated on her thoughts and feelings in the ISC, noting that she wondered about how her partner would respond to her raising her spiritual experiences and insights in relation to Steven's death:

FP15: Well, I was kind of watching where he [Fred] was, you know, how he was responding. But I was also wondering if these two things were ok to talk about. And...if he was comfortable with that. And he seemed to be ok. Yeah, I just kept on thinking about how all...the "synchronicity" of all this stuff happening... We had just met this woman and...I was just kind of...looking at how all this stuff kind of...came about and...just kind of the layers, I think. And just thinking about...more like...how Fred has put it all together in those ways...So...I think it's more curiosity about how...some of these things have changed over time, too, again. And kind of...the calmness that he talks about it with, too. Yeah, I felt quite engaged with him, like involved. (FP₄ISC)

At various points throughout the research process, the couple returned to elaborate on the role of their individual and joint spiritual practices and beliefs, addressing particularly

their understanding about 'synchronicity'. For example, in the IJC Fred shared his experiences in this regard, exploring his own recent and growing realization about the ways in which various events may be connected:

MP6: That's why I've thought more and more in recent times...I was always a believer in God. I didn't think about it very much. You know, I just was and went on about it. Like Mom used to say about the religion being the way you live, I guess. But these different events that have taken place in the last... And I thought, well, there is this card from [a friend] and the phone call from the car chasers there, from back in 2001, there's just too many things mounting up here. And the fact that I made the move down to [a city] branch, and [a co-worker] working there. And she talks all day long about negative and positive energies and so on, which I take an interest in and give that some thought actually. Maybe I always did, but it was never brought to the forefront at all. Maybe it's just happenstance that it's some more knowledge available at the time about it, so it makes me think more about it. (MP4IJC)

Sandra's spiritual reflections and practices were impacted by her conversations and experiences at work. Since her employment involved working with First Nations clients, Sandra explored the ways in which her Christian faith and the Native spirituality of her colleagues and clients complimented each other and informed her own grieving actions. As Fred had become more open to spirituality over the past months, she shared her reflections for the first time with him during the IJC:

FP6: ... And at my work I'm also getting a lot of Native spirituality, right? And like that's visible all the time. It's like, you know, smudging and working with people in traditional ceremonies. And participating in ceremonies that are just, like you just feel the presence of things, right? Like going to a sweat and seeing stuff and it's like, you know, like it's it just feels like connection, you know? So there is that kind of not knowing and not knowing how it all fits together but, yeah, I...and we talk about spirituality at work all the time. And that...and I guess the truth and reconciliation meeting really kind of threw me. But that...it's kinda like where mainstream religion hits Native spirituality. And it's kinda like I'm on both sides at the same time. And yet, you know, like that...my belief is about these two things coexist in whatever ways, you know. (FP4IJC)

Sandra elaborated further on this important aspect of her spiritual life in the ISC, focusing particularly on her sense of connection with the spiritual activities of her deceased son. She stated in the ISC:

FP22:...It's kind of like this is such a natural part of my life. And this is kind of like a constant...it's kind of like work related stuff. And just kind of bringing that out, but also the fact that Steven was also doing some of that exploration. And...I'm always aware when I bring Steven into the conversation, always aware. And I do it a lot. And I know that sometimes that's...that's hard. But it's really about kind of creating that context, too. About...kind of having a three way relationship in some ways. So it was much more of...making space for other ways...other spirituality pathways and stuff. Just kind of try to open that up a little bit more. And...just kind of...seeing where that goes. (FP₄ISC)

Throughout their involvement in the research project, both partners commented frequently on events that triggered their individual and joint grieving. One such event, which occurred in the midst of the couples' research participation, took place while both partners jointly attended a BC Lions football game in Vancouver. During the game the couple watched as the teams and the fans honoured the recently deceased Bob Ackles, who had been involved with the team for a significant period of time. The couple processed their joint grieving action during the FJC. Fred inquired initially how the Sandra's day had gone. Sandra responded that it had been a very difficult day at work for her, and that her grieving had started more intensively when they attended a local football game and the teams had honoured Bob Ackles. Sandra stated in the FJC:

FP2: And then...just to see Kay Ackles and the family grieving. That, you know, just kind of caught me...just kind of go quiet and...but I knew that it was coming but I don't know why. It just kind of...affecting me in...some of the same words that they were talking about were the same kinds of things that people were saying about Steven. You know, that he was a good person, really passionate about the sport. (FP₄FJC)

Sandra elaborated on her internal process in the FSC, noting the context for the difficult day at work and the way in which she felt connected to Fred in her grieving:

FP2: ... I had told him in the car on the way up about what had happened today and so that's when he started with...it's been a really bad weekend and, and I have been feeling really down since I guess Friday night, and so I was just kind of recapping what it was about on Friday night that I had felt so bad but that has now kind of resurfaced again today at work and how that can, how that was connected. So I was just kind of letting him know kind of where the context that stuff was happening in, even though we had already talked about it before. (FP₄FSC)

She also commented further on the way in which this event had spurred her on to think about the meaning of her son's life and his untimely death. She stated in the FSC:

FP75: That was more around this idea of why do some people live longer than others...at the football game, I really felt betrayed. 'Cause some people get to live long lives and do all these wonderful things and, and get honoured for that and I would have liked that for my child. I would have liked that for Steven, and I know that he would have been great at what he did because he's just that kind of a guy. He was just engaged and involved and loved life every minute and...So when he was talking about what's happening and that's part of where I get to is this, this not being able to kind of have the life or have the, the amount of years that other people have. Like it's just, just doesn't seem right. (FP₄FSC)

Fred listened compassionately to the Sandra's account of the football game and her subsequent grieving. In the FSC, he mentioned his sense of connection to Sandra during this part of their grieving. He explained:

MP2: Well, she was mentioning about the football game on the Friday night. Stayed after the game at a tribute to Bob Ackles who passed away recently. And I was thinking the same thing when she mentioned Kay Ackles and they were sitting over to our left shoulder basically at the press box...And I thought the same way as soon as she mentioned it - you become instantly emotional. Well, especially in the last five years...Just feeling for the people and you know what they're going through. (MP₄FSC)

The couple also shared their experiences of grieving at work with each other. In the FJC, Fred recalled being surprised at work when a customer mentioned the name of his son's funeral home. Sandra empathized with Fred in the FJC and then reflected in the FSC on the ways in which their work settings hinder and facilitate their grieving:

FP8: Just...that kind of connection and...I felt bad that he had that experience. You know like...aw, that's too bad...'Cause it's a totally different experience when you're

working in a counselling setting than when you're working, you know, kind of day-to-day just regular life stuff where you don't talk about any of that stuff, right. So it's very different. (FP₄FSC)

While Sandra's place of work was more and supportive of her grieving, Sandra also spoke about the ways in which her work is more difficult as she works daily with people who are facing death or the loss of a loved one. She shared this struggle with Fred in the FJC:

FP3: ...And today, you know, the fact that I've been dealing with this a lot at my work, right? Where people are dying or losing children or...it's so difficult to kind of stay...unengaged. Or, you know...because not only do you feel your own pain, you also feel it for them, too, cause you know kind of what the experience is and so you're thinking, oh my god, this would be horrible to, cause you know how horrible it is. (FP₄FJC)

Sandra elaborated on these feelings of empathy for her clients in the FSC, as well as on the way in which her own grieving may potentially interfere with her therapeutic work with clients. She described in the FSC:

FP24: So that was more of an explanation of what happens. Not just feeling your stuff, but feeling somebody else's stuff and I'm sure they call it counter-transference, but anyway. Counter-transference. But you know it's still that sense of you know what that pain was like. And it's different when you're counselling somebody and you haven't got any experience of it and you're just hearing and being with them and sharing that. But when you're there and you have experience of it, there's always that filter of what's mine and what's yours. And then how do I help you through that, and then how do I help me through that? Just trying to hear Fred when he's talking about those times when he's there, right? And I guess more trying to see it through his eyes and that, and that was what I was doing. I was just kind of sitting back and trying to see, how does this fit for you and what's, what's going on for you? More just trying to be in that moment right then, so. (FP₄FSC)

Fred listened to the Sandra's description of her work with compassion and then commented on his feelings of empathy for the Sandra in relation to her work environment.

He stated in the FSC:

MP16: Just feeling some sympathy or what-have-you for Sandra's situation. I know that in her job every day, she runs across that more often than I ever do, where there's illness and death involving clients or fellow workers that she deals with it. So you kind of feel for that person. (MP₄FSC)

Change in the joint grieving project. Throughout the research process, both partners commented on the ways in which their grieving was continuing to change over time. Both partners – but especially Fred – were very clearly engaged in a worldview shift in relation to his spirituality. This shift was witnessed throughout the research process and was evident not only in Fred’s comments but also in the ways in which Sandra responded to the change Fred was undertaking. Fred commented on his understanding of the shift in his worldview and how he saw this as relating to his grieving. He stated in the FSC:

MP92: I think if I had anything to say, I’d say maybe going forward. And not forgetting by any stretch of the imagination but maybe going forward a little bit and being clear on things, like a bit of general clearing of what specifically is hard to say but just a general clearing of the mind. Still the mind is very much involved in all the emotion aspect of the last five years but at the same time, there’s a little bit of a clearing and less fogginess is there...and also maybe a little bit different openness about, about different thoughts and processes and things. (FP4FSC)

The above-noted quote emerged towards the end of the FSC, but the changes in Fred’s spiritual worldview became visible much earlier in the research process. In the IJC, the Fred commented on his increased interest in spiritual ideas and his experiences of synchronicity. Sandra listened intently in the IJC and then explored her internal processes in the ISC, noting particularly the novelty of having this joint spiritual conversation with her partner and her enjoyment of this process:

FP18: When Fred was talking about kind of the metaphysical stuff...that kind of conversation is pretty new. And...I don't often talk about Native spirituality and stuff in those ways. And so...it's kind of like having a shared parallel experience, but now you're just bringing them together. So that felt like a joining...in some way...I think that kind of, the metaphysical connection and stuff is...is not something that we talk about much...That was kind of...that was good, that felt good. (FP4ISC)

Fred elaborated further on some of the context that has led him to begin to think about potential spiritual connections that may be related to their ongoing grieving. Again he focused on his experience of synchronicity in the ISC, stating:

MP41: I thought for many years...you know I always thought there is a God. I didn't see him as being a manipulative...type figure or theory...I have, you know, hearing and being more open I guess. Probably another term I could use for myself. These thoughts have...become more dawning. As to the why these things take place and so on. But that's what I was thinking about at the time...And making some associations...and maybe thinking a little bit more clearly so that you can be more open. You can make some associations and...do some thinking when you're reading and whatnot. Whereas for quite some time before that you're almost...just like sleep walking at times. (MP4ISC)

While Fred explored potential spiritual connections between grieving actions, Sandra addressed her recent positive spiritual experiences at church and with an aboriginal elder. In particular, Sandra commented on the ways in which she is finding an increasing connection between her Christian faith and the Aboriginal traditions that she is exposed to at her place of work. She stated in the FJC:

FP13: I still find going to church helpful. It's helpful in other ways. Like...it just feels, I feel more solid...It just makes sense to me. But...you know, all the stuff I do at work in my day to day. It is that kind of day-to-day practice I think. It's always a good fit, right. My work and my beliefs about people and all that stuff about doing the best that you can. (FP4FJC)

Sandra elaborated further on her personal context for wondering about these experiences of synchronicity, noting in particular the connection that she perceived between Christian teaching at church on Sundays and Aboriginal spiritual teachings at work. She explored this as follows in the FSC:

FP98: ... I just thought, you know like, if I were looking at connections and stuff, that going to church is important to me and then I always relate what's going on to what's happening in church and how it's a similar process, right? That that message was just right for me 'cause it was exactly what we were talking about. So like the week that those eagle teachings at work, we had an elder come in and talk about eagle and, and how to use an eagle whistle and that are Aboriginal teachings and so they were doing it with our whole staff. And then, I go to church that Sunday and we have maybe six different things over the summer that they rotate and the one that they chose was an eagle coming in. It's unusual for churches to use an eagle as a presence and then it could have been any one of four for the whole summer and they choose eagle. And so it was again that kind of just interesting timing and coming together and just kind of synchronicity. (FP4FSC)

Fred listened to the Sandra's thoughts and experiences in relation to her church and then elaborated in the FSC on how he has recently begun to think about joining his wife in church as of late. He explained these novel contemplations as in the FSC:

MP67: Feeling maybe a little curiosity as to whether a person should look into that or...it's hard to say...You know...I could go with her. There's nothing that would stop me from going. So I probably gave it more thought recently to maybe attending one Sunday but I probably only thought about that in recent times in the last year. (MP4FSC)

Sandra commented further on the ways in which she perceived Fred, even though he may not be present with her in body at church, is present with her in other ways. She commented on this realization in the FSC:

FP103: It was a new awareness that I did talk about church and...hearing him talk about my going to church from his perception is interesting. Very interesting. And just feel kind of grounded by that, he may not come to church with me but he's kind of there, you know, in kind of other ways. So it's kind of cool. (FP4FSC)

A second change that emerged in the joint grieving project was an increase in grieving-related activities that coincided with the five-year anniversary of Steven's death. Both partners noted that they were becoming increasingly aware of the impact of their son's death on other people. In the final set of interviews, Sandra said that she experienced this novel awareness of other people's grief as somewhat overwhelming. She elaborated on the ways in which she finds other people's grief for her son to be difficult to bear in the FSC:

FP40: So, we [were] talking about how other people are grieving, too, and I don't know if you're oblivious to it but you, I think to see it written in black and white and to see the impact that your child had on other people's lives only exaggerates the loss. It makes it worse because you're, you realize how much bigger it is than just you and your loss. Your loss is different as a part. Her loss is different as his girlfriend for eight years, right?...And his friend's loss is different as somebody he's grown up with practically his entire life and been in a band with and done all these things and had visions and dreams together and so that the losses are so much different and yet they're such a big part of who he was. Right? It's kind of having different roles in different people's lives and how impactful that is. (FP4FSC)

Fred contrasted his experience with the Sandra's, which was more one of curiosity about the potential spiritual connection and spiritual being that may be directing these events in their lives. He elaborated in the FSC:

MP24: Just a feeling of curiosity as, you know, there's something happening out there that I maybe haven't thought about before or didn't give thought to...I tend to think of the positive side...[But] maybe some sadness in the fact that you didn't pay more attention. (MP₄FSC)

A third shift in the joint grieving project related to the recent cancer diagnosis of one of the Sandra's close friends. In her first phone conversation, Sandra stated that she believed their joint grieving project has shifted a bit because of this diagnosis and that she had been talking about her concerns with her husband. She stated that both Fred and she understood her friend's situation better due to Steven's death and the sense of helplessness they had experienced during Steven's heart attack (FP₄Call₁). Sandra also commented on the experience of hearing of her friend's diagnosis of cancer in her second journal entry. She described her experience of worry and fear for her co-worker and addressed the way in which she had shared it with Fred, because she knew he had the capacity to respond appropriately to her worries. She stated in the journal:

I just woke up feeling very down. My friend and co-worker had been diagnosed with cancer and was awaiting surgery. I had received the email telling me about it late the night before. I had known about it but felt particularly helpless. I talked to Fred about how I was feeling, especially because I knew he could relate to how helpless we felt when Steven was in hospital. Again I thought how loving and caring isn't enough to keep someone alive, and that I need to focus on whatever support I can offer. I was able to take it easy and not participate in our usual busy Saturday activities. On Sunday, I went to church and asked the congregation to pray for her as she faced difficult health concerns. I wondered about whether it was appropriate for Christians to pray for someone who practices at a very deep level her Aboriginal spirituality. In the end, I figured we were all praying (or talking to the Creator) for help. (FP₄Journal₂)

On the day of her friend's surgery, Sandra wrote about the way in which this event reminded her of her son's death and how she had once again shared her fear and grief with Fred. She stated in her third journal entry:

I had been thinking of [my friend] all day long as I knew she was going to be in surgery today, and prayed for her all day long. I let Fred know what happened for [her] when I finally heard about it late in the evening. I had been worrying all day about her, praying for her recovery from surgery. As it happened, it was extensive, she had had cardiac arrest on the table and a cardiologist was called in to revive her. Again, it reminded me of Steven. [I was] grateful to finally hear about [my friend], but worried about how extensive the surgery was. I found Fred very comforting and supportive. I wanted some comfort and to update him with the information. Fred continues to call me at work every day to check to see if I am OK. (FP₄Journal₃)

Project Summary. From an action-theoretical perspective, the joint grieving project for this couple was captured at a significant five-year milestone of their son's death and was associated with the emergence of various realizations about their joint grieving actions. Realizations for both partners included a noted increase in joint grieving actions, an understanding of how they may have staggered their initial grieving to support each other and their daughter, a perception of the continuous nature of grieving and reflections on how their respective work environments are both helpful and hindering in their grieving. The joint grieving project emerged within longstanding relationship careers with each other and their daughter and, for Sandra, within a lifelong commitment to her faith. The joint grieving project was also significantly impacted by the Fred's increasing interest in spirituality and both partners shared a growing fascination with experiences of synchronicity related to their grieving.

The intentional framework for this couple can be described as learning to grieve together with the partner, while exploring new realizations about their individual and joint grieving actions. This intentional framework consisted of multiple overlapping goals for the

couple, which included goals for their relationship with each other, with their daughter and her fiancé and with their individual and joint engagements with their faiths.

Grieving strategies for this couple included a variety of both individual and joint actions. Joint grieving strategies included conversing with each other about the increase in grieving actions associated with the five-year anniversary of their son's death, sharing ongoing realizations about their individual and joint grieving processes (e.g., staggering their grief initially, increased joint grieving recently, the ongoing nature of grieving, etc.), and talking about individual and joint grieving actions (e.g., grieving jointly at the BC Lions football game, grieving individually at work). Additional strategies included joint conversations with their daughter and her fiancé about their son, his death, and their grieving as a family.

Manifest behaviours, which were observed in the three sets of interviews, included a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal communication actions. Non-verbal communications included listening, smiling, nodding the head, crying, and laughing. Spoken communication included asking/answering questions, agreeing and disagreeing with the partner, describing self, other, past situations, expressing emotions, such as sadness, surprise, uncertainty, confusion, expressing beliefs, opinions, realizations, and describing hypothetical or imagined situations.

Assertions. The joint grieving project for this couple became increasingly possible as the intensity of the initial grieving subsided and they were able to attend to their partner in his or her grieving. This joining in their grieving increased over the course of the couple's involvement in the research project as Fred explored his interest in spirituality and shared this

interest with Sandra. Both partners were particularly fascinated by their experiences of ‘synchronicity’ in their joint grieving.

Couple 5. The couple consisted of a 57-year-old man (Stan) and a woman (Mildred) who chose not to disclose her age. Stan was born in Canada and described his ethnic heritage as German/Russian. He reported working in sales for a snack food company. Stan described himself as an Evangelical Christian who has been practicing his faith since he was 10 years old. Mildred chose not to complete the demographic information form. She indicated that she was initially reluctant to participate in the research interviews because conversations about their grieving were still very painful for her. Although she participated in the interviews, she chose not to complete the demographic information form, participate in phone meetings or journal during the monitoring period. Furthermore, the couple ended their final joint conversation after approximately 13 minutes. Stan and Mildred reported having two children, one of whom was deceased. Their deceased child, David, died at the age of 22, on March 2, 1997, in a motor vehicle accident. The couple’s other child, Sarah, was married to Wayne and had two young children.

Joint grieving project. Following the first interview, the interviewers analyzed and described the couple’s joint grieving project. The following description of this project was presented to the couple in the Member Check Interview (MCI) and the couple concurred with the description. During the telephone monitoring phone call, Stan agreed again that the description of their joint project was still accurate for them as a couple. The joint grieving project for this couple could be described as:

Finding joint comfort in God’s providential care, and offering this care to others while acknowledging their own suffering and longing for their son.

The joint grieving project included a variety of joint actions, such as remembering their early grieving, reflecting on their early grieving at work, recalling their isolation in their grieving, and speaking about the role of their faith in their grieving actions. The joint grieving project also included talking about past and present grieving actions as a couple and as a family. Stan and Mildred also reflected on the impact of David's death on their relationship, noting both experiences of closeness and relational strains. These strains largely emerged particularly in the final set of interviews and constituted a minor shift in the joint grieving project.

Detailed description of the joint grieving project. The couple's joint grieving involved reflections and comparisons on the ways in which their grieving had evolved over the past 10 years. Stan and Mildred reflected on the ways in which their initial grieving had been impacted by their individual work situations. They acknowledged that their faith had been an important source of comfort and strength, and both reflected on how Mildred's relationship with God had become more distant and painful over time. Stan and Mildred found that their faith has helped them to find meaning in their son's death through joint grieving actions such as publishing a grieving-related poem or through organizing support meetings for bereaved parents. As the joint grieving project developed, Stan and Mildred noted that their relationship was increasingly impacted by Mildred's ongoing distress in relation to her grief and by various external strains. The discrepancy in grieving and the strains impacted their joint grieving project.

