

**WHAT IS THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING
FOR WOMEN IN MIDLIFE OF THE RECENT
DEATH OF THEIR MOTHERS?**

by

KAREN CATHARINE KRANZ

B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1995

**A THESIS SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF
THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS**

in

THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES

Department of Educational and Counselling Psychology & Special Education

**WE ACCEPT THIS THESIS AS CONFORMING
TO THE REQUIRED STANDARD**

THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

June 1999

© Karen Catharine Kranz, 1999

In presenting this thesis in partial fulfilment of the requirements for an advanced degree at the University of British Columbia, I agree that the Library shall make it freely available for reference and study. I further agree that permission for extensive copying of this thesis for scholarly purposes may be granted by the head of my department or by his or her representatives. It is understood that copying or publication of this thesis for financial gain shall not be allowed without my written permission.

Department of Educational & Counselling Psychology &
The University of British Columbia Special Education
Vancouver, Canada

Date Aug. 11 / 99

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research was to explore how women in midlife experience and make meaning of the recent death of their mothers. A qualitative phenomenological paradigm was chosen as a means of exploring and discovering, in depth and in detail, midlife daughters' experiences as they viewed them from within their own phenomenological worlds (Henwood, 1993).

Nine Caucasian women between the ages of 42 and 65 years participated in individual, in-depth, audio taped, personal interviews. Each of these women had experienced the death of her mother between 1 1/2 and 5 years prior to the interview. The main question the women were asked to consider and describe was: *What was it like for you to experience your mother's death and what meaning does her death have for you today?* Co-researchers were invited to discuss their experiences like a story with a beginning - a middle - and an end.

Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step model of phenomenological data analysis served as a general guideline to identify the common themes shared by these women who had recently experienced their mothers' death. Seven themes emerged through the analysis. These themes pertained to these daughters' (1) profound sense of loss, (2) need to make sense of their mothers' death, (3) need to reassess their relationships with their mothers, (4) sense of regret concerning lost opportunities, (5) sense of shifting roles and responsibilities, (6) need to reassess meaning in their lives, and (7) sense of enduring connection to their mothers. These themes are elaborated on in terms of their implications for future research and counselling.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION	1
Purpose of the study.....	7
CHAPTER TWO - LITERATURE REVIEW.....	10
Significance of the Mother-Daughter Relationship.....	10
Research on Impact of Mother Death on Children/Adolescents.....	15
Research on Impact of Mother Death on Women in Midlife	17
CHAPTER THREE - METHODOLOGY.....	24
Personal Assumptions.....	24
Participants.....	26
Procedure.....	28
Recruitment.....	28
The Interview.....	29
Data Analysis.....	30
Limitations of the Study.....	32
CHAPTER FOUR - RESULTS.....	35
Women's Bio-synopses.....	35
Wishbone.....	35
Jonnie.....	36
Alice.....	37
Betsy.....	38
Emma.....	39
Jane.....	40
Jean.....	41

TABLE OF CONTENTS CONTINUED

Laine.....	42
Mary.....	43
Common Themes.....	44
Profound Sense of Loss.....	45
Need to Make Sense of Their Mothers' Death.....	52
Need to Reassess Their Relationships with Their Mothers...	56
Sense of Regret Concerning Lost Opportunities.....	60
Sense of Shifting Roles and Responsibilities.....	65
Need to Reassess Meaning in Their Lives.....	70
Sense of Enduring Connection to Their Mothers.....	75
CHAPTER FIVE - DISCUSSION.....	80
Comparison with the Literature.....	80
Implications for Future Research.....	88
Implications for Counselling.....	91
REFERENCES.....	96
APPENDICES	
Appendix A - Advertisement for the Study.....	102
Appendix B - Co-researcher Consent Form.....	103
Appendix C - Orienting Statement.....	104
Appendix D - Interview Questions.....	105
Appendix E - Letter - Validation Interviews.....	106

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to express my gratitude to, and acknowledge the efforts of, my committee members Dr. Judith Daniluk, Dr. Rich Young, and Dr. Angela Henderson. I thank them for sharing their knowledge, wisdom, and insight. I am especially grateful to Judith, my supervisor, for her enthusiasm, encouragement, and guidance throughout this endeavour.

I am grateful to the nine women who participated in this research. I thank them for their honesty, openness, and willingness to share their stories.

I wish to thank all the women who have mothered me throughout my life: Cathy, Dorothy, Carol, and Tove. I especially want to acknowledge my mother Catharine Ellen Bradshaw who has profoundly influenced my life and was the inspiration for this project.

I wish to thank my friends, a wonderful group of people who always support and encourage me. A special thanks to Joyce for her proofreading skills and to Trevor for his unconditional love.

Finally, and most important, I wish to thank my beautiful partner, Laurie, whose love and laughter fills my life with joy.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

“...every mother contains her daughter in herself and every daughter her mother, and that every woman extends backwards into her mother and forwards into her daughter” (Jung, 1959, p.188).

“Oh, my son’s my son
till he gets him a wife,
But my daughter’s my
daughter all her life.”
(Craik, 1980, p. 597)

Each person is born of a mother; each woman is a daughter.

Relationships between mothers and daughters are probably the most rewarding and the most challenging relationships imaginable. This relationship is unique as each party changes and matures dramatically during the course of the interaction. Mothers experience their daughters as prenatal beings, babies, children, adolescents, young adults, adults in their middle years and, sometimes, adults in their later years. Generally, daughters first form relationships with mothers who are young adults. This relationship continues through the mother’s middle adult years and into her older adult years. Thus, the mother-daughter relationship is a complex web of interconnections between parties who are continually casting off aspects of earlier selves and reconstructing their identities as they develop and mature. It is within this relational tapestry that people may experience, to varying degrees, the full spectrum of emotions available to human beings; from pleasure to grief, from pride to disappointment, from excitement to fear, and from love to hate.

No matter if we are a woman or a child, we have our own children or not, we are in communication with our mothers or not, we know deep within us that the woman who gave birth to us has a unique hold on our psyche. As Rich (1995) writes, “Probably there is nothing in human nature more resonant with charges than the flow of energy between two biologically alike bodies, one of which has lain in amniotic bliss inside the other, one of which has laboured to give birth to the other” (p. 225). Through exploring Greek mythology, heroines in contemporary novels

and movies, academic psychological literature, and anecdotal popular psychology books, it becomes obvious that mother-daughter relationships and the loss of these relationships profoundly touches all aspects of women's lives.

In Greek mythology, the loss of