Stan and Mildred's joint grieving project involved reflecting on the intersection of their vocations and their grieving. At the time of David's death, Stan was working as a sales representative and was often on the road, while Mildred worked as a cashier at a local

grocery store. Stan pointed out in the IJC that his job as a salesperson allowed him the privilege of spending a lot of time alone, and that he was able to grieve freely during those times. Mildred, on the other hand, stated that she did not have the luxury of grieving during her work as a cashier at a local grocery store. They noted in the IJC:

MP16: And I know you were quite jealous or upset when for so long I could listen to tapes in the van and I could cry my eyes out. And you were at work and couldn't cry. You were kind of a ...

FP16: I was like a robot. I came to work and I switched it on. And I work I had to do work, and then I got back in the car and then I...at work I was at work, and in the car I became David's mom again. (FP₅IJC & MP₅IJC)

Stan remembered his grieving actions while driving, which included listening to music CDs and expressing his sadness and longing for his son through tears. He remembered this in the IJC and also expressed his sadness and compassion for Mildred whose grief was postponed by her work environment:

MP70: Just for those CDs with my job. And I, with my job, you know I'm in the van a lot and I can just listen to CDs and I just cry the whole [way]. Then you kind of get your act together and go into the stores. But for her, she didn't have that. She was...I felt pity or sorry for her. She couldn't grieve the same way that I could because she was a cashier at a grocery store and just to start crying, well, she wasn't there to cry. Well, for me you know I had the van and the music to. (MP₅ISC)

Mildred, too, elaborated on the ways in which her work environment had affected the ways in which she could grieve regularly for her son. She compared her work situation to Stan's in the ISC:

FP69:...I do remember saying things like that him because he's a salesman. He's in the car all the time. And he would come home and he would say some speaker that he heard on the radio and that he'd talked about grief or talked about something. And here I was at work and I was working with a boss who was...he was just really struggling emotionally and so I kind of found exactly what I just said. I'd come to work and I'd drive to work and I'd, I could hardly stand it. I drove past where the accident happened every day at that time. And...that's all I could think about. But I knew that when I came to work, I was a cashier. I couldn't do that there. I had to come to work and so at work, I worked. And then when I got to my car then I could

cry all the way home if I needed to or whatever. But I remember the day I went back to work. I went back to work three weeks after David died, Stan went back two weeks. And it was a little grocery store where you kind of knew everybody. And I'll never forget that day because...I thought I was, I think I was a good cashier. I know I was. But that day, I just didn't want to do, I couldn't. I remembered nothing and the customers who I knew, they came through. And I remember the one girl and she said, Mildred we're going to help you. And she came around the side and she bagged groceries for me. And she said, slowly, just do it one at a time. And that really helped me. They were very helpful and it was just a small thing. But you know, that's a hard thing, to go back to work and even though things that you know, that you've done, and then for somebody to take that and just say, we'll help you with this. It was just a small thing. All she did was put those groceries in a bag. (FP₅ISC)

Another part of the couple's joint grieving project involved recalling their early joint grieving and remembering how they felt isolated from others in their grieving and the ways in which they felt disappointed by some of their friends. Stan discussed this pain and isolation in the IJC:

MP10: Wasn't that hard at times, though, when [name] and [name] especially they wouldn't talk to us after David died. And it took many months before...I mean they're really good friends and, but they didn't want to hurt us, because, you know, we're crying and it wasn't that that hurt us. It was, you know, the death of David. (MP₅IJC)

Stan elaborated on this sense of isolation and the resulting sadness in the ISC, noting also the ways in which he felt let down by his pastor at the time. He stated in the ISC:

MP38: Just the hurt that some of our very closest friends wouldn't even, you know they'd kind of walk on the other side of the street. They wouldn't talk to us and then we had other people that we didn't know that would come and walk the path, the journey with us. And yet our closest friends, you know they were...they were far away from us.

IA45: So remembering that disconnection.

MP39: Yeah, disconnection of... being together for...at that time 22 years... So just the fact that some of your closest friends just...kind of turned their back on us. You know that was really hurtful. Even the pastor, you know pastor [name], he's the associate and pastor [name] did the message [at the funeral], but it was three or four months before we had people come to visit us but the pastor didn't come down. And finally I had to talk to him. You know, it's not like we're new in the church. We've been in the church for...at that time 24 years. And he said, I'm sorry I let you down

but...you know as we come to grips with different things that people say and do.
(MP₅ISC)

Throughout the various interviews, both partners commented on the changes in their faith over time. Both Stan and Mildred initially experienced a sense of peace and closeness to God, but their subsequent grieving actions were marked by significant emotional discrepancies. Mildred and Stan described this discrepancy as follows in the IJC:

FP3: I know it was for you. For me, it wasn't, right? [yeah] You know that. Right after David died then I felt close to God and then afterwards, then I felt...like, why didn't...?

MP4: You felt anger.

FP4: I did. Like, why did You allow this to happen? Other moms have their sons, other parents have their sons still. (FP₅IJC & MP₅IJC)

In the ISC, Stan elaborated on his motivation for joining his partner in her remembering of the difficulty of early grieving, as he felt compassion for her suffering and wanted to be connected to her in this suffering.

MP6: I mean I'm thankful that, I'm not thankful that David died but I'm thankful for the lessons that we've learned through this. Even though they've been very hard lessons, just the fact that I know without a doubt that God has a plan. And she doesn't always, I mean she does believe it but doesn't always. (MP₅ISC)

Stan elaborated a bit further on his understanding of the felt difference between his grieving and Mildred's. He stated in the ISC:

MP9: I understand that she's just missing David so terribly much and as we walked out I said this is, this is good to do something like this. And she says, yeah, but it's difficult. I said well we've got well we've got through so many hurdles in the last couple of years that this is really not that difficult. So it's...and she agrees. But, you know, the mother's love...and don't get me wrong, David and I had a wonderful relationship and all. You know, I miss him terribly, but it's a little bit different than Mildred. (MP₅ISC)

Mildred spoke also about her ongoing feelings of pain, sadness and longing for her son, which were evoked once again through the research interviews. She stated in the ISC:

FP5: Kind of brought it all back. I mean...there's hardly a day goes by that we don't talk about it, think something about David, but it kind of all brought it all back again. You know, just talking about it in depth like this. (FP₅ISC)

Mildred elaborated on her ongoing feelings of anger and sense of isolation from God in the ISC, stating that she initially felt close to God, but then soon remembered feeling distant and angry. Furthermore, she compared her way of grieving with that of Stan, noting particularly the way in which she sees the loss of her son having a permanent impact on her emotional state and personality. She stated in the ISC:

FP7: Just remembering how I went from being close to God to not feeling that way. And you know sometimes hearing Stan say he's pick up hitchhikers and he'd share [his faith]...I remember being, feeling like...whatever. I do remember those kind of feelings because I didn't feel that way then. I felt...I went from feeling close to God...to being angry. But not being angry, shaking fist angry, angry hurting angry kind of. You know? And he has handled things way different than I have. Stan hasn't changed much in the 37 years of marriage. This was Stan and then when David died, he became a little bit different there but he's the same Stan. I'm not the same person that I was. I know I'm not. It's a...I mean I still laugh and I go to weddings and I go to funerals and do things, obviously. You know, I haven't stayed in bed and taken drugs. You know...we've gone on. We have gone on but...We have grieved differently but we've definitely grieved together. (FP₅ISC)

Throughout the various interviews, Stan consistently agreed with the Mildred's analysis of the difference of their grieving. Stan elaborated on his feelings and faith and on the contrast between his and Mildred's ways of grieving in the FSC:

MP38: No matter what, I believe that the Lord allowed this to happen for a reason. And it's, I think that every trial that comes our way is to bring us closer to Him. And I don't think Mildred feels that way. She's still frustrated that the Lord sometimes could allow David to die. (MP₅FSC)

Mildred confirmed her sense of this discrepancy as well at various times during the interviews. For example, in the FSC she elaborated very poignantly, noting that her current experience in her grieving was different from her beliefs and Stan's beliefs and experiences. She stated in the FSC:

FP12: I know that Stan is exactly what he said. You know, he just believes that God has a plan and I do too. I do. I'm just not where, where he is. Right now I guess I'm confused sometimes, just kinda wondering. I know that this was all in..., 'cause God has our days written down. He knows when we're going to die. I know that. But sometimes I still, I guess you wonder why it was, why is it us who has to go through this? And we won't know that, we keep saying we'll never know that until, until we get to heaven, we won't know that. But I'm just not always as positive as Stan is. (FP₅FSC)

In spite of the discrepancy in their grieving, both the Stan and Mildred reaffirmed numerous times that they saw themselves as grieving jointly. Mildred characterized their joint but divergent grieving as follows in the FSC:

FP20: It's just that we grieve together but Stan grieves differently than I do and, and you know what? He's...I don't want to say he's pretty much okay. That sounds really cold. But he has come to grips. He has come to grips with David's death. And I don't think I have. And sometimes I wonder if I ever will. I remember when Trudeau, Prime Minister Trudeau died. At his funeral, somebody said they didn't that he ever had gotten over the death of his son. That rings in my head many times, and I think, I think that will be me. 'Cause it just, you think you do. And you do. You go to weddings and you do all kinds of things but, but I'm not the same person that I was before David died. And Stan isn't either but he's way ahead. (FP₅FSC)

Stan concurred with Mildred in this regard, stating in the ISC that his joining with Mildred in moments of frustration and sadness was motivated by compassion for his partner and a deep understanding of her spiritual struggle. In response to a question by the interviewer about whether he felt disconnected from his wife's experience at this point in the IJC, he noted:

MP16: We're connected, we're just in a different state. And I can understand her...her, the way she feels, not being that close to the Lord. So it's...

IA19: Kind of an understanding and a compassion (yeah) I would say. Does that fit for you, Stan? (yeah) For where she's at and her struggle.

MP17: And she's...I know she's struggled in a lot of ways and you know her background and different things. And she's struggled believing that the Lord would provide, believing that the Lord is...with us all the time. (MP₅ISC)

Stan contrasted his own faith with that of Mildred, stating at various times in the interviews that his faith in God had been strengthened through the loss of their son and through their grieving. He noted in the FJC:

MP8: Well, I still think that it's strengthened my faith. As time goes on I know that....God has a plan and I believe that plan and...it seems like we have more frustrations and yet...the Lord has brought us to be there for us even in the 11 years. And...we've gone on. (MP₅FJC)

Throughout the various interviews, both partners frequently reaffirmed the fact that their faith had enabled them to search for and find a spiritual meaning in their son's death. In the IJC, Mildred and Stan offered their joint understanding of how God could have allowed David to die. They indicated that their pastor had initially offered this theological understanding, and that they had adopted it as a meaning for David's death. It is particularly noteworthy that Mildred also continued to affirm this meaning, in spite of her present struggles with her faith. Stan and Mildred noted in the IJC:

FP5: Like Pastor [name] said, He made us, He understands, and He didn't...He didn't plan that David was gonna die. But, it was in His plan, right? That on March the 2nd, 1997, it was David's time to go home. It wasn't that He planned for that van that...yes, this is gonna be the one that's gonna kill David. That wasn't...I don't believe that was any way. [He allowed it to happen]. He allowed...because that was the day that David was going home...

MP7: If he hadn't been there that day...

FP7: Then maybe it would have happened in a different time. [yeah] Because that was his day. That was, it's like a big book in heaven. And David's name was down there for 1997, March 2nd. (MP₅IJC & FP₅IJC)

Mildred spoke further about the way in which this very specific theological understanding of the meaning of her son's death had had a positive impact on her healing. She noted in particular in the ISC that she experienced this belief as something positive:

FP23: Well, I think some of that is part of the healing that has happened because at first even though I felt close to God and then I went to this angry kind of stage. And

then you start to realize that God did allow that and then the anger subsides and...you know...I didn't like it though. The part where I was angry, I didn't like that feeling because I felt David wasn't an angry person and he certainly wouldn't have been very proud of his mom. But I thought, too bad, you're not here. You know, those are the kind of turmoil things that you go through. (FP₅ISC)

Stan, too, elaborated on their joint statement about the meaning of David's death in the ISC. He stated his agreement with Mildred, citing also the way in which his faith had been challenged by two Scripture verses, which, for him, seemed initially to challenge his theological interpretation of these events. He noted that these two verses had posed a particular problem to him, but that he had found his answers through the emergence of positive events following the death of his son. He elaborated in the ISC:

MP25: And Mildred said you know God, on that day, God knew that was going to be his last day. And so that's what I was saying, too. God allowed it to happen and you know, the next part is...well somebody else has said, well what if David wasn't there? Well, God orchestrates every detail...There are two verses that I struggled with very much in the beginning. Romans 8:28, for all things work together for good to them that love the Lord. How can this be for our good? And yet, as time has gone on, I can see that it's... I think there's going to be far more people in Heaven because of David's death than there will be because of his life...It took me a long time. I went to the pastor and it just doesn't make sense. What was the other verse? Honour your father and your mother and you'll have a long life. David honoured us. Now how can this, you know, but I guess it's in general speaking. You know, not everybody is going to live a long life. But those two verses, you know that was...

IA28: That was a struggle for you.

MP27: That was a real struggle for me for a long time. You know to, how can this be for our good? And yet...all the people that we've talked to, all the people that we've...mentioned the Lord because of this. And we gave an altar call at his funeral and three people said they prayed the prayer. So...you know you can't, you can't measure that. But I really, really, really struggled with that. (MP₅ISC)

One of the joint grieving actions that enabled both partners to cope with the loss of their son was for the Stan and Mildred to reach out to other bereaved parents. The bereaved parents meetings offered Stan and Mildred comfort and community, as well as another positive aspect to their loss. In the quote below, Stan addressed the interpretation that both

the Mildred and Stan made about their outreach to other people, noting that the pain that they experienced through the loss of their son had enabled them to become more compassionate towards other people who are suffering.

MP17: I mean I'm not thankful that David died, but I'm thankful for lesson that we've learned. And, you know, learning to be compassionate to others who are hurting. And just reaching out in different ways. That way, like you said before, would be better to read it in a book than to have to go through this. Unfortunately, there's no magic pill or anything to get through this and not to have walk it. (MP₅IJC).

Mildred, too, commented on their joint grieving action in the ISC, noting that she understood their efforts to offer comfort to other grieving parents as part of their own healing:

FP46: ...And so we decided that...I forget if it was the first Christmas or the second Christmas. But we got a hold of other people who had children die. And we'd have them come to our house. What we did is we...sat around in our living room and we shared about our child. And I bought candles, just little tea lights for everybody. And after they shared, then we would light a candle in memory of our child. It was a great thing. It was healing for us to do that. And I know it was healing for the people who were there. There was a guy there who was a pastor and his son died. And he said...his wife said, do you want to share or should I? He says, no I better. And then he shared. He said, I'm a pastor. I speak to hundreds of people. I talk to people about death and I haven't been able to talk about my son's death. And he shared that day. And that was a healing process for us. (FP₅ISC)

Both partners also recalled an annual joint grieving action in which they placed a spiritual poem about death into the bulletin of their church. Mildred remembered the time in which they had a special ceremony as a family on the 10th anniversary of David's death, and Stan then elaborated on a poem that they put into the church bulletin each year. IJC:

FP13: And we have done things together to remember David. Like going to the cemetery. Like Sarah and Wayne and the kids on the 10th anniversary. Buying McDonald's and going down to the cemetery and the balloons off the sun deck. The birthday dinners. The tree. The candle thing at Christmas time, the poem.

MP14: Yeah, that poem, you're spending Christmas with Jesus Christ this year. Wow, that's touched so many lives, you know. Just every year we put it in the bulletin at church, and every year we get people coming to us and thanking us for putting that poem into the bulletin, because they've all had people that have died and it says don't weep for me, you know, I'm in heaven with Jesus. (FP₅IJC & MP₅IJC)

Mildred elaborated on the significance of this poem in the ISC, noting particularly the way in which this joint activity helped them deal with their own suffering during Christmas:

FP62: ...And sometimes I think, 11 years later, should we still be putting this in? But you know what? Every year we've put it in, because every year, somebody loses someone. And people have come to us and said thank you for that poem. That just really helped us through the Christmas season. Okay, we'll put it in next year again. (FP₅ISC)

Mildred and Stan also reflected in various interviews and in the telephone monitoring call on the way in which their joint grieving project had been impacted by the grieving of other people in their immediate and extended family. Both partners agreed that in particular their relationship career with their daughter Sarah, as well as her partner and their children, had a significant impact on their ongoing joint grieving project. In the IJC, both partners remembered back to their initial grieving and expressed their regret about the way in which they believe they neglected their daughter during that time. They stated in the IJC:

MP12: And [silence]...Sometimes I still feel kind of sorry for Sarah, because during that grieving time, you know, at the beginning time we were hurting so much. And Sarah needed the attention and, you know...

FP12: We were grieving so deeply, that that just didn't even cross my mind.

MP13: No. We tried to be there, but...you know, the Lord carried us through that situation. (MP₅IJC & FP₅IJC)

Stan elaborated further on this aspect of their joint grieving in the ISC, commenting on their sadness about the inability to comfort their grieving daughter more fully:

MP55: I was sorry for Sarah. We've spent so much time grieving ourselves that even though she did have the two little boys at the time and that helped. But she did say sometimes I feel like I'm left out. And that bothered us and hurt us that we weren't there for her as well. (MP₅ISC)

Stan and Mildred noted also that their joint grieving project continued to be affected by significant family events, such as their grandson's graduation ceremony at camp. Mildred

commented on this event in the FJC, noting how such notable events continue to elicit novel grieving actions in her:

FP10: I guess just watching our grandkids, watching them as they grow. Those are the things. It's watching them grow. Like the other day at the kid's camp finale. Watching them and how they're growing...and knowing that they are missing out on having an uncle here who would be excited about what they were doing. Excited about how they're growing. And so those things...it's kind of a round about grief because you see them. You see how good they're doing and...then it's frustrating that he's not here. And so it's a grief, [but] it's a different kind of a grief. (FP₅FJC)

Stan agreed with Mildred in the FSC and elaborated on his feelings of sadness and disappointment that David was not there to witness the growth in his nieces and nephews in the FSC:

MP44: Disappointment, sadness, you know, that he's not there to see the kids grow up. And they don't know who he is. I mean they do because we tell them but, you know, they can't phone and say, 'Uncle David, you know, I'm graduating. Can you come to my graduation?' You know, that kind of stuff. (MP₅FSC)

Throughout the various interviews, both partners acknowledged that their ongoing grieving for David had impacted their relationship with each other. Mildred and Stan indicated that their relationship had both improved and been challenged through David's death. In the first interview, Stan addressed the way in which David's death had affected their ongoing relationship with each other. He noted in the IJC that their relationship was strengthened through the way in which they grieved for their son.

MP15: Statistics say that 75% of the marriages split up after a child dies. And we said right from the start that we would not be a statistic. And I think we've always had a good relationship, but this has brought us closer together than we were before. Don't you agree? (MP₅IJC)

Mildred agreed with Stan on this point, and acknowledged in the ISC that they were both determined not to become a "statistic". However, she also acknowledged that they experienced "tension" in their relationship and that this tension is generally related more to

their ongoing grieving for David than to the initially perceived cause for the tension. She explained in the ISC:

FP65:... We've talked about it many times that we don't want to be that statistic again. It is tough. I mean...but like I said, we can tell the times when...maybe there's tension. This has everything to do with today you remembered something about David and it was a hard day for you. And we just kind of...we cry together and then we move on. (FP₅ISC)

Change in the joint grieving project. Throughout Stan and Mildred's involvement in the study, several changes in their grieving project were noticeable and were described by the couple in the final interviews. As the couple explained in the IWU, FJC and FSC, these changes were marked by increasing feelings of frustration and isolation for Mildred in her grieving, as well as by novel financial stressors, which subsequently led to increasing strain in their relationship. It became evident in the final interviews that these strains also impacted the couple's ability to participate fully in the research process, as they decided to cut their FJC short after talking for only eight minutes with each other. In particular Mildred indicated that she was experiencing significant personal distress at this point in her life.

In the FJC, Mildred described her ongoing pain and longing for their son and compared it to the pain that she felt initially after the loss. She also elaborated on their different ways of grieving and on how their grieving impacted their relationship with each other. She stated in the FJC:

FP6:...I guess, going back...to the beginning it was really intense....pain, gut wrenching pain when we were grieving. Now, I don't feel that it's that way....that much. Sometimes it is. Sometimes it is. It just overwhelms me and I think the grieving....I think, it's the small things now...that affect me now in a different way now because...at first the grief was so....so intense. It's just like there was an elephant standing on my chest. It was so intense. Now it's not so intense. But now it's because....and I grieve differently than you, because I miss David so...sometimes instead of sitting there and having a good cry, I just, because I'm feeling uptight inside because I miss him. Somehow that causes other repercussions and then causes

tension, frustration between the two of us. Frustration at somebody else because...because of that. (FP₅FJC)

Mildred elaborated further on her feelings during the FSC, noting her realization that her feelings of frustration have increased over the years and that the peace, which she initially felt, had been replaced by enduring feelings of disappointment and anger. She also acknowledged that she continued to feel the intense pain that she had initially experienced at the beginning of her grieving process. She noted in the FJC:

FP8: Kind of just what I said before about yeah, now it seems like, like I'm more frustrated. You know?

FP9: Because when he first died, it was just, you just cried all the time. But in the same sense felt very, it sounds ridiculous, but felt very at peace. It sounds kind of weird.

FP10: Just, just felt very, you know, but yet heavy-hearted because he died. Like nothing mattered. It didn't matter when he first died because the, the pain was so strong. I couldn't have cared less if...like, we moved into a house that year. I couldn't care less if they painted the walls green with purple polka dots. Nothing mattered. Things weren't important, you know. Because the pain was so strong but now, it's still there. Sometimes it just hits you like a ton of bricks, you know. But it's not as long. It's not like all day, you know. (FP₅FJC)

In response, Stan acknowledged his compassion for Mildred, noting in particular that their frustrations now are often brought on by “the little things”. He stated in the FSC:

MP35: Well I'm feeling hurt for her and pain for her and the little things, you know, they just can really get to us sometimes. Whereas before it was one big thing now it's a lot of little. As life goes on all the trials that you face every day. (MP₅FSC)

Stan and Mildred also acknowledged that their joint grieving project had been affected by additional life and financial strains, which were, at the time of the interviews, making it more difficult to grieve for their son. Mildred described the current life stressors that interfered with their grieving in the FSC, noting in particular her realization that grieving

is something is that is always present with her and that affects the way in which she addresses other life stressors:

FP26: It has been really stressful in a kind of different kind of way. We went on a budget. We just went on a budget and so I'll think we'll be okay, but it's little things like that. Because the grief is always sitting on the backburner. It's like that small burner at the back of the stove. It's always sitting and it's always on simmer for me. That's the only way I can describe it. And then the other three burners, all of a sudden stuff comes on there and they boil and they boil and then all of a sudden it's just too much. I just can't take it then and I used to be able to. I used to be able to do something every day. I'd work all day and at night I'd entertain. And we'd do this and we'd do that and we'd have people over and I just don't have that stamina any more. And sometimes I do see other moms who have lost children and they've gone on to be able to do that again. And that's when I kind of get down on myself and I think I should, I should be at a different, in a different spot and, and then I think, you know what? This is where I am. I can't, I, it's just where I am. (FP₅FSC)

In spite of these struggles, however, Stan acknowledged in the FSC their determination to keep enduring. When asked about his overall intentions for the FJC, Stan summed up his thoughts as follows:

MP52: I guess just the fact that we still have to go on no matter how rough the road is, no matter how many trials we face, no matter how frustrated we get. We still have to go on and it's a long journey and you just have to walk. No magic formula to get out of it. You just have to carry on...there's no easy way out of this. (MP₅FSC)

Project Summary. From an action-theoretical perspective, the joint grieving project for this couple emerged within multiple ongoing careers and projects and consisted of numerous goal-directed actions. The careers included relationships with each other, their daughter and her family, as well as their longstanding commitments to their common Christian faith. The couple reported that their joint grieving project seemed to be in synch in its early years, as both partners experienced the pain of the loss, grieved their loss intensively, and sought comfort and meaning in their joint faith. More recently, however, the couple had become 'out-of-sync' in their grieving, with Stan maintaining a stable grieving project, supported by his faith community, while Mildred seems to be struggling to align her

divergent inner processes (e.g., anger, disappointment, frustration) with her cognitive understanding and beliefs in her faith. In fact, it appears that her suffering seems linked to this disjunction in her life, a disjunction that is likely produced a significant amount of cognitive and emotional dissonance. In particular, Mildred seemed unable to align an ongoing relationship with a loving and just God with the seemingly meaningless death of her son and her ongoing suffering.

Both partners reported that they were experiencing additional strains, such as financial shortfalls and worries about their future, and that these stressors impacted their joint grieving project. This seems to be especially prominent for Mildred, who felt more frustrated in her daily life and more isolated in her faith than at previous times in her grieving project. Furthermore, at the time of the interviews, the joint grieving project seemed also to incorporate the growing realization that their grieving will continue throughout the rest of their lives, and that it will continue to emerge in novel ways as the couple and their extended family pass through new life milestones (e.g., graduation from a summer camp).

The overall intentional framework for this couple can be described as seeking renewed comfort and meaning through their faith, while striving to sustain their relationship career in the midst of a variety of personal and financial stressors. This intentional framework included a variety of overlapping goals for the couple, such as attending to their relationship careers with each other and their daughter, as well as their faith careers. Additional joint grieving goals included attending to their joint grieving project through remembering David, reflecting upon their grieving journeys, and searching for a spiritual meaning for their son's death and their suffering.

Grieving strategies for this couple included a variety of both individual and joint actions. Joint grieving strategies included reflecting on their individual and joint grieving projects, sharing individual and joint emotional struggles related to grieving and other personal stressors, and reaching out to other bereaved parents. Additional grieving strategies included striving for an authentic faith through regular church attendance and speaking to clergy to resolve some of their confusion about theological questions related to the meaning of suffering. In this regard, Mildred noted that she also frequently sought to avoid potential grieving stressors (e.g., decreased church attendance, ending the research participation prematurely, not completing the journaling exercises) in order to decrease the experienced strain. These avoidance strategies seemed to be directed primarily towards decreasing personal distress for Mildred associated with the discrepancy between her stated beliefs in a loving and just God and her ongoing experience of sadness, frustration, anger, and loneliness.

Manifest behaviours, which were observed in the three sets of interviews, included a wide variety of verbal and non-verbal communication actions. Non-verbal communications included listening, smiling, nodding the head, crying, and laughing. Spoken communication included asking/answering questions, agreeing with the partner, describing self, other, past situations, expressing emotions, such as sadness, anger, uncertainty, ambivalence, joy, disappointment, expressing beliefs, opinions, perceptions, judgments, and describing hypothetical or imagined situations.

Assertions. The joint grieving project of this couple was focused on finding a way to live out divergent grieving paths in the midst of committed and longstanding relationship and faith careers. Of particular note are the emotional and cognitive differences between both partners. Stan had found an acceptable meaning for his son's death and seemed largely able

to cope with the pain of the loss of his son. Mildred, on the other hand, continued to struggle with the discrepancy between her cognitive beliefs and her lived experiences, and therefore seemed more strongly engaged in an ongoing search for a spiritual meaning for her son's death and her ongoing life. The discrepancy between the individual and joint grieving projects, exacerbated by current additional stressors, appeared to lead to strain in the couple's longstanding relationship career.

Cross Case Analysis

The second step in the process of analysis, commonly employed in both action theoretical research (e.g., Valach et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005) and instrumental case designs (Stake, 2005) involves a comparison of the cases with each other, noting both commonalities and unique processes between them. In spite of the demographic and spiritual divergence in the research participants (e.g., ages of participants ranged from fifty-two to seventy years, time since death ranged between five and eighteen years, ages of the deceased ranged from seventeen to twenty-two), analyses revealed six areas of overlap between various participants. Analyses also revealed four unique aspects of joint grieving careers, which related to discrepancies in the couples' grieving projects, the unique spiritual path of one participant, and the sequelae of grieving actions that were uniquely related to the suicide of one the couples' sons.

Commonalities. Commonalities between the joint grieving projects included permanent changes to life trajectories due to the magnitude of the loss, the embedding of the grieving projects within relational, faith, and vocational careers, the emergence of grieving at planned and unplanned moments and the dynamic dimension of grieving over time.

Magnitude of loss. One of the central aspects of the joint grieving projects of all participants related to the ways in which all bereaved parents in this study experienced the death of their children as a cataclysmic event in their lives. The death of their children changed every aspect of their existence, provoked them to re-examine life values, challenged their faiths and altered their identities. The following quotes address the magnitude of the impact of the loss, its pervasiveness in the lives of bereaved parents, as well as their reflections on the ways in which they understood themselves to have changed permanently. In short, the loss of their children seemed to have initiated not only an ongoing joint grieving project, but also a variety of pervasive life projects, projects which pervade all aspects of their lives, have resulted in renegotiated life goals and values, and have at times led to permanent changes in identity and personality. At times these life projects were focused on the actions of one partner (e.g., Hank's theological studies or Clara's poetry workshops), while at other times the projects reflected shared commitments and goals (e.g., Stan and Mildred's care for other bereaved parents or Hank and Clara's engagement with a bereaved parent support group). The quotes below are examples of the perceived magnitude of the loss, as well as the resulting changes in identity, personality, and the new life projects.

For example, Carole stated in her first journal entry that she struggled to think of her grieving as a separate activity because she believed it to be completely embedded within her life. She commented on the pervasiveness of grieving and its connection to all aspects of her life by stating that, "grieving becomes a filter through which you experience the world" (FP₁Journal₁). Lance equally indicated in his first phone call that he sees his grieving as a way of being rather than a discrete project. He stated that "if you want to know who I am you need to know about my loss, it's not all of who I am, but it is a significant part of who I am".

He spoke about his loss as being part of his identity, part of who he is, and that at the beginning of the grieving journey the loss was his identity. He spoke also about the belief that “I’ll never be the same again”.

Other participants commented on the ways in which their grieving had permanently altered dimensions of their personality. Gwen, for example, spoke about how she believed that her personality had changed as a result of the death of her son. In the following quote she addressed this perceived change in the FJC:

FP3:...on my way home that day, it triggered that...feeling of....how would I be a different person and how would....would I be much happier, much more jolly? I came to the conclusion that...I think I would've been. A lot more bubbly. I seem to have withdrawn. I've just withdraw from these conversations and just become a listener because there is nothing to say and in this stage of your life...these friends who were great support for me those early years, they don't want to hear me say...that I haven't got any grandchildren yet. I may never have grandchildren because Joel died.
(FP₃FJC)

Mildred also commented on how she viewed herself as having changed in response to her loss. She stated in the ISC that they have had to adjust to a “new normal” in their lives:

FP82: I realized that we have. It's like sometimes people say well are things back to normal? And ah...there's, Patsy Clairmont is a Christian writer and she writes a book “Normal is only a setting on your dryer”. And I've used that many times when people have said...are things back to normal? I said, well, what is normal? Normal is only a setting on your dryer. And that's really helped me because what is normal? We're in a new normal. It's not the same normal as before David died. This is a new normal. This is our life now. And this is what we have to deal with and how we have to cope with things. And how we go through Christmas and how we go through birthdays and Father's Day and you know, the day he died. All those kind of things. It's a new way of doing it. We do it and we've done it...so far we've survived. (FP₅ISC)

Compassion for bereaved parents. As a result of the experience of the loss and the subsequent shift in identity, all of the participants spoke of their compassion for other bereaved people, particularly newly bereaved parents. For some participants this shared emotional connection gave rise to both individual and joint grieving actions and projects,

such as when the Hank and Clara attended and gave leadership to a local bereaved parent support group or when Stan and Mildred chose to start a support group for bereaved parents and annually published a bereavement-related poem in their church's bulletin. The following quotes represent another example of how parents – in the case Fred and Sandra – experienced an emotional connection to other bereaved parents and how they expressed this connection in the midst of their joint grieving career. In the following quote from the FJC, Fred expressed realization that this experience of sadness and connection is part of his daily life. Sandra, who commented on Fred's realization in the FSC, noted further that she believed that these grieving actions related both to their own pain and sadness over the loss of their son and also to an empathic awareness over the pain that she believed the other parents were experiencing.

MP3: ... When there's the news on and something happening to people with a child that's....past away or....you almost instantly feel....just emotionally start to drain. Tears in your eyes almost each time. And whether it be a...little blip or something a little bit more further than that...it happens all the time. (MP₄FJC)

FP6: Well he was talking about when we hear about things on the news or, or someone has lost a child or whatever about how that experience, you kind of go inside yourself and go down. And for me I was thinking about not only that kind of relating to your own experience, but also knowing what pain they're going through. And so I go back to that much later but...what was going through my head then is, I wonder if that, was that's part of what happens too is that you not only relate to your pain, you also relate to their pain and know how hard it is for them to deal with that. (FP₄FSC)

Grieving and relationship careers. All research participants also commented on the ways in which their joint grieving emerged in and was intricately related to multiple relationship careers. This included ongoing relationship careers between each of the couples and also lifelong commitments to adopted (Couple 2) and biological children (Couples 1, 3, 4 and 5). Some participants (e.g, Carole and Clara) experienced this connection so strongly that they found it difficult to separate grieving projects and relationship careers. For example,

Clara commented in the IJC that she experienced the intense relationship careers with her adopted children as interfering with her ongoing grieving project for her biological son:

FP1: ... You know the whole thing with James and our hopes for him and having our hopes dashed...and Susan having this baby which - I should love the birth of a baby - and I'm even bitter about that, but I think my bitterness, well those disappointing circumstances interfere with my simple love for Max [crying]. (FP₂IJC)

Some participants also spoke about the way in which they or their partners adopted unique grieving roles within the relationship. These roles were characterized by patterns of action adopted within the relationship and enacted in relation to each other. For example, in the ISC Tom characterized his grieving as “mostly joint” because he saw himself as not really grieving a lot individually but rather being drawn into his grieving through Carole’s grieving actions. Thus, he seemed to have adopted a passive grieving role in which he honoured Carole’s individual grieving actions and was open to being drawn into joint grieving actions. As their joint grieving project changed over the course of their research involvement, Tom became more invested in enacting his own grieving actions. Both partners confirmed that Tom’s increased attention to his individual grieving project had resulted in increased individual awareness and grieving actions as well as in an increased frequency of joint grieving actions. This individual attention to and enactment of his grieving seemed to have enabled Tom to become a more fully engaged and equal partner in their joint grieving career.

Similarly, Hank also reflected in the ISC on the various roles that they had adopted in their grieving for Max. Hank noted that Clara’s “preoccupation” with her grieving, her daily individual grieving rituals, her involvement with a parental bereavement support group and her writing about her grief had “absolved” him of some of his need to grieve individually. He commented on this understanding in the ISC, after commenting on a remark made by Clara

in the IJC about how she used to pray daily in front of a picture of her son:

MP1: Well - she's talking about her kneeling, I'm imagining our bedroom and where Max's picture is. There's always a candle in front of it, there's always a flower behind it in a vase, and it is...and Clara would kneel at that place every night for 12 years before she went to sleep... You know, in a way, as we age, one of the things we talk about is that we do grieve differently, every person does of course, and men and women definitively grieve differently. And in a way her preoccupation with grief has become her central, and in a way she carries such a huge burden of it. It's like she kinda absolves me of the responsibility. (MP₁ISC)

Grieving and faith careers. The joint grieving projects of all couples were informed by their ongoing faith careers and at times gave rise to changes in these faith careers. These faith careers were multi-dimensional and dynamic and intimately related to the joint grieving projects of the couples. The most common relationship involved the experience of faith/spirituality as a resource for finding/making meaning of the deaths of their children and of their joint and individual grieving projects. Spiritual meaning also served as a source of comfort and solace for many bereaved parents and often involved imagining the child's ongoing afterlife and the eventual reunification of the family in that afterlife. Indeed, for most parents in the study, their experience of the continuing bond with their child was enabled by their faith in the child's ongoing life in heaven. And while the faith or spirituality of participants certainly addressed their individual relationship with the Divine, some couples also experienced a horizontal dimension to their faith; that is, their faith emerged in their relationship and was influenced by the faith or spiritual practice of their partner. This reciprocal dimension of the faith reached beyond the confines of the marital relationships for many couples and was echoed in the relationships with members of their spiritual or faith communities. And while most participants experienced this to be a comforting relationship, it at times was also a source of distress. Finally, several participants also noted that their

spiritual practice or faith was invigorated by mystical experiences related to the death of their children.

Searching for meaning. Numerous participants described their grieving projects as involving a search for the meaning of the deaths of their children and the meaning of their ongoing lives post loss. The following three quotes are representative of the various ways in which the participants found and made meaning of the deaths of their children. The first quote comes from Lance, a retired salesperson and evangelical Christian, who explains his trust in the meaningfulness of his son's death and his own life in spite of not knowing the meaning with certainty. The second quote represents the way in which Fred is searching for meaning, wondering if there may be a Divine being who is coordinating the actions of those who are grieving for his son. Finally, the third quote represents a conversation between Stan and Mildred in which they reminded themselves of the meaning that they had found in their son's death.

MP42: ... There is a peace that we don't have to get an answer to these questions. It's not hammering at God's door, demanding an answer and getting increasingly angry that we don't get one. But the peace that even in our questioning, God is there, saying, you're not getting an answer to that question, but trust me. And that's, and that's peace... It's emotional in the sense that to question is at the very core of your being. We spend all our lives questioning, don't we? I mean, from, when the children can first speak - why this, why that? You know? Every question leads to another question. So questioning is at the core of our being... And so it's emotional. We say that this huge event, this huge loss, this huge tragedy has happened in our lives and, and, and we're trying to understand it. We're trying to understand why God, our loving heavenly Father, would permit this. So it's emotional but it's saying, even in all this emotion, we've learned that there is peace. There's not an answer, but there's peace. (MP₃FSC)

MP10: It's difficult to correlate or try and make sense of. It's something that's taking place or...or that you perceive or think to be taking place, I guess. At least I do. I think the 5-year thing has something to do with it, too. Five year anniversaries...of one thing or another. It's a milestone. Whether or not someone is moving the characters to help some of this. It's the way it is I guess. Whether...it may not make a direct move but one move leads to another one, which leads to a 3rd one...so about the 5th or 6th

down the road is...[name] is contacting us by email or running into [name]. It's come to the point where it's not as shocking anymore. We're not as....surprised anymore. But still makes you think anyway (MP₄FJC)

FP5: Like Pastor [name] said, He made us, He understands, and He didn't...He didn't plan that David was gonna die. But, it was in His plan, right? That on March the 2nd, 1997, it was David's time to go home. It wasn't that He planned for that van that...yes, this is gonna be the one that's gonna kill David. That wasn't...I don't believe that was any way. [He allowed it to happen]. He allowed...because that was the day that David was going home...

MP7: If he hadn't been there that day...

FP7: Then maybe it would have happened in a different time. [yeah] Because that was his day. That was, it's like a big book in heaven. And David's name was down there for 1997, March 2nd. (MP₅IJC & FP₅IJC)

What is noteworthy about these quotes is that while each participant was engaging in an individual and joint search for the meaning of their child's death, these meanings were informed by divergent faith perspectives, personal histories and interpretations of events. Thus, it is not surprising to find differences in the meanings they found and constructed. What is common, however, is the fact that they all did engage in a search for meaning and that their meanings were intimately tied to their faith perspectives. Furthermore, as the next quote highlights, the meanings attained also shifted as the parent's grieving project shifted over time. In the following quote, Mildred reflected on how her search for meaning was once again re-invigorated by the process of questioning. She stated in the FSC:

FP12: I know that Stan is exactly what he said. You know, he just believes that God has a plan and I do, too. I do. I'm just not where, where he is. Right now I guess I'm confused sometimes, just kinda wondering. I know that this was all in..., 'cause God has our days written down. He knows when we're going to die. I know that. But sometimes I still, I guess you wonder why it was, why is it us who has to go through this? And we won't know that, we keep saying we'll never know that until, until we get to heaven, we won't know that. But I'm just not always as positive as Stan is. (FP₅FSC)

Seeking and finding comfort in faith. In addition to being a source of spiritual meaning, participants frequently sought and at times found comfort and solace in their faith.

The following quotes represent examples of this search for comfort. For several parents, the search for comfort seemed to be connected to their search for meaning as well, and it was often the meaning that was found in their child's life and death that also lent comfort to them. The first quote, taken from the FJC of Lance and Merle, is emblematic of spiritual meaning as a source of comfort – in this case it was the way in which this couple understood the parable of the prodigal son as a personal reassurance of their son's forgiveness. A second source of comfort, represented in the second quote below, related to the ways in which several parents imagined the lives of their children going on in heaven. Although the quote comes from Tom, several other parents (e.g., Carole, Hank, Lance, Merle, Stan, Mildred) also reiterated wondering about and imagining their child's ongoing life in heaven, a life that for them now was safe from pain and harm. Indeed, it is worth noting that the continuing bond that all parents described in this study was frequently facilitated through their faith in their child's ongoing life. The nature of this ongoing life varied slightly among parents, with some (e.g., Tom, Carole, Stan, Mildred, Lance, Gwen) focusing on their child's life in heaven and others (e.g., Hank, Clara, Sandra) emphasizing their child's felt and visible presence in this world. The following quotes are indicative of this diversity.

MP7: And we have the image that was so vivid because the times that was rarely spoken about around the time of Joel's death, the parable of the prodigal son, of the son returning to the Father. And the Father running out and to meet him. And as Jesus says out of this parable and says that the Father fell on his sons neck and kissed him. And we are reminded every time we read that of the image of God, of Christ accepting...Joel into his heart, into his arms and seeking him out. Forgiven...for that wrongful act of taking his life. Forgiven, accepted and that Joel, that God allowed Joel to come out. He could have stopped it. We keep coming back to that, don't we? And like you, I think it's only natural to keep asking God why? And...I think of...Wolterstorff's words, as he said, God can be found in the questions, not just in the answers. But we ask God the questions and we simply hear silence and yet we seem to know that God is there. And that he seems to be saying to us...I can't provide you with an answer that you would understand. Trust me. And it comes back to our knowing our trust that ordered our lives, Joel's life. Richard's life. (MP₃FJC)

MP13: Yeah, it's definitely comfort for me. 'Cause I think part of your father's heart is that you want to protect you little girl. And to know that she's in a place where she can't be hurt, she can't experience pain. To me the loss is there, but that gives me huge comfort to know that she can't be raped, she can't be...have an abusive experience and...the loss is huge but to know that it's so good for her and that one day we'll join her. (MP₁ISC)

MP67: I'm [silence] in a way convinced that he is still with us and that in a very visible way...I feel like he's still with us...it's very reassuring for me. [But] with Clara's, the difference I mean with her, there's a sense that he's not there, that she has to continually hang on and reaffirm that he's there. And for me, he's there. You know, I don't have to worry about that, there's always evidence for that, like when I turn here, there's evidence that Max is there, I turn there, there's even to the point where people who never met him and know who he is, are building tributes to him, it's amazing. (MP₂ISC)

FP85: It is continuing. And you know, I mean, he's my first born. He taught me everything about being a parent. Everything that I know, you know, everything was a new experience. Even his death was a new experience for me...And still happens, you know. My relationship with him changes. It's quite remarkable. (FP₄FSC)

In addition to offering comfort, several parents talked about the ways in which their faith accorded them strength and how they felt paradoxically enriched by their loss. The following two quotes reveal different aspects to this experience, with Hank speaking about the strength and fulfilment he has found through his faith and Stan addressing the ways in which his faith in and understanding of God have been solidified through his loss.

MP77:...You know I can speak personally. I never feel resentful about it...And I think if anything my life of faith is...the reason why I don't feel bitter. I don't feel embittered. I prayed for that...and it's not just a Pollyanna view that I feel. But I feel enriched. I feel fulfilled in many ways. (MP₂FSC)

MP8: Well, I still think that it's strengthened my faith. As time goes on I know that...God has a plan and I believe that plan and...it seems like we have more frustrations and yet...the Lord has brought us to be there for us even in the 11 years. And...we've gone on. (MP₅FJC)

Faith as a source of distress. Although for most parents their faith was a resource in their joint grieving project, some parents also spoke of their faith as a source of distress as

well. Parents revealed their feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment, frustration and confusion with God. It is worth noting that these descriptions of their grieving projects were often uttered by the same parents who also found comfort and meaning in their faith. This points to the complexity of the relationship between parents' grieving projects and faith careers and to the capacity of parents to experience a variety of emotions simultaneously or sequentially.

The following quotes are representative of the diversity of emotions that related to the spiritual lives of the bereaved parents. The first quote is from Merle, who recalled her shock and anger at God for not protecting her son. In the second quote, Lance talked about his disappointment and confusion with God for not protecting his son. The third and fourth quotes, from Clara's journal and Mildred's ISC respectively, are examples of parents voicing their anger at God. The final quote is from Hank, who talked about vacillating between faith and doubt in his grieving journey.

FP6:...That night was a night that will never be erased from my mind. I prayed a lot during that time and my prayer was, as I left the house the afternoon, I asked the Lord to protective arms around Joel, protect him til I got home. And of course that was, that was the thing that shocked me, angered me, that God would let me down. The one thing I asked was that He protect my child and He didn't. (FP₃IWU)

MP34: Yes, and I don't think perhaps we've used the word disappointment in the question, there's also disappointment with God. That comes into your mind. God, I'm disappointed that You didn't work these things out differently. Why? And as you say, it's an ongoing thing that you, in a sense you resolve it and then the question is back and you go through the resolution process again on a not really resolved because you don't resolve it in the sense of getting an answer and I think I begin to talk about my favourite author [laughter] again in a moment. (MP₃FSC)

Travelling the Grief Road: alone and together (& faith?). Spent last week alone (well, that means without Hank) at [a retreat centre] on [a gulf island]. A writing workshop. I vowed (before I left) that I would not share my 15-year-old grief with strangers. So, guess what, at the first breakfast there, when asked if I had children, I told about my dead one. I also referred to grandchildren, 7-year-old Julie, as a source of joy...But by Wed night (I had arrived on Sun. night), I was missing Hank. I phone home to

discover Julie there. Yet another crisis. Really, it's like another death: she has revealed who her molester is. Susan is freaking out. Grandpa is babysitting. I couldn't sleep that night, so left my beautiful restorative retreat and workshop 2 days early. When will this suffering be over? [a quote from an Ontario writer – writing from the point of a Cath. Priest in an impoverished and skickly northern town]. My faith here? Shit! I'm angry at God this time. Another destroyed child! “Damaged goods” as Hank's brother always says of James and Susan, our adopted children, when their behaviour again outrages us. Poor Julie. Now, as I write, she is not allowed to play with the other kids at lunch or recess. She has a child care worker all the time. This last action came after, on Friday [the day after I retired) she asked a grade one boy to come for a sleepover & she would put his penis in her mouth. 10 mothers have complained, acc. to Susan. So I'm supposed to be writing about my grief as a bereaved parent. Now I'm a bereaved grandparent. Self pity – there it is again! “God, don't let me be bitter!” was my prayer after Max died. Now it's “God help me in my bitterness”. (FP₂Journal₁)

FP7: Just remembering how I went from being close to God to not feeling that way...I remember being, feeling like...whatever. I do remember those kind of feelings because I didn't feel that way then. I felt...I went from feeling close to God...to being angry. But not being angry, shaking fist angry, angry hurting angry kind of. You know? (FP₃ISC)

MP59: I'm thinking that there's a real need to hold onto hope and to give meaning to those things that are incomprehensible. And then I'm talking about preparing prayers...and then at some point it becomes a kind of academic exercise, you know, it just becomes like it's a paper you have to write or an exercise you have to complete, you know, something like that. And then I do, and then you go, this is a load of crap...I just finished this paper on Psalm 126, the first two lines are when Lord restored the fortunes of Zion we were like those who dream. And it's like and the power there is to imagine salvation, these are post-exilic Jews living, returning to Jerusalem, thinking about what it was like in Babylon. And so you think that and they were like we were, those who were dreaming of restoration, and you can hear Martin Luther King going, I have a dream. So there was a power and so there are times when that happens and it's just like, you know you just want to get up and preach it, be able tell somebody. And there are other times when you just go, what a bunch of shit this is, you know... (MP₂ISC)

Faith and the relationship with the partner. In addition to the relationship of the parents to the Divine, participants also revealed that their faith was intimately related to their relationship with their partner and their partner's faith career. The various quotes below are indicative of the intersections of the various aspects of the couples' careers and projects.

For example, in the first quote Carole addresses the way in which her faith career was steadied by the faith of her partner. The second quote, from Clara, speaks to her reliance upon and resentment of Hank's faith. The final quote, from Mildred, concerns the perceived discrepancy between her faith career and that of her partner Stan (as well as their faith community), and the distress that resulted from this discrepancy.

FP32: This is really Tom. When you see this it'll look like he's preaching, but he's not. This is all the stuff he says to himself. He finds most of his comfort is in Scripture and in thinking of the afterlife. His faith is so profound, so deep, that he never even has a question of...what will happen in the afterlife... Yeah, but he's so grounded and so...his faith is so deep and so real...[And] it feels familiar. When he talks, when he does this it just feels familiar. Just sameness. Sameness, stability. It just, you know, that's one of the things I love the most about Tom is just how stable and level-headed and down to earth he is. I love it that he's not emotionally fragile. I really like that. There's a strength in that. (FP₁ISC)

FP27: Well I'm ambivalent because...in many ways I resent Hank's strength. And so a few minutes ago I just told you that it was reassuring to hear him doubting . And now I'm beginning to think, oh oh. He's doubting. (ya) But you know how he told a little story of the picture (ya) and...Hank has a capacity for joy that...somehow is part of his personality. Ya. I think I've withdrawn into...although I'm listening to him (ya), I'm running my thoughts through still. My feelings that is. (FP₂ISC)

FP20: It's just that we grieve together but Stan grieves differently than I do and, and you know what? He's...I don't want to say he's pretty much okay. That sounds really cold. But he has come to grips. He has come to grips with David's death. And I don't think I have. And sometimes I wonder if I ever will. I remember when Trudeau, Prime Minister Trudeau died. At his funeral, somebody said they didn't that he ever had gotten over the death of his son. That rings in my head many times, and I think, I think that will be me. 'Cause it just, you think you do. And you do. You go to weddings and you do all kinds of things but, but I'm not the same person that I was before David died. And Stan isn't either but he's way ahead. (FP₅FSC)

Faith invigorated by mystical experiences. Several parents commented on the ways in which their joint grieving projects and faith careers were invigorated by mystical or spiritual experiences. These experiences varied in kind (e.g., visions, interpretations of events) and in content, but were recounted by the various participants as powerful experiences that revitalized their joint grieving projects and informed their faith careers. The following two

quotes represent separate accounts of such mystical-spiritual experiences. The first is by Hank, who recalled a vision that he had had a few months after the death of his son, and which subsequently guided him to proceed with the construction of Max's Cabin. The second quote is from Merle, who, along with Lance, reported multiple visions and sense-of-presence experiences. In this account, Merle recalled the vision of a white light emanating from her son's room on the night of his death.

MP75: ... I had this vision and the vision I had completely, like this is a real central moment to this whole grieving process for me, I was very keening and crying like I had never cried never in my life, and when I was crying I had this vision and what I had, I saw this picking up a sack of cement and the vertebrae were glowing, shimmering, and the shimmering turned into the horns, the antlers of a buck, of a stag, and floated off, and Max was part of that, he was holding onto this bag of cement, and it was on the beach on [location] where we were building, this whole scene was set [location] on the beach, he was picking up a bag of cement and putting it on the beach, and when I came back I told my brother, I said we have to build [the cabin], we hadn't started building yet, so that is tied, that is...ok we're going up there, we're gonna pour the the footings this summer, and then we took the two kids up there with us, we poured the footings and the building has continued since. (MP₂ISC)

FP6:...So Richard and I set off to go down and it was like that much snow and ice and it was just starting when Lance came home from a business dinner that night. So the three of us went [down the road] and we were met by Police. And [crying]. I think I've gone as far as I can go. That night was a night that will never be erased from my mind. I prayed a lot during that time and my prayer was, as I left the house the afternoon, I asked the Lord to protective arms around Joel, protect him til I got home. And of course that was, that was the thing that shocked me, angered me, that God would let me down. The one thing I asked was that He protect my child and He didn't. So of course when we didn't see Joel, the Police came back with us to our home, stayed with us 'til about 3 in the morning. I was in very deep shock, I just was like a block of ice. I couldn't react to anything. They asked a number of questions, and cause my mind just couldn't, wouldn't focus. At 3 o'clock they left, making sure that were ok. We thought that they were extremely helpful, comforting. And so I went on upstairs, and as I came to the top of the stairs, Grant's room was on the left. Something drew me into that room, and it was a like a white light, a white vision. And the Lord said to me, He said, he's in my care now, Gwen. So there was the answer to asking for protective arms to be around him. You don't have to worry, he's in my care. And it just, the light just disappeared, and I guess I couldn't even tell Lance that. Cause in shock you don't really know what's taking place. And then I went off to bed and I guess I slept somewhat until the next day. (FP₃IWU)

Planned and unplanned grieving. A further commonality of the joint grieving projects of these bereaved parents pertains to the ways in which all projects included both planned and unplanned grieving actions. Planned grieving often took on the form of rituals that marked special occasions. Examples of planned grieving actions included Tom and Carole's annual trips to Whistler, visits to Max's Post for Hank and Clara, daily joint Scripture reading and prayer for Merle and Lance, taking time to look through pictures and showing their daughter's fiancé old family photo albums for Fred and Sandra, and remembering the anniversary of their son's death with an extended family picnic at the cemetery for Mildred and Stan. All the couples also mentioned additional joint grieving rituals, which are detailed in the within case analyses.

In addition to these planned grieving actions, all couples also detailed unplanned grieving actions, which, though intentional, were different from the planned actions in that they did not involve planning and foresight and typically lasted only a few moments. All of the couples spoke of their grieving projects emerging at unexpected times, being 'triggered' by associations or memories and impacting them on a near-daily basis. Examples of such unplanned grieving actions included encountering a girl who looked like Sonja at the mall for Tom and Carole, receiving the news of their granddaughter's sexual molestation for Hank and Clara, reading a newspaper article on stress, depression and suicide for Merle and Lance, attending a football game and witnessing a commemorative ceremony for Fred and Sandra and remembering the broken VCR, which was fixed by their son, for Mildred and Stan. The following quotes are representative of several research participants who spoke about their grieving as generally arising organically and unintentionally throughout the day. In the first quote, Carole commented in the IJC on remembering her daughter throughout the day, but

also of planning special joint grieving actions. In the second quote, Lance commented on his understanding of grieving unfolding over time and not being limited by a defined end point.

FP7: Yeah, I think our grieving is more well, not like this of course, when you're in a structured room and people looking at videotapes and things. Obviously, but we do talk quite a bit and I think we have remembrances throughout our day. Like Sonja's name may come up once or twice in conversation with each other. We'll - like the other night, I can't even remember what it was when we were sitting on the couch and you said something. Oh, I reminded you about the time when there was a spider going across the floor and you threw a cup over top or killed it or so you thought, threw a cup overtop and J was terrified of spiders. And when you lifted it up it was alive and she flew up to the top of the couch screaming, right? And I don't know what brought that up, you threw a book on top of something crawling across the floor or something [a bee] - a bee, yeah. And that brought it up. And I think, it's just she's so much apart of our everyday lives, that it's not like, it's not like you set aside necessarily special - you do that, too - but it's more like everyday we'll find something to talk about her something... (FP₁IJC)

MP12: The interesting thing or the reality I suppose about grieving, is that it's not, to me it's not a project that you pick, it's not a project, if you call it a project, that you set out any structure of where you're going with this and how you're going to achieve any goal. In fact, I'm not sure that there is no end point. It unfolds as it unfolds and different things are important at different times. (MP₃MCI)

Grieving and vocations. The joint grieving projects for many of the participants in this research study were embedded not only within relational and faith careers, but also were enacted within the context of their vocations. The vocational careers for the participants varied widely, ranging from full-time theological studies as a second career to working as a grocery store clerk to retirement. Interestingly, nearly all of the bereaved parents commented on the ways in which their vocations interacted with their joint grieving projects, at times hindering their grieving (e.g., Carole, Fred, Mildred), enabling their grieving (e.g., Tom, Merle, Sandra, Stan) or taking on a more neutral role as a contextual variable that shaped their grieving (e.g., Hank, Clara, Lance). The following quotes address the ways the relationships between grieving projects and vocational careers of the research participants emerged in their lives. The first quote is from Sandra's FSC and focuses on how her place of

work facilitated her grieving. The second quote, from the ISC of Mildred, speaks about how she struggled to grieve as a sales clerk at a grocery store.

FP19: You know, in my work I get to enact all of my values, what I believe in and what's important to me and, it's not just like a job. It's more like a calling, which is different, 'cause all of you is in it. Where I think other jobs...you're doing something but you don't have to call on every resource that you have...[It] brought something to my awareness that I didn't realize about how alone he is with it a lot of the time. Whereas, I don't feel that way a whole lot of the time. I always feel like there's people around that I can talk to. (FP₄FSC)

FP69:...I do remember saying things like that him because he's a salesman. He's in the car all the time. And he would come home and he would say some speaker that he heard on the radio and that he'd talked about grief or talked about something. And here I was at work and I was working with a boss who was...he was just really struggling emotionally and so I kind of found exactly what I just said. I'd come to work and I'd drive to work and I'd, I could hardly stand it. I drove past where the accident happened every day at that time. And...that's all I could think about. But I knew that when I came to work, I was a cashier. I couldn't do that there. I had to come to work and so at work, I worked. And then when I got to my car then I could cry all the way home if I needed to or whatever. But I remember the day I went back to work. I went back to work three weeks after David died, Stan went back two weeks. And it was a little grocery store where you kind of knew everybody. And I'll never forget that day because...I thought I was, I think I was a good cashier. I know I was. But that day, I just didn't want to do, I couldn't. I remembered nothing and the customers who I knew, they came through. And I remember the one girl and she said, Mildred we're going to help you. And she came around the side and she bagged groceries for me. And she said, slowly, just do it one at a time. And that really helped me. They were very helpful and it was just a small thing. But you know, that's a hard thing, to go back to work and even though things that you know, that you've done, and then for somebody to take that and just say, well help you with this. It was just a small thing. All she did was put those groceries in a bag. (FP₅ISC)

Grieving changes. The joint grieving projects for all couples revealed a dynamic dimension, as evidenced by their evolution over the course of their involvement in the research project. For each couple this evolution was not only related to changes in their grieving actions but often impacted by events in their lives – graduations, milestones, anniversaries and so forth. The grieving projects were enacted in the midst of changing life

circumstances and events, events that highlighted the absence of their child and in which they enacted their grieving anew.

Although these changes are elaborated more fully in the within-case analyses above, a few examples may serve as a brief reminder. Hank and Clara, a couple whose lives were often focused on managing the emerging crises in their adopted children's lives, found that they became increasingly distracted from their ongoing grieving for Max as their adopted children's crises demanded their attention and action. Lance and Merle, whose grieving project had unfolded over the past 18 years, also commented on how they missed their son in new ways, particularly as they recalled the milestone event of their Richard's marriage. The grieving project for Fred and Sandra likewise included joint reflections on the changes in their grieving project. The quote below is a brief excerpt from the FSC, in which Sandra comments on her expected retirement and on the sense that this change will once again reveal new facets of their ongoing loss and grief:

FP17: And then sometimes I think at work a couple ladies have been talking about retiring and I think, you know, in four or five whatever years I could think about it. And I think, you know, you're just going to get old. And he still won't be here. It sounds silly. It sounds weird. But those are the thoughts I have....And Sarah's great. Sarah's great at being there. But you still, it's that hole that's missing in our family. (FP₄FSC)

Unique processes. As is evident from the preceding section, the grieving projects of the bereaved parents in this study included numerous commonalities. These commonalities emerged in spite of the many differences between the couples, differences that included spiritual/faith journeys, age, time since death, causes of death and so forth. And while there was certainly a significant overlap in the grieving projects of the bereaved parents, several unique processes also emerged and offered a contrast to the shared grieving processes.

The first such unique grieving action related to the way in which Stan and Mildred addressed the discrepancies in their grieving project. All couples in this research project spoke about the ways in which each partner grieved in his or her own way and how these unique grieving actions emerged out of their unique history and were expressions of their unique personhood. For example, Tom and Carole's grieving project included comparisons between their expressions of emotion in grieving, with Tom commenting on how he enjoyed remembering the "positive" aspects of their daughter's life. Carole, by contrast, spoke about how her individual grieving project included remembering both "positive" aspects of her daughter's life and also attending to other elements – the pain of the loss and her longing to be reunited with her daughter. Frequently, Carole expressed this sadness and longing through tears. The grieving projects of the other couples also included such individual differences. What is common about these discrepancies is that most of the couples' joint grieving projects included sufficient room for diversity in grieving, that is, the grieving projects were flexible enough to sustain individual differences and these differences were not necessarily perceived as threatening to the jointness of their grieving.

For Mildred and Stan, however, this was seemingly not the case. While the joint grieving project initially included a lot of similarity for both partners (e.g., both reported feeling "closer to God" at the beginning of their grieving), Mildred reported experiencing a dissonance between her beliefs in core theological assertions of their evangelical Christian faith (e.g., goodness and love of God, meaningfulness of life, sovereignty of God) and her emotional experience of suffering. Both partners acknowledged that Mildred's grieving project was divergent in this regard from Stan's, as well as from the theological assertions of her faith community. What is particularly noteworthy is that this lack of integration within

the individual grieving project for Mildred was experienced as intensely painful and isolating, contributed to relational strain for the couple, and played a part in the premature termination of the FJC. It is also worth acknowledging that it was not the discrepancies between Stan and Mildred's individual grieving projects, which were the source of the suffering, but rather Mildred's response to and emotional experience of these differences as painful and isolating. The quote below, from Mildred's FSC, expresses her understanding of the felt discrepancy between her grieving project and that of her partner.

FP20: It's just that we grieve together but Stan grieves differently than I do and, and you know what? He's...I don't want to say he's pretty much okay. That sounds really cold. But he has come to grips. He has come to grips with David's death. And I don't think I have. And sometimes I wonder if I ever will. I remember when Trudeau, Prime Minister Trudeau died. At his funeral, somebody said they didn't that he ever had gotten over the death of his son. That rings in my head many times, and I think, I think that will be me. 'Cause it just, you think you do. And you do. You go to weddings and you do all kinds of things but, but I'm not the same person that I was before David died. And Stan isn't either but he's way ahead. (FP₅FSC)

A second unique process in the grieving projects of the participants was strongly related to the unique cause of death of Merle and Lance's son. Both partners acknowledged that their joint grieving project was shaped by their son's suicide. In particular, they noted their grieving project involved protecting themselves, their remaining son and the memory of their deceased son through hiding or minimizing the cause of death. The following quote, from Lance's ISC, addresses these protective actions. The protection took on various forms in their joint grieving project, including initially lying about the cause of death, hiding or minimizing the cause of death to friends and relatives and highlighting the praiseworthy qualities of their deceased son.

MP9:...What was so painful in those early days. It was the...as you've heard me say, the mixture of embarrassment and sort of a shame that was unexplainable. We could look at each other and say we've been kind, caring parents. And I think we still believe we gave both our boys a very loving upbringing. But the sense that other

people would judge us differently. But then...not just us and you see I shifted my focus to, away from us, to the fact that we wanted to protect Joel. We were so proud of that boy. And we hadn't mentioned, he was...also an excellent pianist. He'd reached...I forget the grades now. The Royal Conservatory. His next exam would have been the licentiate. So he was up to the top...He'd passed the grade 12...so you know, there were all these things that we were so proud of. And he was a handsome guy. I mean, you know, every parent's dream of a young man. And...I wanted to protect him. We wanted people to still think highly of him. That's what I'm...that's how I'm feeling again there. What am I feeling? It's that feeling of...despair as to how do we deal with this situation. (MP₃ISC)

This unique process in Lance and Merle's joint grieving project seemed to be directly attributable to his cause of death, the couple's reported shame and guilt over the suicide of their son, their worries about public perception and judgments of other parents. While they acknowledged that this facet of their grieving project had subsided – they felt freer to speak about their son's death as a suicide – Lance and Merle also acknowledged and enacted that they still sought to protect themselves and their son's memory when speaking about his death in the research project.

A third unique process was evident in Fred and Sandra's joint grieving project. This unique process was related to the way in which their extended family grieved together with them for Steven. All other couples also reported that their joint grieving projects included grieving together with family, friends and at times, strangers. Frequently, these grieving projects included remembering their child's lives, the impact of their lives on others, and were accompanied by feelings of pride and joy. Most parents were very pleased if friends or family acknowledged their deceased child and many were highly motivated to ensure that their deceased child was not forgotten, For example, Merle and Lance's joint grieving project included maintaining deliberate and ongoing contact with Joel's friends. This ongoing contact was both a way of remaining connected to their son and the legacy of his life as well

as remembering, and in this case assuring themselves, that his life was not “wasted” but rather had a positive impact on the world.

Most couples in this study were excited to learn of their child’s ongoing impact on the lives of friends and relatives. However, Sandra’s grieving project differed markedly in this point. For her, the ways in which other people remembered her son only seemed to intensify her own grief. She described this as “overwhelming”, which may have been due in part to the fact that they had recently crossed the threshold of the 5-year anniversary of Steven’s death and that now people were increasingly contacting them in relation to their deceased child. In the FSC, Sandra spoke about the way in which the grieving stories of friends and relatives “multiply” her own grieving and how this is “overwhelming” to her at this point in her grieving project. She noted in the FSC:

FP40: So, we [were] talking about how other people are grieving, too, and I don't know if you're oblivious to it but you, I think to see it written in black and white and to see the impact that your child had on other people's lives only exaggerates the loss. It makes it worse because you're, you realize how much bigger it is than just you and your loss. Your loss is different as a part. Her loss is different as his girlfriend for eight years, right?...And his friend's loss is different as somebody he's grown up with practically his entire life and been in a band with and done all these things and had visions and dreams together and so that the losses are so much different and yet they're such a big part of who he was. Right? It's kind of having different roles in different people's lives and how impactful that is. (FP₄FSC)

What is noteworthy about this unique process is that it is likely related to Sandra’s focus on the loss of her child, her loss and the loss of her friends, as opposed to the way in which her son’s life impacted his world and thus added to it in a positive way.

The final unique process also emerged in the joint grieving project for Sandra and Fred. This process, which was likely related to Fred’s relatively recent engagement with spirituality, was manifest in the role of spirituality/faith in their joint grieving project. All of the other couples spoke of their faith/spirituality as a source of comfort and meaning. The

joint grieving project for Fred and Sandra was unique in that they never spoke of their faith or spirituality in this way. Rather, both partners spoke about their faith in a more abstract and cognitive manner, wondering, for example, if a Divine Being may perhaps be manipulating events like an unseen hand on a chessboard. This metaphor, employed by Fred in the FJC, is perhaps particularly apt because it points to the detached, curious and largely cognitive approach to spirituality. The following quotes, from FJC and FSC, are examples of how the joint grieving project included this unique process, which may be related to increasing grieving by friends and family on the five-year anniversary of Steven's death.

MP10: It's difficult to correlate or try and make sense of. It's something that's taking place or...or that you perceive or think to be taking place, I guess. At least I do. I think the 5-year thing has something to do with it, too. Five year anniversaries...of one thing or another. It's a milestone. Whether or not someone is moving the characters to help some of this. It's the way it is I guess. Whether...it may not make a direct move but one move leads to another one, which leads to a 3rd one...so about the 5th or 6th down the road is...[name] is contacting us by email or running into R. It's come to the point where it's not as shocking anymore. We're not as....surprised anymore. But still makes you think anyway (MP₄FJC)

FP70: Yeah, it's interesting because his analogy of moving things around and it's, it's like being on a chess board, right? That somebody else is controlling the pieces. That is kind of new behaviour. He hasn't...articulated how these things are...A bigger plan or that this is happening here and then that causes this...So, I found that really interesting. Was really kind of fascinated by how we've come to that place and he doesn't often express things visually like that. So that, I found that really interesting too. I was like, well, that's new (FP₄FSC).

Key Assertions

The within-case and between-case analyses represent a detailed analysis of the joint grieving projects for all five couples. The following key assertions represent the author's best attempt – in consultation with his supervisors – of summarizing both sets of results. The key assertions were constructed after an intensive review of the within-case and between-case

analysis and thus represent the key findings of this study from an action-theoretical perspective.

Key Assertion #1: All couples experienced the death of their child to be a cataclysmic and life-changing event, an event that pushed them to the limits of their existence and permanently altered relationships with family and friends, with God or the Divine, and life goals and projects. The gravity and immensity of this event led naturally to the pervasive individual and joint grieving actions for all participants. Indeed, grieving for these couples encompassed the entirety of their existence, including their personal, social and spiritual worlds.

Key Assertion #2: All couples in this study engaged in individual and joint grieving projects. Joint grieving was facilitated through: (a) engaging in joint grieving rituals (e.g., pilgrimages, walks, daily Scripture reading and prayer, publishing a grieving-related poem); (b) sharing one's individual grieving actions with the partner and taking time to listen to the partner's grieving stories; (c) accepting the individual grieving style of the partner, and the timing of the partner's grief, as well as finding joy in and learning from the individual grieving actions of the partner.

Key Assertion #3: Joint grieving was impeded by experiences of disconnection and isolation from the significant others (partner, family members, church community) and by various life stressors (financial struggles, relational conflict with immediate and extended family). These stressors were experienced as hindrances to grieving and, at times, to an ongoing felt connection to their deceased child.

Key Assertion #4: Joint grieving emerged as intentional action and was oriented towards numerous goals. At times these goals were related directly towards the grieving

project itself, while at other times the goals were oriented towards other relational or spiritual ends. The joint grieving actions of bereaved parents were oriented towards: (a) maintaining a continuing bond to one's deceased child, (b) living and deepening an authentic relationship with one's partner, (c) striving for an authentic and comforting relationship with the Divine; and (d) searching for meaning for their suffering and the death of their child and in their own lives.

Key Assertion #5: At times the research participants were aware of their joint grieving intentions (e.g., during grieving rituals), but more often their individual and joint grieving actions emerged unexpectedly. In these situations, the intentions of the couples emerged in their engagement with or reaction to their grieving.

Key Assertion #6: The participants' relationships with the Divine in the context of their grieving were complex and multi-dimensional. Most of the participants did not see their faith careers as distinct from their grieving careers. Relating to God meant relating to their grief and grieving generally included addressing the Divine. Their faith or spirituality included: (a) receiving comfort, strength and solace from God, (b) God's provision of ongoing parental care for their children in their absence, (c) finding spiritual meaning relating to their child's life, death and their ongoing lives in the midst of their suffering; (d) maintaining a felt continuing bond with their deceased children through their belief in their child's ongoing life in heaven, through sense-of-presence experiences, and through their child's ongoing impact in the present life; and (e) an avenue to express their sadness, longing, disappointment, anger and at times rage over the loss of their children.

Chapter 5: Discussion

This dissertation sought to understand the ways in which bereaved parents grieve jointly for their teenage and adult children. In particular, it explored the ways in which the spiritual and/or religious beliefs and practices of these parents emerged in their joint grieving actions of bereaved parents. Building upon the findings described in the previous chapter, this discussion relates these findings to the extant literature on parental bereavement. I begin by reminding the reader about the rationale for this study, which emerged in light of the limitations in the current literature on parental bereavement. Next, the chapter offers a response to the research question, which is contextualized within the research literature on bereavement literature. These discussions lead naturally to a discussion of the theoretical, methodological and counselling implications of the findings. The chapter concludes by addressing the limitations of this study and pointing to future research questions on the spiritual lives of bereaved parents.

Summary of the Research Problem

This study arose at the intersection of two distinct yet related bodies of literature – the psychology of religion and spirituality and parental bereavement. Spirituality and religiosity have increasingly been implicated as potential resources in coping with health and life challenges (Harrison, et al., 2001; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Klass, 1999; Koenig, et al., 2001). Pargament (1997) in particular has demonstrated that spirituality and religiosity are particularly relevant when individuals face existential crises that push them past the limits of their coping resources. Coping with the unexpected death of a child is precisely one such situation, as it violates the assumptive worlds of the parents (Janoff-Bulman & McPherson-Frantz, 1997) and places them at significant risk for health and mental health challenges

(Stroebe, et al., 2007; Znoj & Keller, 2002) in ways that other types of bereavement typically do not. Researchers and clinicians have persistently pointed out that parental bereavement does not fit the previously held theories of grieving (Klass, et al., Murphy, 2008) and that more attention needs to be paid to the roles of spirituality/religiosity (Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009) and relationality (Oliver, 1999; Toller & Braithwaite, 2009) in the grieving processes of bereaved parents. In particular, researchers have been encouraged to explore parental grieving as a shared process (Wijngaards-de Meij, et al., 2008) and to elaborate on the multiple dimensions of spirituality and religiosity in the grieving actions of bereaved parents. This study addressed these aspects of parental bereavement by investigating how bereaved parents, who identify as spiritual and/or religious, grieve jointly for their deceased teenage and adult children.

Summary of the Findings

An action-theoretical analysis of grieving stories and actions of bereaved parents found that the participants in this study grieved jointly for their deceased children. The loss of one's child was described as a cataclysmic and life-changing event, which remained intensely painful even after years of grieving and permanently altered the life-trajectories of the bereaved parents. Joint grieving was described and enacted as a goal-directed activity for the participants in this study and included both planned and unplanned grieving actions. Planned joint grieving included rituals enacted by the bereaved parents, which frequently marked the passage of time since the death of the child but also emerged in daily life. Unplanned grieving emerged at surprising moments in the parents' lives and occurred more frequently than planned grieving. Joint grieving actions were intended towards the development of an ongoing, relational representation of the deceased child and towards the

authentic and vibrant relationships with the partner and the Divine. Joint grieving was facilitated through engaging in joint grieving rituals, sharing individual grieving actions with one's partner, and accepting the individual grieving style of the partner. Joint grieving was impeded by experiences of disconnection and isolation from the significant others, and various extraneous life stressors. The joint grieving projects of the bereaved parents in this study were inherently and irreducibly related to their spiritual lives. These spiritual lives were multidimensional and shaped the continuing bonds with their deceased children. Bereaved parents also received comfort from and expressing intense emotions towards the Divine, searched for meaning and engaging with faith communities.

Response to the Research Problem

The findings of this study contribute to the parental bereavement literature in several ways. These contributions include illustrations of previously identified research findings, as well as three novel dimensions of parental bereavement that, to the author's knowledge, have not yet emerged in the literature or have not been developed fully by previous studies. While this study does not explore these dimensions of parental grieving exhaustively, it does make a substantive and meaningful contribution to the literature.

Illustrations of Previous Findings. The findings of this study connected well with previously identified aspects of parental grieving. These included: (1) Bereaved parents experienced the sudden, unexpected and violent loss of their teenage and adult children as a cataclysmic, life-changing and intensely painful event, for which they continued to grieve for years and decades. Indeed, all parents in this study expected to grieve for their children for the rest of their lives; (2) many bereaved parents in this study enacted their individual and joint grieving on a daily basis, which included both planned and unplanned grieving. From an

action-theoretical perspective, both planned and unplanned grieving involved intentionality; in the case of the former it involved forethought and deliberation; in the case of the latter it involved a willingness to turn towards one's loss even when it emerged at surprising moments.

The magnitude and impact of parental bereavement. Parental bereavement researchers and bereaved parents have persistently noted that the loss of a child is a cataclysmic and life-changing event (Christ et al., 2003), which does not map well onto current grieving theories (Murphy, 2008), and which has served as the principal challenge to psychodynamic (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Freud, 1917/2005; Parkes, 2004) understandings of deatheataxis or relinquishing bonds. Indeed, some bereavement theorists have suggested that the process of parental grieving is better described as 'relearning the world' (Attig, 1996) rather than a discrete and bounded activity such as 'grieving'. Others have suggested that bereaved parents enter into a culture of grieving, to which they belong not out of their own volition but due to the tragic events of their lives (Walter, 1996; cf. Bourdieu, 1998). The bereavement accounts and grieving actions of the participants in this study illustrate this important finding in several important ways.

All participants in this study acknowledged that the loss of their child was intensely painful, and that talking about and enacting their grieving in the context of this study gave the opportunity for this emotional intensity to emerge. At various points in the interviews, virtually all participants were moved to tears when recalling and enacting their grieving. It is worth noting that the researchers in this study did not notice a perceptible difference in the emotional intensity of the bereaved parents, even though the timeframes of grieving for the couples varied between five and eighteen years. The ongoing emotional intensity of parental

grief has been described in previous research (e.g., Murphy et al, 2003), but also needs to be contextualized within the wider grieving literature, which generally finds that the intensity of grieving, including grieving for a deceased child, decreases over time (Stroebe et al., 2007). Although the results of this study do not provide a direct challenge to this finding, they do potentially suggest that it may need refinement and that parental bereavement once again does not follow conventional grieving theories (Murphy, 2008). Certainly clinicians (e.g., Klass, 1999; Worden, 2004) attest to the fact that parental grieving retains emotional intensity over years.

Bereaved parents in this study found that the loss of their child impacted all areas of their lives, including, (1) their relationships with each other, family and friends, (2) their values and life goals, (3) their personalities and identities, and (4) their relationships with God and their understanding of their faith and/or spirituality. The multi-dimensionality of the parental grieving, documented in other research (e.g., Klass, 1999; Murphy et al., 2003; Rosenblatt, 2001) and also found in this study, points to the importance of taking the immensity of parental grieving seriously and not reducing it to functional dimensions (e.g., mental health or health problems), changed relationships, the reconstruction of meaning, or coping strategies. Indeed, parental bereavement is all of these aspects, and an adequate understanding of parental grieving requires a multidimensional and holistic approach.

Planned and unplanned grieving. A corollary of the ongoing intensity and magnitude of parental grieving is the fact that all bereaved parents in this study encountered their grief on a daily basis in both planned and unplanned ways. All parents enacted grieving rituals for their children as individuals, couples and communities. These planned grieving actions often included the bereaved couple and were at times open to the extended family and

friends and sometimes the wider community. The rituals were deeply meaningful to the bereaved parents and often served to mark the time since their child had died. The rituals involved forethought, planning, and were intended towards grieving-related goals (described below). These individual and joint grieving rituals map fairly well onto what Attig (1996, 2004) has described as “active grieving”.

In addition to planned grieving, all couples described and enacted unplanned or surprising grieving actions. In fact, all couples commented that the unplanned grief emerged much more frequently than the planned actions. Such surprising and unplanned grieving fits what Attig (2004) described as ‘reactive grieving’, a type of “complex of a belief, disposition and feeling” (p. 343), which happens to us and is evoked by various triggers that remind us of the deceased. However, the findings also point to additional complexity in unplanned grieving. Two points are worth noting in this regard. First of all, Attig’s (2004) treatment of this subject, as well as many of the other task (Worden, 2004) or stage (Bowlby, 1980/1998, Kübler-Ross & Keller, 2005) oriented grieving theories emphasized the active, engagement-focused aspects of grieving, while noting that the emotionally-reactive aspects of grieving are typically relatively short-lived and often dominate the initial phase of grieving. Indeed, Attig (1996) dedicated an entire chapter of his landmark text to making the case for a choice-filled, active grieving, which he contrasted with the more pervasive construct of reactive grieving (i.e., grieving as an emotional and automatic response to loss). While the findings of this current study do not contradict Attig’s claim that grieving is active and chosen, they do perhaps point to a potential imbalance in the frequency of active grieving. The couples in this current study certainly were far more frequently engaged in unplanned grieving actions than in planned ones. Active grieving happened on planned occasions, at rituals, which

commemorated the life of the deceased child. Reactive grieving, to use Attig's terminology, was a near-daily occurrence for all participants in this study.

Secondly, while Attig's (2004) distinction between active and passive (or reactive) grieving may be helpful in distinguishing different forms of grieving, the results of this study point to a potential misunderstanding here, as even the reactive grieving required the parent to turn towards their emotional world and to become conscious of their grieving. A poignant example of this is Tom's development over the course of his involvement in the study, which witnessed an increased amount of individual grieving by Tom in response to becoming more aware of his inner (emotional and cognitive) world. It was indeed Tom's intentional and active engagement with the research project, which allowed him to become aware of the many small aspects of his grieving, to which he had previously not paid much attention. For example, after journaling and talking about his grieving for several months, Tom allowed himself to be emotionally touched by a small rabbit, which was "snuggled" up to a memorial statue for his daughter. Tom and his spouse, Carole, agreed that without his participation in the study, Tom would have never noticed this event and thus could not have grieved jointly at this moment with Carole. This process-oriented perspective points out that 'reactive grieving' requires a (active) decision to allow oneself to be touched by one's loss.

Novel dimensions of parental grieving. In addition to the illustration of previous findings noted above, this study also identified dimensions of parental grieving which, to this author's knowledge, have not emerged in the research literature on bereavement or are still in the early stages of development. These include: (1) The construct of joint grieving for bereaved parents, including actions which facilitated or impeded joint grieving; (2) the intentionalities of parental grieving actions, such as the striving for authentic and engaged

relationships with one's partner and the Divine, as well as the relational representation of the continuing bond with the deceased child; and (3) the multi-dimensional spiritual lives of the bereaved parents were irreducibly and intricately related to their joint grieving projects and included the continuing bond with the deceased child, receiving comfort, solace and hope from the Divine, being able to express anger at and disappointment with God, searching for meaning in their deceased child's life and death, and engagement with their faith communities.

Joint grieving. The single most important contribution of this study is likely its identification of the construct of 'joint grieving' and the description of the joint grieving actions of bereaved parents (cf. Valach et al., 2002). The researchers involved in this project, including this author, were interested in exploring the dimension of relationality in the grieving process, but did not necessarily presume to encounter joint grieving as pervasively as we did. The findings of this study reveal that parental grieving is fundamentally a relational activity, that is, enacted jointly with the partner in rituals and daily actions and contextualized within the ongoing relational careers with each other, the deceased child and the Divine.

The vast majority of previous empirical work on parental bereavement has presumed grieving to be solely an intra-individual process, in which the bereaved parent engages in the grieving process singularly or perhaps with the support of family, friends, and communities (Braun & Berg, 1994; Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Murphy et al., 2003; Worden, 2004). This intrapsychic conceptualization of grieving typically involves the 'working through' of one's grief by turning towards and attending to one's feelings of sadness and loss (Rosenblatt,

2001). Relational aspects of grieving are secondary to intrapsychic grieving and have relatively little import on dominant models of grieving (cf. Walter, 1996).

When bereavement has been approached from an interpersonal perspective, as has been the focus of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1980/1998; Parkes, 1996), the continuing bonds perspective (Klass, 1999; Klass et al., 1996), the dual-process model (Stroebe et al., 2005), or the two-track model (Rubin, 1999), the focus has been on the relationship between the bereaved parent and his or her deceased child. At times researchers have also become interested in relational struggles of bereaved parents (Oliver, 1999; Schwab, 1998), the role of spiritual or social support in grieving (Klass) or in the role of the Divine in lending comfort, solace and meaning to the bereaved person (Klass; Pargament, 1997), but here, too, the focus has been on the ways in which the individual experienced the support of or felt estranged from the other.

A few exceptions are particularly noteworthy at this point. Nadeau's work (2001a, 2001b) on family meaning making following bereavement has explored the ways in which bereaved families found meaning in the death of a family member. Drawing on a Bowenian systems perspective, Nadeau identified both themes and processes in her grounded theory dissertation and has been a noteworthy inclusion in the two most recent editions of the landmark handbooks on bereavement research (Stroebe, et al., 2001; Stroebe, et al., 2008). Similarly, some communications researchers (Toller & Braithwaite, 2009) have explored discourses of bereaved parents and have become particularly interested in the role of dialectical contradictions in their grieving (e.g., the presence and absence of the relationship with the deceased child). Furthermore, Margaret Stroebe and her colleagues at Utrecht University (Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008) have also begun to explore the interdependence

of parental grieving with the loss of their child through the use of the Actor Partner Interdependence Model within multi-level regression analyses. These newer statistical procedures have allowed the Utrecht team to explore the ways in which bereaved parents influenced each other in their grieving. While the studies which focus on the dyadic or family systems level of bereavement are heartening, much remains to be done.

The results in this study offer an action-theoretical extension of previous findings of the interpersonal dimensions of parental grieving (Valach et al., 2002). Joint grieving actions for participants in this study revealed various degrees of relatedness. Some joint grieving actions included the physical presence of both partners and involved their joint engagement in the same grieving ritual. These joint grieving actions included both planned and unplanned events and were sometimes accompanied by dialogue about the internal processes of the participants at the time or after the joint grieving actions. At other times, one member of the bereaved couple was engaged in a grieving action on their own, but at some point shared this activity with their partner. Participants understood such actions to be part of their joint grieving projects and typically experienced a personal investment in such actions and an emotional connection to the partner. A third variation of the joint grieving actions included occasions where individual partners of the parental dyad took on distinct roles in their grieving, which were complemented by the actions of the other partner. This included turn-taking in the joint grieving or allowing one partner in the dyad to express the grief in various forms on behalf of the couple.

Various actions and attitudes facilitated joint grieving for bereaved parental couples. These included: (a) Engaging in joint grieving rituals, which often seemed to occur at regular time intervals or at important dates that marked the life or the death of the deceased child. At

times they involved a longer time commitment or an ongoing commitment of smaller amounts of time. The rituals typically involved forethought and planning and were frequently incorporated into the daily lives of the participants; (b) sharing one's individual grieving actions with the partner and taking time to listen to the partner's grieving stories. Many bereaved parents also talked about the importance of listening to their partner empathically and thus sharing in their grieving action; (c) accepting the individual grieving style of the partner, and the timing of the partner's grief, as well as finding joy in and learning from the individual grieving actions of the partner. Many bereaved parents in this study understood their acceptance of their partner's grieving style and personality to be an essential element to their joint grieving.

Joint grieving was impeded by various actions, attitudes and events in the lives of the bereaved parents in this study. These included the following: (a) Experiences of disconnection and isolation from the significant others, such as one's partner, family members, or their faith communities. Pargament and his colleagues (1997; Butter & Pargament, 2003) have described such forms of spiritual/religious coping as a "problem of fit". But the findings in this study also revealed an additional dimension, which might be described as a disconnection between faith beliefs, emotional experience and the faith community; (b) various life stressors, extraneous to the joint grieving project itself, also impeded joint grieving for various couples in this study. These stressors were experienced as hindrances to grieving and, at times, to an ongoing felt connection to their deceased child.

Intentional grieving. Following an action-theoretical orientation (Valach, et al., 2002), we understood individual and joint grieving actions to be intentional, that is, consciously or unconsciously directed towards a meaningful goal. Grieving theories have

varied greatly in the identification of the purposes or goals of grieving. Freud (1917/2005) initially suggested that grieving was about the removal of libidinal energies from the object (i.e., the deceased individual) as the intended outcome of his Trauerarbeit (grief work; cf. Hagman, 2001). This withdrawal of energies would in turn free the bereaved person for the investment of such energy in new relationships. This goal was also echoed by various other theorists (e.g., Bowlby, 1980/1998), although recent formulations of attachment theory have distanced themselves from the ‘relinquishment hypothesis’ (Field, 2008; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2008). Other bereavement theorists, particularly those who have focused on cognitive appraisal and coping (e.g., Folkman, 2001; Stroebe, et al., 2006) and religious coping (Pargament, 1997; Wortman & Park, 2008) have not focused on the intended outcome of grieving or only addressed it from a theoretical perspective. Stroebe’s (Stroebe et al., 2005) dual process model of grieving, for example, emphasized the oscillation between loss-oriented coping and restoration-oriented coping but did not specify an intended outcome for the bereaved individual. Likewise, Pargament’s religious coping model identified five general purposes of religiosity, but did so solely on the basis of his theory rather than deriving these purposes from his research (cf. Klaassen, Graham, & Young, 2009).³

Parental bereavement researchers and clinicians (e.g., Attig, 1996; Klass, 1999) have typically pointed to the inadequacy of current bereavement models for bereaved parents. While other forms of bereavement typically result in an altered role for the bereaved individual (e.g., a bereaved spouse becomes a widow), the bereaved parent retains his or her status as a parent in spite of the death of the child. This was demonstrated clearly on the

³ A brief word of caution might be in order at this point. On the basis of their clinical work with bereaved individuals, psychologists and counsellors are often eager to identify desired outcomes of coping. Pargament (2002b) rightly cautions researchers against this sort of functionalist reductionism, in which an action is limited to its measurable outcomes. Religiosity, according to Pargament, is primarily concerned with religious and not psychological or health-related aims. A parallel claim might be made with parental grieving.

demographic information forms for this study in which all participants in this study acknowledged their ongoing relationship to their children. Klass's (1999; Klass et al., 1996) continuing bonds model of parental bereavement suggested that in lieu of relinquishing parental bonds, bereaved parents often seek a re-configuration of the parental relationship with the deceased child in which the child retains an ongoing but novel relationship with the parent. Grieving, from this perspective, is about the development and maintenance of an enduring 'inner representation' of the deceased child. There is currently a vibrant debate within the bereavement research community about the nature of these continuing bonds and the circumstances under which they might be considered pathological (Field & Filanovsky, 2010; Klass, 2006). Field (2008), for example, suggested that internalized expressions of continuing bonds are healthy, while externalized expressions, including sense-of-presence experiences, may be indicative of a psychotic process.

In contrast to the singular foci of the various models noted above, the participants in this study identified a variety of intentions in their individual and joint grieving actions. These intentions were directed towards the deceased child, their partner, and towards the Divine. Many bereaved parents noted that their grieving actions were oriented towards the maintenance of a felt, continuous bond with their deceased child. At times these continuing bonds were facilitated by mystical experiences and visions, in which the parents either jointly or individually experienced the 'sense-of-presence' of their children (Steffen & Coyle, 2010). On other occasions the parents were motivated to ensure the memory of their child remained present in their relationship and in the wider community. The experiences of the continuing bond were at times associated with suffering and sadness but also frequently with joy and peace. Contrary to the assertions of some researchers (e.g., Field, 2008; Field & Filanovsky,

2010), none of the parents regarded their continuing bonds to their children as pathological or as an indication of an arrested grieving process. Rather, they typically understood them as Divine gifts and as means of comfort in their grief. Although the design of this study does not permit this author to draw a definitive conclusion, the accounts and actions of the bereaved parents in this study call into question Field's (2008) theoretical differentiation of internalized (healthy) and externalized (unhealthy) continuing bonds.

Klass (1999) suggested that grieving actions of bereaved parents are intended towards the development of an 'inner representation' of the deceased child. This formulation is helpful when understanding parental grieving as an intrapsychic process, but falls short when one is trying to understand it in terms of the parental relationship. At this dyadic level of analysis, the bereaved parents in this study understood their grieving to be oriented towards an enduring *relational representation* of their deceased child within their relationship. Bereaved parents engaged in joint grieving actions, which were directed towards and made space for the presence of the deceased child in their joint lives. Conversations about the deceased child, their ongoing and changing relationship with him or her, and about the child's ongoing presence in their lives and in the lives of their families are examples of such relational representations.

While the bereaved parents in this study sought to maintain a continuing bond with their deceased child, many of them likewise identified their desire for deepening the intimacy with their partner as related to their grieving actions. As noted above, the experience of the loss of their children and their ongoing grieving actions for these children formed a significant part of the newly-formed identities of these participants. They were, irrevocably, bereaved parents. And while grieving certainly was directed towards their relationship with

their child, all bereaved parents also understood their grieving to involve their partner and their desire for an emotionally intimate relationship with their partner. In this way, joint grieving also involved the striving for increasing the authenticity and intimacy in their relationship. When this intimacy was lacking, bereaved parents engaged their partners in dialogue to seek to enhance or deepen their relational intimacy. At times these requests for reconnection were expressed as straightforward requests, while at other times they were expressed in clandestine ways. Fundamentally, however, the relationship between the bereaved partners was irreducibly related to their joint grieving actions.

From a theoretical perspective, the requests for increased intimacy in their grieving can be understood as examples of restoration oriented coping (Stroebe et al., 2005) or a focus on ongoing functioning in Rubin's two-track model (Rubin, 1999). It is worth noting, however, that the bereaved parents in this study engaged in these relationship-enhancing requests at the same time as they were engaged in joint grieving actions which were directed towards the maintenance of their continuing bond towards their child. The separation of grieving actions directed towards the deceased and those directed towards a re-engagement in life, which has been the prevalent dynamic since Freud's (1917/2005) initial formulation, seems less distinguishable in this study. Joint grieving actions between parents bridged these two foci. Thus, while this distinction may be helpful to the clinician at a theoretical level, the results of this study suggest that the models may be an oversimplification when considering joint grieving actions of bereaved parents.

Similarly to joint grieving actions, which were directed towards the deepening of the relationship with one's partner, bereaved parents also engaged in grieving actions that were intended towards striving for an authentic and supportive relationship with the Divine. For

the bereaved parents in this study, many individual and joint grieving actions were oriented towards the deepening of the relationship with the Divine. While this study was not focused on verifying ontological claims about this relationship, the phenomenology of the grieving for the bereaved parents clearly incorporated this dimension.

At a theoretical level, these individual and joint grieving actions can be understood as religious/spiritual coping (Benore & Park, 2004; Pargament, 1997; Wortman & Park, 2008). They involved the bereaved parents' belief in a benevolent afterlife for their child, and understood God to be protective of their children in the afterlife. However, it is critical to note that these spiritual grieving actions were contextualized within an ongoing relationship between the bereaved parents and the Divine. For example, the four couples (Couples 1, 2, 3, and 5) whose religious orientations could be described as 'intrinsic motivations' (Allport, 1960; Batson, Schoenrade, & Ventis, 1993), that is, directed primarily towards their relationship with the Divine, had clear spiritual beliefs grounded in their worldviews that supported their understanding of their child's ongoing life in heaven. From a faith-development perspective (Fowler, 1981), one could also understand these couples to fall within Fowler's individuative-reflective stage or within Streib's (2001) individuative-systemic religious style. Couple 4 in this study was somewhat unique in that Sandra had adopted a Christian faith perspective but was simultaneously searching for spiritual understandings within Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices. Her partner, Fred, professed a belief in God since childhood, but noted that he remained largely unengaged with his spirituality. The events that he and Sandra understood to be 'synchronicity' had spurred him on to explore his faith some more. Fred's spiritual beliefs and practices are probably best

described as ‘quest’ spirituality, a spirituality that is characterized primarily by a search for rather than an attainment of spiritual truths (Batson et al., 1993).

Multi-dimensional spirituality. The joint grieving projects for most parents in this study were intimately related to their individual and joint relationships with the Divine. Consistent with the research on religious or spiritual coping in general (Pargament, 1997) and religious or spiritual coping with bereavement more specifically (Benore & Park, 2004; Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009), the spiritual lives of these bereaved parents were multi-dimensional and connected to their relationships with their spouses, faith communities, and continuing bonds with their children (Klass, 1999). The faiths included the dimensions of: (a) the experience of the continuous bond with their child⁴ (which included, for some parents, spiritual visions or a mystical sense of presence of their deceased child); (b) receiving solace, comfort and hope from God; (c) being able to express their anger at and disappointment with God; (d) finding meaning in their deceased child’s life and death, as well as in their ongoing lives; and (e) engagement with their faith communities.

Some readers might question at this point why the author is including this section under novel findings. Have not other researchers (e.g., Klass, 1999; Wortman & Park, 2008) likewise identified spirituality and religiosity as central to the grieving of bereaved parents? The answer to this question is, in the opinion of this author, both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. Indeed some researchers have addressed aspects of the spiritual lives of bereaved parents, most exhaustively in the ethnographic research program of Dennis Klass. However, this study makes a novel contribution to the literature on spirituality and grieving by identifying its multi-dimensionality and by connecting it inextricably to the grieving actions of bereaved

⁴ The continuing bonds between the bereaved parents and their deceased children was explored at length in a previous section and thus will be omitted at this point.

parents. The spiritual lives of almost all bereaved parents in this study were intricately related to the deaths of their children and their ongoing individual and joint grieving projects. The deaths of their children continued to impact every aspect of the faith of these bereaved parents, and thus this author argues that the bereaved parents in this study had and were relearning their faith, as well as their lives (cf. Attig, 1996).

With the exception of Fred, all parents in this study commented on their experience of receiving solace, comfort and hope from God. These findings are consonant with previous research (Klass, 1999) and underscore the importance of understanding the spiritual context in which bereaved parents grieve for their children. The comfort for many participants in this study came as a result of their faith in their children's ongoing lives, and their belief in the eventual reunification with their children. Although the nature of the afterlife was conceptualized differently by various parents, most found common comfort and hope in the belief that their children lived on and that they would eventually meet them again. It is possible that the parents' experience of comfort from God may relate directly to their faith in a Divine personal being (Rohr, 1996). The only parent not to comment on the experience of receiving comfort from the Divine was Fred, who was engaged in a more cognitive questioning and searching at the time of the research. Given that he did not conceptualized the Divine as a personal being, it is not surprising that he did not comment on finding comfort from such a being.

While the bereaved parents in this study spoke about finding solace, comfort and hope in their faith, many of the bereaved parents in our study also noted that their faith in God gave them an avenue to express their anger and disappointment over the loss of their child and the resulting suffering in their lives. The anger and bitterness seemed to be of a

chronic nature for some parents, while others spoke about and enacted shorter periods of disappointment, anger and disillusionment with God, which were either recalled during the interviews or which shifted over the course of their involvement in the research.

Religious coping (Butter & Pargament, 2003; Pargament, 1997) and bereavement (Klass, 1999; Murphy et al., 2003; Neimeyer, 2006) researchers have commented on the varied emotional responses that bereaved people experience during the course of their grieving. Bereaved parents of suddenly and violently deceased children in particular (Prigerson et al., 2008) are vulnerable to the development of complicated or prolonged grief, which may be accompanied by intense anger and feelings of meaninglessness and hopelessness. With reported incidence rates of up to 78%, some researchers (Murphy, 2008) have even expressed their concern to what extent one can speak of 'normal' vs. 'pathological' grief in bereaved parents or whether grieving after the violent and unexpected loss of a child might be better accounted for by trauma theories.

However, one confusion which seems to arise with some regularity in the grieving (Rubin et al., 2008) and religious/spiritual coping (Pargament et al., 1998) literature is the division of emotional responses into 'positive' and 'negative' responses. Pargament and his colleagues spoke about 'red flags' in religious coping, which included the presence of doubt, anger at God, and conflict with the theological assertions of one's faith community. In spite of repeated admonishments to remember that grieving is a natural process (Stroebe et al., 2008) and that this natural process includes intense feelings of sadness, longing, and anger, researchers may explicitly or implicitly equate intense feelings with something 'negative' and seek to explore the statistical relationships of these feelings with 'negative' outcomes.

Conclusions based on such findings are theoretically problematic (cf. Lazarus, 1999) and potentially impose a functionalist bias on the spiritual lives of bereaved parents.

The grieving actions of the bereaved parents in this study tell a different story. First of all, it is critical to note that many of the bereaved parents who experienced strong feelings of sadness, anger, disappointment and even bitterness in relation towards God also described their faith as intimate and deeply meaningful. It would seem that the spiritual lives of the bereaved parents in this study are inherently complex and changing. The relationships of these bereaved parents with the Divine thus include a full range of emotions and many bereaved parents in this study felt quite free to express these emotions in their interviews and journal entries. The expression of such intense emotions did not seem to detract from the spiritual lives of these bereaved parents, and may indeed have contributed to feelings of closeness with the Divine. Further research is needed to explore these intense emotions more fully, but the grieving actions of the bereaved parents in this study call into question the common binary of 'negative' and 'positive' religious coping (cf. Pargament et al., 1998).

Thirdly, the individual and joint grieving actions of the bereaved parents in this study were intricately related to the search for existential meaning. Clinicians and researchers (e.g., Frankl, 1969; Längle, 2005a; Neimeyer, 2000; Pargament, 1997; Park & Folkman, 1997) have suggested that faith may serve as a source of existential meaning in the face of incomprehensible suffering. Frankl, for example, differentiated between ontological meaning and existential meaning, relating the former to the meaning of Being in general and the latter to the meaning of a specific, lived situation. Researchers have also distinguished between the process of arriving at a meaning (meaning-making or meaning-finding) and the intended outcome of such a search (the attainment of meaning).

The participants in this study certainly embodied these varied dimensions of existential meaning as they sought to understand and find value in their children's lives and deaths, and also searched for direction in their own lives. All bereaved parents in this study were engaged in individual and joint actions that were intended towards providing them with some spiritual understanding about the meaning of their children's lives and deaths. The meaning-oriented grieving actions of the bereaved parents in this study fit well with much of the current literature on phenomenological (Attig, 2004), constructivist (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, 2000), and coping-based (Folkman, 2001; Pargament, 1997; Park & Folkman, 1997; Wortman & Park, 2008) grieving, as well as parental bereavement research (Braun & Berg, 1994; Murphy, et al., 2003), and existential psychology more generally (Frankl, 1969; Längle, 2005a). Action theory (Valach et al., 2002), likewise, assumes that individual and joint actions, such as grieving, are intentional and goal-directed, that is, oriented towards a meaningful end.

Finally, the bereaved parents in this study were engaged in their spiritual communities, and this, too, emerged in their joint grieving actions and projects. To date, numerous researchers have commented on the importance of spiritual and social support for those coping with serious life challenges (Pargament, 1997) and bereavement (Wortman & Park, 2008). Some (e.g., Stroebe, 2004) have wondered whether such support can be understood as mere social support, but others have argued for the uniqueness of spiritual social support on theoretical (Park & Benore, 2004) and empirical (Pargament, 2002a) grounds. The participants in this study certainly grieved within the context of their existing spiritual and relational networks, and thus the presence of their faith communities impacted their ongoing grieving projects. Similarly to the expression of a range of emotions, bereaved

parents in this study experienced their faith communities as both helpful and compassionate and, at times, uncaring and hurtful. The engagement with their spiritual communities encompassed the breadth of emotions and behaviours.

Numerous parents in this study commented on the care and support of their religious communities. This care included tangible support (often early on in the grieving process), but also emotional and spiritual support from fellow congregants and from clergy. Bereaved parents generally found the presence of their faith communities to be helpful in their grieving process. In particular they noted that acts of care and compassionate, non-judgemental listening and spiritual support assisted them in their grieving process. On the other hand, some bereaved parents experienced an absence of care when clergy and fellow parishioners ignored their suffering and made judgemental or insensitive remarks about the deaths and lives of their children.

Theoretical Implications

The findings of this study both support and challenge existing theories of bereavement and grieving. The identified goals of parental grieving support existing grieving theories, which focus on meaning reconstruction (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006; Neimeyer, 2000) and continuing bonds (Klass, et al., 1996). Stress and coping theories of grieving (Folkman, 2001; Stroebe et al., 2005) likewise are supported in the loss-oriented and restoration-oriented grieving actions of the bereaved parents in this study. Religious coping theory (Pargament, 1997) is supported in its multi-dimensional and meaning-oriented (Park & Folkman, 1997) understandings of the spiritual lives of these bereaved parents.

However, this study also offers numerous challenges to existing theories. Firstly, this study has revealed parental grieving to be a joint as well as an individual process. While

some researchers (e.g., Toller & Braithwaite, 2009; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008) have begun to explore dyadic expressions of parental grieving, the vast majority of researchers consider the individual parent and his or her grieving to be the primary focus of research. Joint grieving challenges the individualistic focus of cognitive coping theories (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004; Park & Folkman, 1997), religious coping theories (Pargament, 1997; Park & Benore, 2004), and meaning-reconstruction theories (Gillies & Neimeyer, 2006) of bereavement. While existing theories can assist us in understanding the experience of parental bereavement, their exclusive focus on the individual parents obscures the fact that parental grieving takes place within the context of an existing relationship, and that this relationship shapes the grieving actions of bereaved parents.

Action theory constructs and the action-project method have informed and shaped this study (Valach et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005) and have contributed significantly to the identification of joint grieving. As action theory is extended beyond its traditional limits within vocational psychology, new findings also feed back into the theory and offer challenges. To date, most action-theoretical studies have involved explorations into how various dyads (e.g., parents and teenage children; partners in addiction recovery) engage jointly in a variety of projects (Young et al., 2008). These projects have typically been directed towards clearly identifiable goals, such as the development of autonomy or sobriety. And while action theory distinguishes itself from cognitive psychology (e.g., Bandura's social-cognitive theory; Bandura, 2001) by asserting that goals may either be conscious or unconscious, the vast majority of theoretical (e.g., Young & Valach, 2004) and empirical work to date has focused on projects with a clearly-definable end point.

Parental grieving offers a challenge to action theory's conceptualization of action as goal-directed behaviour (Young & Valach, 2004) because bereaved parents generally do not foresee an endpoint or a goal to their grieving. This does not imply, of course, that specific individual and joint grieving actions were not motivated. At the intermediate level of goals – 'functional steps' in action theory terminology – parents in this study did identify specific goals for their joint grieving projects. However, the ultimate endpoint of grieving was typically not identifiable to the parents in this study. The theoretical import for action-theory is a challenge to conceptualize individual and joint actions that are not 'goal-directed' or which have goals that are perhaps not as evident to the person. Actions may remain intentional, that is, enacted deliberately towards intermediate-level functional steps even when the ultimate goal remains obscure.

The lack of clearly identifiable end-points for parental grieving likewise offers a challenge to the action-project method (Young et al., 2005). Developed in concert with action theory, this method aims to understand individual and joint actions through collecting data on manifest behaviour, internal processes and social meaning. The process of analysis typically revolves around the elements, functional steps and goals of a specific activity. This study explored the joint action of a grieving conversation in which bereaved parents both enacted and represented their grief. Subsequent individual interviews sought to unpack the cognitions and emotions of the parents in this joint conversation. The research project was guided by the general research question of how spiritual/religious bereaved parents jointly grieve for their deceased children. Conversations with research supervisors and assistants suggested that the bereaved parents in this study may have focused more on describing their grieving (including their past grieving) to the researchers than on enacting it during the joint conversations.

Consistent with this author's conceptualization of rigour, which emphasizes the importance of fidelity to research participants, the research literature and the research method, the resulting findings are perhaps more phenomenological or descriptive than past action-theory research projects. This author contends that this may also be due to topic of inquiry and to the above-noted lack of a definite end-point or goal for parental grieving.

Thirdly, this study wades headlong into the ongoing dialogue and debate on continuing bonds (Field, 2008; Klass, 1999; 2006; Klass, et al., 1996). In spite of the varying lengths of bereavement, all parents in this study maintained continuing bonds with their deceased children, and these continuing bonds included both internalized (e.g., memories) and externalized (e.g., visions, sense-of-presence experiences) expressions. Critically, the continuing bonds of the parents in this study were informed by the parents' faith commitments and beliefs in the ongoing lives of their children in the afterlife. None of the parents in this study, including the three who recalled 'externalized' experiences, found these experiences to be disturbing or believed them to be related to psychotic processes. Rather, all of them understood these experiences to be Divine gifts and thus integrated them into their existing understandings of God's working in the world and in their lives (cf. Steffen & Coyle, 2010). Thus, the findings of this study offer support for Klass's (1999) contextually-sensitive conceptualization of continuing bonds and offer an initial challenge to Field's (2008) bifurcation of continuing bonds into internalized (healthy) and externalized (unhealthy) processes.

Finally, this study offers a challenge to the prevalent binary of positive and negative religious coping (Butter & Pargament, 2003; Pargament et al., 1998). Many of the bereaved parents in this study experienced a range of intense emotions throughout their grieving

process. At times, this included anger, bitterness, disappointment with God and the expression of such emotions in individual and joint grieving actions. However, the same participants also experienced joy and intimacy in their relationships with the Divine, and remained engaged in their search for a full and vibrant faith. Thus, the findings of this study are supportive of a process-oriented conceptualization of religious coping, which understands grieving to be a holistic project. Likewise, Lazarus' (1999) admonishment to explore stress alongside a full range of human emotions seems especially apt and supported by the rich experiences of the participants in this study.

Counselling Implications

This study also offers several implications for the multi-disciplinary counselling practice with grieving parents. These implications include: (1) understanding the spiritual lives of bereaved parents and incorporating this dimension into assessment and treatment, (2) taking the parent's continuing bond with their deceased child seriously and being cautious when challenging to veracity or helpfulness of this bond, and 3) offering services to bereaved parents as couples, in addition to individual or group counselling. A brief caveat may be in order at this point. It is important for the reader to know that the clinical implications suggested here are tentative conclusions that have emerged from an instrumental case study design with five bereaved parental couples. This study cannot offer firm suggestions for what is likely to be helpful in a given case, but rather may point to important domains of inclusion in psychological assessment and treatment with bereaved parents. Clinicians are encouraged to apply their clinical judgement in counselling bereaved parents.

Researchers and clinicians in the psychology of spirituality and religion have long exhorted clinicians to take the spiritual lives of their clients seriously (Richards & Bergin,

2000). The argument that has often taken on an ethical tone, which parallels calls for clinicians to address their own cultural biases and increase their awareness of diverse cultural contexts of their clients (APA, 2003). This study adds to the increasing chorus of scholars who are calling for spiritually-sensitive psychological and counselling services for clients (Pargament, 1997; Puchalski & Romer, 2000).

The findings of this study point to the importance of understanding and assessing the multi-dimensional spiritual lives of bereaved parents. The following aspects seem particularly relevant: (1) the parents spiritual lives prior to the death of the child; (2) the impact of the death of their child on the parents' faith and meaning structures; (3) an exploration of the cause of death (especially suicide) and the spiritual implications for the bereaved parents; (4) the role of their faith in the search for meaning in their child's life and death and in their own lives; (5) the relationship between the parents and their faith community and the extent to which they feel supported and/or disconnected from this community; (6) how the bereaved parents experience the Divine and the presence of potential comfort, solace and hope as a result of their faith.

Secondly, the results of this study suggest that clinicians may do well to pay attention to the continuing bond between bereaved parents and their deceased children, particularly if the bereaved parents are engaged in a faith community that believes in the ongoing life of their children and encourages this continuing bond. Both clinicians and researchers (Klass et al., 1996; Rubin, Malkinson, & Witzum, 2008) have admonished clinicians to attend to the possibility that bereaved parents may not relinquish the attachments with their deceased children, and some (Klass, 1999) have noted that this might not necessarily be an indication of pathological grieving. The grieving actions of the bereaved parents in this study certainly

supported this, as the parents understood their grieving to be a life-long process with an anticipated reunification for the whole family in the afterlife. Some researchers have recently suggested that some grieving actions, particularly those involving sense-of-presence experiences, may be suggestive of an unhealthy, psychotic process (Field, 2008; Field & Filanovsky, 2010). The participants in our study who recalled such sense-of-presence experiences, however, understood these to be spiritual in nature and not indicative of psychopathology or an arrested grieving process. While this does not imply that all continuing bonds are inherently healthy, it is a cautionary note to clinicians to be aware of their potential ontological biases and refrain from impulsive judgments about the nature of these continuing bonds.

Finally, the inherently relational nature of parental grieving suggests that clinicians working with bereaved parents should consider working jointly with bereaved parents, should they be approached to do so in a therapeutic setting. Research on grief counselling has offered mixed results (Jordan & Neimeyer, 2003) and researchers (e.g., Stroebe et al., 2008) frequently offer reminders to clinicians that grieving is a natural process that does not necessarily require clinical intervention. However, bereaved parents are at risk to develop complications in their grieving processes (Prigerson et al., 2008; Murphy, 2008), such as post-traumatic stress disorder (Murphy et al., 2003), depression (Murphy et al., 2003) and relationship problems (Oliver, 1999; Schwab, 1998). Furthermore, some clinicians have also suggested that bereavement-related anxiety may have some unique elements that require clinicians to attend explicitly to the grieving process (Rubin, et al., 2003).

The joint grieving projects of bereaved parents in this study have implications for dyadic grief counselling. Firstly, the findings indicate that parents may benefit from learning

how to listen and respond to the individual grieving stories of their partner. The participants in this study generally developed an increased understanding of their partner and his/her grieving actions, and explained that this understanding was helpful for their joint grieving and their relationship. The experience of being understood by one's partner was seemingly enhanced when the couple approached their individual and joint grieving in an open-minded and non-judgmental way, which allowed each parent to grieve in his or her timeframe and style. Secondly, the bereaved parents in this study understood their grieving projects to incorporate ongoing relationships with their partner, the deceased child and the Divine. One might therefore suggest that clinicians would do well to encourage bereaved parents to attend to all of these ongoing relationships, if they are relevant to the relational and spiritual lives of their clients. Parents in our study strove for authentic and vibrant relationships with each other and with God in the midst of their ongoing joint grieving projects. Interventions in and outside of the counselling room, which target the enhancement of the couples' relationship with each other and with God, might therefore also enhance the grieving process for bereaved parents.

Limitations of the Study

Although the focus and method of this study were deliberately chosen to address previously identified omissions in the literature, this research project, like all, suffers from some limitations. Firstly, while we were able to track the joint grieving projects of bereaved couples over approximately three months, the bereaved parents in this study and in other projects (e.g., Klass, 1999) have shown that parental grieving is a longitudinal process that shifts over time. Researchers have called for and conducted multi-year studies (Murphy et al., 2003), which track the grieving process as it unfolds over longer periods of time. Thus, this

study could have benefitted from a longer timeline, beginning within a few months after the death of the child and lasting for several years. Such a timeline would likely have enabled additional insights in regards to the changing nature of joint grieving over time.

Secondly, this study could have been strengthened by a larger number of research participants, which may have allowed us to address certain grieving related issues more directly. The sample for this study included participants from various Protestant denominations, but unfortunately no Catholic participants emerged from our recruitment efforts. The inclusion of Catholic participants as well as a larger number of participants from conservative and liberal Protestant denominations may have permitted some thematic comparisons between such groups. The same argument also holds true for the recruitment of participants outside of the larger Christian religious community. The inclusion of Hindu or Buddhist or Aboriginal participants, for example, may have offered interesting comparisons in relation to the grieving projects of bereaved parents. Likewise, this study also lacked significant cultural diversity, which could have broadened the findings or allowed for an analysis of the intersection between culture and spirituality in parental bereavement (cf. Stroebe et al., 2008).

Finally, the study might have benefitted by adding further sources to the data gathering procedures or by enhancing the interviewing setting. Most data gathering occurred within the research facilities of the University of British Columbia, and while this aided the researchers in the pragmatic aspects of conducting our research, it may have also imposed some limitations. For example, bereaved parents who participated in this study were asked to have a conversation with each other about their joint grieving processes as they might do so 'at home'. This joint action might have been enhanced, however, if the conversation had

actually taken place within their homes, in the place in which the bereaved parents actually grieve. Furthermore, adding further data sources, such as participant observations (e.g., observing the bereaved parents during a public joint grieving ritual) might have added an additional degree of closeness to the actual grieving actions of bereaved parents.

Future Research

Scholars in the domains of grieving (Murphy, 2008; Nadeau, 2008; Stroebe et al., 2008) and spirituality (Wortman & Park, 2008, 2009) have noted that there is much work to be done. Indeed the intersection between spirituality and the grieving processes of bereaved parents remains under-researched and crucial questions about the spiritual grieving actions of bereaved parents remain unanswered.

Firstly, bereavement researchers are currently discussing the nature and consequences of continuing bonds (Field, 2008; Klass, 2006). At the centre of this debate is the question about sense-of-presence experiences (Steffen & Coyle, 2010) and the extent to which they point to healthy or unhealthy grieving processes. Some preliminary research has shown that ‘external’ continuing bonds may be unhealthy (Field & Filanovsky, 2010), but this research is preliminary at present and has not explored the role of spirituality/religiosity and cultural context in this process (cf. Klass & Goss, 1999). Thus, future research on sense-of-presence experiences for spiritual/religious bereaved parents is urgently needed. The first step for such a program of research might be to start with a phenomenological study of the sense-of-presence for bereaved Christian parents. This could be supplemented with similar studies with members of other religious and ethnic groups. A secondary stream of research could explore the health, mental health and spiritual consequences of such experiences. In particular, this author would be interested in understanding to what extent religious coping

might mediate the relationship between continuing bonds and various outcomes.

Furthermore, it would be of interest to explore how various characteristics of bereaved parent (e.g., religious orientation, faith development, culture) might moderate the statistical relationship between the continuing bonds of bereaved parents and mental health outcomes. Given Pargament's (1997; Butter & Pargament, 2003) existing research on religious coping, one might expect more favourable outcomes from continuing bonds if these fit within the parent's existing faith structure and are supported by his or her faith community.

A second stream of research that might emerge from this study could explore more fully the joint grieving actions of bereaved family members over time. The focus for this current study has been the joint grieving project of the bereaved parents. However, family grieving in general remains understudied (Nadeau, 2008) and thus a next step might be to explore such grieving actions more systemically. Recent studies (e.g., Toller & Braithwaite, 2009; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008) have begun to investigate relational grief processes for bereaved parents, while others have investigated the grief of grandparents (Hayslip & White, 2008). However, much remains to be understood. This researcher has offered the findings of this study as tentative suggestions of what might facilitate or impede joint grieving. Additional studies with longer timeframes and more religiously and culturally diverse participants are surely needed to add to our understanding on the relational nature of parental grieving.

Finally, in addition to the discussion around continuing bonds, the individual and spiritual grieving processes of bereaved parents are certainly worthy of further investigation. Many questions in this domain remain unanswered. For example, the following questions have yet to be explored: What is the role of theistic religious beliefs in the grieving actions of

bereaved parents? How do parents, whose spiritual beliefs do not include a Divine personal being, experience the continuing bond with their deceased children? How does this belief impact them and how does their experience compare to that of bereaved parents who believe in a personal Divine being? Which novel dimensions of parental grieving emerge when one explores the grieving actions of bereaved parents from various spiritual traditions (e.g., Muslims, Buddhists, Aboriginal traditions) and cultures?

Conclusion

Over the past two decades, scholars and clinicians have become increasingly interested in the potentially salutogenic role of spirituality and religiosity in health and mental-health related domains (Ano & Vasconcelles, 2005; Hackney & Sanders, 2003; Koenig, et al., 2001; Smith, et al., 2003). Numerous research programs have demonstrated that spirituality is uniquely implicated in the adjustment to or recovery from a variety illnesses, as well as significant life events, such as bereavement and loss (Pargament, 1997; Park & Folkman, 1997). In each of these cases, people have been pushed to the limits of their existence and have, to a lesser or greater extent, had to face the finality of their lives.

The death of a child has long been acknowledged as one of the most devastating losses, and studies have found that bereaved parents are particularly vulnerable to health and mental health challenges (CAH, 2004; Stroebe et al., 2007). While researchers have begun to understand the role of spirituality in parental grieving, much remains unclear. The vast majority of studies to date have sought to understand and explain intrapersonal dimensions of grieving and have addressed the spiritual dimension of grieving only peripherally.

By contrast, this investigation sought to address these dimensions more by focusing centrally on joint grieving actions of spiritual/religious bereaved parents. Findings were

analyzed through the lens of contextual action theory (Valach et al., 2002; Young et al., 2005) and an instrumental case study approach (Stake, 2005), and revealed parental grieving to be an individual and joint response to an immense and life-changing event – the sudden and violent death of one’s child. For the bereaved parents in this study, joint grieving was an emotionally intense response, consisting of planned and unplanned grieving actions, which were intended to maintain a continuing bond with their deceased child, and which include the striving for intimate and authentic relationships with one’s partner and with the Divine.

Bereaved parents grieved jointly for their children through rituals and daily grieving actions. This joint grieving encompassed varying degrees of relatedness and was facilitated through engaging in joint grieving rituals, sharing individual grieving actions with one’s partner and taking time to listen to the partner compassionately. Joint grieving required the partners to accept each other’s individual grieving styles, and parents benefitted from being open to learning from the partner and finding joy in his/her individual grieving actions. Joint grieving was impeded by experiences of disconnection and isolation from one’s partner, family and faith community, and by various life stressors.

The spiritual lives of the bereaved parents in this study were multi-dimensional and intimately connected to their relationships with their spouses, faith communities, and continuing bonds with their children. They encompassed the continuing bond with the child, receiving solace, comfort and hope from God, and being able to express their anger at and disappointment with God. The faith commitment of the bereaved parents facilitated their ongoing search for meaning in their deceased child’s life and death, and supported the quest for the meaning of their own ongoing lives.

This study adds to growing literature on the relational and spiritual dimensions of parental grieving (Toller & Braithwaite, 2009; Wijngaards-de Meij et al., 2008) by exploring the joint grieving actions of bereaved parents who identified themselves as religious and/or spiritual. And while the findings of this project are helpful in understanding the contextual actions of bereaved parents, much remains to be explored. It is the hope of this researcher that others will join the dialogue and assist in the development of a more fully relational and spiritual account of parental grieving.

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Appendix A: Advertisement for Participants



Volunteers Needed for Bereavement Study

If you are:

- *19 years old or older*
- Have lost a teenage or adult child (16+ years)
- You and your partner (including non-biological parents, common-law spouses, same-sex parents) are jointly willing to participate in the study
- Your faith and/or spirituality has played an important role in your grieving process

then we need ***YOUR HELP*** to find out how parents cope with the loss of their teenage/adult child. Your experience is extremely valuable and will help us understand how parents – individually and together – cope with the loss of a child. Involvement includes a 3 video-taped interviews, keeping a structured journal and several telephone conversations. Compensation is offered for time and costs.

For further information and to participate, please contact Derrick Klaassen leaving your name, phone number, and a message telling us that you are interested in participating.

Conducted by:
Dr Susan James
Educational & Counselling Psych.
University of British Columbia

Derrick Klaassen, MA
Educational & Counselling Psych.
University of British Columbia

Appendix B: Telephone Screening
Spirituality and Parental Bereavement

1. Template for Screening both Parents:

Date of screening call:

Name/contact info:

Introduce myself & explain that I am returning his or her call regarding participating in the parental bereavement study.

Thank-you for your interest in this study. Can I ask how you found out about this study? The purpose of this call is to explain the study to you and to determine whether your experience fits with the purpose of the project. There is potential for this phone call to take up to 30 minutes. Is it alright to proceed or would another time be more suitable?

For you to be included in this study I first need to ask you a series of questions about your experience of losing a child. If you don't meet the criteria for inclusion in the study, the information you have provided will be destroyed? Is it alright to proceed?

Semi-structured questions:

1. I need to have some basic information about you and your child. What is your child's name? How old was _____ when s/he passed away? How did _____ die?
2. When did _____ die?

(In order for the parents to be included in the study, the child has to have been at least 16 years old at the time of his/her death. Should the potential participants not meet these criteria, they will be informed of this fact at this point, thanked kindly for their interest in the study, and the phone call ended).

3. Can you tell me briefly about how you first learned about your child's death or diagnosis? What happened after that?
4. Can you tell me a bit about your bereavement experience? How did you cope initially with the death of your child? How has this changed over the years? What is it like now?

5. How would you describe your personal spiritual/religious beliefs and practices? Do you regularly attend and participate in a place of worship?
6. Can you tell me briefly about the role of your faith/practice in coping with the death of your child? What role did your spiritual community play? Initially? Now?
7. How did the death of _____ affect your relationship with your spouse? Have you been able to support each other in your grieving process?
8. Is your partner interested in participating in this study? If so, could I speak with him/her (or have his/her phone number) to go explain the study to him/her? If the person is present and there is sufficient time, speak to the partner at this point. Otherwise schedule a second phone call. Proceed with question #3-8.

To conclude this intake interview I would like to explain to you what is involved in this study, your rights as a participant, how we compensate participants and the limits of confidentiality to which I must abide. Proceed to summarize the three meetings, monitoring period, compensation, rights to withdraw at any time, indicate that upon confirmation of the second person in the dyad the information will be mailed out to both persons, and the limits of confidentiality.

Are there any final questions you would like to ask?

Appendix C: Letter of Consent for Participants

Spirituality and Parental Bereavement

Principal Researcher: Dr. Susan James, Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, The University of British Columbia

Co-investigator: Derrick Klaassen, MA, Educational and Counselling Psychology and Special Education, The University of British Columbia

Contact info: If you have any questions about the research project itself, you may contact either Dr. Susan James or Derrick Klaassen.

If you have any questions about ethical issues involved in this project, you may contact the Research Subject Information Line in the UBC Office of Research Services at 604-822-8598.

Dear Participants,

Thank-you for your interest in this study, which is designed to explore the role of your spiritual/religious faith and practice in coping with the death of a teenage or adult child.

Overview of the Study

If you both agree to participate, you will be asked to take part in three interviews over three months. The interviews will be audio- and video-recorded. The purpose for these recordings is to enable the research team to transcribe and analyze what you have said. These interviews involve several stages. Initially, we want to get to know you and your child a little. We will invite you to bring pictures of your child to the interviews in order to get to know him or her a little. Interviews will include observed conversations between the parents, individual interviews with researchers, and joint interviews with both parents and researchers. After the each interview, we will write up a brief narrative summary of the interview and pass it along for your feedback. Every two weeks you will be contacted via phone by a researcher (calls last approximately 30 minutes) to hear about your ongoing process in the study. You will also be asked to keep a written journal (which will be supplied to you by our team) to help you keep track of the role of your faith/practice in your joint and individual grieving.

Time Commitment

The total time commitment for this study is approximately 14 hours over three months (not including travel time to/from the UBC campus). Specifically, the first and third interview will be approximately 2.5 hours each, the second interview will be approximately 1 hour. The time spent on journaling will vary, but we encourage you to spend approximately 30 minutes three times a week in writing down your reflections. Weekly phone calls will last approximately 30 minutes. If you are interested in the results of the study, you will be given the opportunity to leave your contact information so that we can send you a summary, once we have finished with everyone.

Potential Risks and Benefits

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. The focus of this study is on the role of your spirituality in grieving. Some people may find it embarrassing to be video-taped, or uncomfortable talking about their grieving. If you ever feel uncomfortable, you can take a break from the interview, or even decide that you no longer want to continue at all. It is important to remember

that some level of disagreement about grieving is normal. However, if problems in the relationship or in the grieving process do develop over the next three months, we will be available to help participants find an appropriate grief or relationship counsellor, depending on your needs.

Your participation in this study will help us explore and understand the role of spirituality/religion in the joint and individual parental grieving. Most of the previous research on parental grieving to date has only touched on spirituality/religion tangentially and also ignored how grieving takes place in relationships. Some parents may also discover that participating in this study will be helpful to them in their grieving as they become clearer about the role of their spiritual faith/practice in bereavement and rethink their values and lives.

Your Rights and Compensation

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or withdraw from the study at any time. To compensate you for the time that you spend on this study, and for any travel or other costs that come from participating, you will be given \$30/couple after the first and second interviews, and \$40/couple after the third interview.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you will remain confidential and will be disclosed only with your permission or as required by law. Specifically, we will store all information and recordings in locked filing cabinets and password protected computer hard-drives; only the investigators will have access to the information. Transcripts (with names and other identifying information removed), and coded data will also be securely stored for potential future analysis.

Your signatures below indicates that you have received a copy of this consent form for your own records, and that you consent to participate in this study and that your responses may be put in anonymous form and kept for further use after the completion of this study.

Signature Date

Name (please print)

Signature Date

Name (please print)

Appendix D: Demographic Form

Spirituality and Parental Bereavement
Background Information

First name only: _____

Gender: MALE / FEMALE

Date of Birth: _____

Current education (check only one option):

___ Completed High School

___ Completed College or Trade/Technical Institute

___ Completed Undergraduate Degree (e.g., Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science)

___ Completed Graduate Degree (e.g., Master of Arts, PhD, MD, etc.)

Were you born in Canada? YES / NO

If NO, what country were you born in: _____

How many years have you lived in Canada: _____

How would you describe your cultural or ethnic background (e.g., Welsh; German; Taiwanese; French-Canadian; East-Indian; First Nations, Latino):

How would you describe your current spiritual/religious faith/practice (e.g., Christian [Mainline Protestant, Catholic, Evangelical, Christian Reformed, other], Buddhist, Hindu, Sikh, Muslim, etc.):

What language do you usually speak at your home (e.g., English): _____

How many children do you have? _____

How old was your child at the time of his/her death? _____

When did your child die? _____

How did your child die? _____

What have you done to cope with the loss of your child? (e.g., support from family/friends, parental bereavement support group, worked with a grief therapist, spiritual direction, etc.) _____

Appendix E: Telephone Monitoring Form

Spirituality and Parental Bereavement: Bi-monthly Telephone Monitoring Schedule

Contact call #: _____ Date of phone call: _____ Project #:

During the interviews, you described your grieving as <name the project for the participant>. Is that still the focus of what you are doing with your [partner/spouse], or has it changed? How can you tell it has stayed the same / changed?

Did you have any project-related activities or conversations since the last time we spoke? Y / N

Did you have the chance to fill out your diary after you did the activity? *If no, ask participant to fill it out with you right now, over the phone.*

How many activities / conversations did you two participate in together? _____

What kinds of project-related things did you do since the last time we spoke? [for each, elicit details re: (a) alone or who with when doing activity; (b) meaning of that activity for them; (c) how did that activity relate to their project]

What does doing/not doing those things mean for you in terms of your relationship with _____?

How did these activities help you in your intentions for [project name]?

What barriers to your goals have you come across since we last spoke?

What stands out for you the most in terms of the project since we last spoke? What are the most meaningful project-related events, thoughts, feelings and/or circumstances that have happened?

Has anything else been going on with your project that we haven't talked about yet?

Appendix F: Template for Participant Logbooks

Spirituality and Parental Bereavement

Whenever you have an activity or conversation that is part of your grieving project, please fill out these questions. If you need extra space, feel free to write on the back of the form.

Date: _____	Time of day that you did the activity: _____
Approximately how long did it last: _____	

What were you doing when the activity/conversation happened?

What was the main thing you talked about (or if it was an activity, describe what you did)?

What were you thinking during the activity / conversation?

What were your feelings?

What were you trying to do / what were your goals in this activity/conversation?

What, if anything, prevented you from reaching your goals?

How did this activity relate to reaching your grieving project (e.g. how did it help you make progress in the project; how did it interfere with the progress; or did it relate in some other way)?

Appendix G: Personal Relationship to Parental Bereavement

My Relationship to the Research Topic⁵

It is common in qualitative research for researchers to first offer a bracketing statement about their personal relationship to the topic at hand. The purpose for this activity is two fold: Firstly, it enhances the researcher's awareness of his/her relationship to the topic at hand and allows him/her to be aware of potential personal issues that may emerge in the research process. This process has at times been identified as reflexivity. Secondly, a bracketing statement relates to the research process and the ability of the researcher to present the findings with confidence and to be able to claim that the results are indeed related to the experiences of the participants rather than a result of one's own biases and presuppositions. Having said this, it is assumed that the researcher will indeed have a significant impact on the study, the questions that are posed, the topic that is researched and the way in which it is analyzed. Composing a bracketing statement at the outset of the study, however, adds one further element to the rigour of the project.

I began this project by being primarily interested in the role of spirituality and religion in the lives of people who cope with significantly stressful life circumstances. My own experiences led me to the interest in this topic. I was raised in a fundamentalist Christian home, with my father being a theologian and my mother a home-maker. I generally had an appreciation for my faith but often struggled personally with its relevance towards life and wondered if it often did not hinder more than it helped. In my university years my faith began to change as I was exposed to more liberal theological views and encountered people with vastly divergent worldviews. I retained a deep appreciation and respect for my faith, but also began to question it simultaneously. This sort of activity was not particularly welcomed

⁵ This bracketing statement was written in the fall of 2007, prior to the proposal defense or data collection.

within the fundamentalist community and thus led to my leaving these churches and seeking out more mainline Protestant communities which encouraged such questioning. During this time I also met my wife, Holly. As we came to know each other better Holly shared with me that she had lost her brother Jay in a motorcycle accident two years previously. Many of our conversations at the beginning of our relationship had to do with death and grief. The two issues were combined in this dissertation, and out of it emerged this study on the role of faith in coping with the loss of a child.

I am very interested in coming to understand more how parents from various worldviews are able to cope with the loss of their child and the role that their personal faith plays in this process. From my conversations with various parents thus far (e.g., with my in-laws), the death of a child appears to be an all-encompassing event, an event that forever changes all people who are close to this child, particularly the parents. Spiritual/religious worldviews, it seems to me, have therefore a great potential to be of help, but my personal hunch is that not all worldviews are helpful. This is where it relates back to my own journey. I found that in my life that some fundamentalist assumptions about the world and faith are unhelpful and are often (at least in my case they were) connected to a suspicion and fear of the world. However, it is experiences that I have had that have opened me up to the possibility that the world may not be quite as rigid and black/white as I grew up believing it to be. My sense is that the death of a child is one such event which lays bear some assumptions about the world that are not particularly helpful – e.g., that God always will protect us and our loved ones and that life is not painful. My sense is that parents who have experienced the death of their child and have emerged with a faith have much to teach us all

about the value of this faith in a time of deep need. So, as I embark upon this project I have a deep sense of reverence for the participants that I will meet.

However, there is also some fear there for me. I am now a parent myself and have two children of my own. Facing the parents in this study will, I believe, to a significant extent confront me with the possibility that I need to turn towards my own mortality and the mortality of my own children. I believe for me that this would indeed be the worst possible thing that could happen to me. But I also sense that in spite of the horror of losing a child that my faith would survive, and that it would probably be the one thing to which I could anchor myself in such a situation. Of course, this would not remove the pain of such an event, as I presume it has not for those who have lost children. However, in the midst of the pain and suffering in such a situation there is probably something that we can learn – about grieving, and parenting, and faith. And although I presume that this study will involve some vicarious pain for me, too, I do believe that it is worth looking for this treasure.

Appendix H: Interview Guidelines Spirituality and Parental Bereavement

Interview #1

PRELIMINARY

- Give brief overview of interview schedule (joint conversation & individual self-confrontation interviews)
- Lead interviewer explains consent & gets signatures from both people first; administers demographic questionnaire

WARM UP

As we mentioned in the consent forms, we will be video- and audio-taping everything, to make sure we have accurate records of what is going on. I'll just turn on the equipment now.

*** remember to turn on BOTH video-cameras, and the audiorecorder ***

Rapport-building:

Ease into the process with questions / comments related to weather, how they came to find out about the study, finding the interview space, etc.

Priming for topic (conversational style)

So our study is about the experience of parental bereavement. Particularly, we are interested in coming to understand the role that your personal faith/spirituality/religion (use terminology that fits with research participant's worldview) plays in your ongoing grieving. Moreover, we would like to focus not only how this relates to your individual grief processes, but also to how your faith relates to what you do together in your grieving (e.g., going to support meetings, joint spiritual activities, prayer, meditation, going to place of worship, etc.).

But before we go onto these things, we would like to take some time to get to know you and your child. Can you tell us a bit about him/her? Did you bring any pictures? What was s/he like?

Can you tell us next briefly about how your son/daughter died and how you came to find out about this? (if child died from disease, how they came to know about the diagnosis).

[ask this individually of each person] Can you tell us about your grieving? How was it for you? What kinds of things did you do? What were these activities about?

[ask jointly] What role did your faith/spirituality/practice play in your grieving? What kind of things did you do, and do you do now, individually and together than help you cope with your loss? What have you done and what do you continue to do to help you make sense of his/her death? How has the death of your child changed your individual lives and your relationship?

When the couple appears ready to engage with each other, or if they spontaneously start react to each other's comments:

So, I wonder if the two of you could have a conversation together about the spiritual activities that you engage in which help you cope with and make sense of your child's death? (e.g., going to a support group, praying, going to place of worship, meditation, meeting other parents who have lost a child, etc.)

OK, well we will leave the room now, so that you can do that. Take the next 20 or so minutes or so to have your conversation, and we will join you again after that time.

JOINT CONVERSATION

Do any preliminary preparations for self-confrontation interview. Make sure that equipment is working.

SELF-CONFRONTATION (each participant separately)

So now we are going to review the conversation that you just had, to help us get a better understanding of your perspective- what you were thinking and what you were feeling in each segment of the conversation. Whenever something important comes up, I want you to feel free to stop the recording and tell me about it. I'll do the same if I notice something that seems important, or if it looks like there is a shift in the focus of what you are talking about.

Do you understand what we will be doing? Are you ready to begin?

[section by section, playing tape]

- What were you thinking and feeling in that section?
- What was your goal (trying to do) in that part of the conversation?
- What do you think [partner's name] was trying to do in that part of the conversation?

Make sure you get their EMOTIONAL reaction, not just their cognitions

At end of tape:

- So overall, what do you think you were trying to accomplish in this conversation?
- And if we take a step back, what are you trying to accomplish by volunteering for this study? What is this about for you?
- Is there anything else that I should know, about that conversation?

Let's see if ___ and ___ are done.

Interview #2

INTRO

- Hellos.
- Remind them of taping.
- Today's interview will be much shorter than last time, and mainly to confirm our understanding of what was going on in the first interview. There will be some individual time, and some time with everybody together.

* Set up recording equipment in 2 rooms *

FEEDBACK (separately)

So, in the last few weeks, had a look at the conversation and the individual interviews that you did last time, and wrote up a summary of it. What we want to do today is to check with you to make sure we were on the right track... does what we say make sense from your own perspective.

I'm going to read out the narrative that we came up with to you, and I want you to stop me at any time if you have questions, or we got something wrong, I want you to tell me what it should say instead.

[read narrative, slowly, pausing at each paragraph and asking some variation of "does that fit with you?"]

Is there anything important that we missed?

In the next part, we are going to share this with [name]. Knowing that, is there anything that you would like me to change or omit, before we do that? Are you comfortable with sharing this with him/her?

IDENTIFYING PROJECTS

[have each participant share their narrative with their partner, to read.]

[elicit reactions to the other person's narrative: are there any surprises or things you didn't know?]

As you probably remember, the point of this study is to understand the role of your faith/spiritual practice in coping with parental bereavement. For the next three months, we are going to ask you to keep track what you are doing ...

But, first, we need to figure out what grieving-related goals, or decisions, or tasks you want to be focusing on, in the next few months. We call these things "projects".

Remembering that we define "grieving" and "spiritual/faith" very broadly... not just praying or going to a place of worship or visiting a gravesite, but anything that you might be doing that is relates to your grieving.

Anyway, the grieving projects that we came up with, from our last interview with you include: [read summary of projects]

Are any of these off the mark, or already finished?

Are there any other things that the two of you need to be focusing on in the next few months? [explore more fully what that means]

So among these different projects, what are the priorities for the two of you in the next 3 months; what would you like to focus on in the next stage of the study?

[come to an agreement about the project to focus on]

EXPLANATION OF MONITORING PERIOD

OK. So in the next few months, one of the things that the two of you will be working on, in terms of your grieving, is [describe project].

What we would like you to do is to keep track of the things that you do together to work on that... your joint actions and activities. For example, if you have a conversation at home about [project], or [insert some relevant examples].

Specifically, we would like you to keep a written journal, jotting down what you did, what you were hoping to accomplish, how it turned out, as well as your thoughts and feelings about it.

This is something that is important for each of you to do individually, because we want to be able to get at, and compare, each of your different perspectives.

There are two ways for us to do this. The easiest one (for us), is to send you the template electronically, and for you to type up the activities, and e-mail the logs back every 2 weeks.

The other option is to use these log-books [demo]; you will write up the activities as they happen. Every 2 weeks, we'll give you a phone call, so you can update us. [get their preference for how to do the monitoring]

Do you have any questions about the monitoring period, or what we are asking you to do?

[give hard-copy logs, if needed]

[get contact info- phone AND e-mail... just to make sure we can contact you if we need to]

[give them your contact info: e-mail and phone]

Goodbyes. I guess we'll touch base in two weeks.

DEBRIEF

OK, so that's it. Do you guys have any questions for us about our study, or the things that we asked you to do?

[If necessary, give summary of purpose of study]

We hope to have everybody interviewed, and all the information analyzed by the end of the year. Would you be interested in getting a summary of our overall conclusions?

[If yes, ask for contact info for that time.] Plus you can always e-mail me at ____ if you don't hear from us soon enough.

Thanks again for being willing to share this part of your life with us.

Interview 3

INTRO

1 person sets up the equipment: both audio-recorders; both cameras

* Hellos & general rapport-building questions*

*Explain today's session:

- like first interview, except this time focused on a how the project went
- will let you talk with each other first, and then review the tape individually, with an interviewer
- After we are done, we'll do a 'debrief', which is basically a chance for you to ask questions about the study.

* Remind them what the project was about: read the description to them.

So, we were hoping that you could discuss with each other how things have been going, in terms of working on that project. Things like:

- So, from your own perspective, was the project helpful, or is it something that you are still working one, or what? (and why do you think it was successful nor not)
- What is the outcome of the project: what decisions / plans / changes have come about? What is still left to be done?
- What did you actually do together to work on the project, and were those things effective or not, and why?

In other words, we would like you to have a conversation with each other, about (a) the project, (b) and how it went over the past month, and (c) what's going to happen next.

Do you have any questions about what we would like you to do? So, do you think the two of you are up to having a conversation with just each other about this stuff?

OK, well we will leave the room now, so that you can do that. Most people find that this conversation is a lot shorter than the first one, but take your time and come and get us when you are done.

JOINT CONVERSATION

Do any preliminary preparations for self-confrontation interview. [If still discussing after ½ hour, go in and ask them how it is going, and if they are about ready to wrap up]

SELF-CONFRONTATION (each participant separately)

So now we are going to review the conversation that you just had, to help me get a better understanding of your perspective- what you were thinking and what you were feeling in each segment of the discussion.

Just like in the 1st interview, when something important comes up, I want you to stop the recording and tell me about it. I'll do the same if I notice something that seems important, or if it looks like there is a shift in the focus of what you are talking about.

Do you understand what we will be doing? Are you ready to begin?
[section by section, playing tape]

What were you thinking and feeling in that section?

What was your goal (trying to do) in that part of the conversation?

What do you think [partner's name] was trying to do in that part of the conversation?

Make sure you get their EMOTIONAL reaction, not just their cognitions

At end of tape:

So overall, what were your thoughts about the conversation you just had?

- *Typical vs. not typical*

- *Feelings about conversation*

Also, was there anything important about the project, and what you have been doing together for the past 3 months, that you didn't get a chance to talk about with [partner]?

- follow-up questions to get a sense of what else was going on.

Now let's see if ___ and ___ are done.

DEBRIEF

Give remaining incentive and thank them

Before we leave, you guys have any questions for us about our study, or the things that we asked you to do?

[If necessary, give summary of purpose of study]

We hope to have everybody interviewed, and all the information analyzed by the end of the summer 2008. Would you be interested in getting a summary of our overall conclusions?

[If yes, ask for contact info for that time.] Plus you can always e-mail Derrick if you don't hear from us soon enough.

Thanks again for being willing to share this part of your life with us.

Appendix I: Master List of Codes for Analysis

Acknowledges	Disagrees	Expresses surprise
Advises	Disapprove	Expresses uncertainty
Agrees	Dismissive or	Expresses understanding
Ambiguous response	diminishing statement	Female Partner
Answers question	Elaborates	Incomplete statement
Apologizes	Encourages	Interrupts
Approves	Evaluative or judging	Invites or elicits a response
Asks for clarification	statement	Laughs
Asks for confirmation	Expresses anger	Paraphrasing
Asks for information	Expresses belief or	Partial agreement
Asks for justification or	disbelief	Pause
reasons	Expresses desire	Praises
Asks for opinion or belief	Expresses disgust	Provides information
Asks for speculation or	Expresses	Reflects affect
hypothetical scenario	dissatisfaction	Reflects cognition
Clarifies	Expresses doubt	Requests
Complains	Expresses fear	States a plan
Confirms	Expresses gratitude	Suggests
Continues others statement	Expresses humor	Unintelligible response
Demands	Expresses joy	
Describes future	Expresses love	
Describes other	Expresses opinion or	
Describes past	perception	
Describes possibility or	Expresses realization	
hypothetical situation	Expresses sadness	
Describes self		
Describes situation or event		

Appendix J: Overview of Study

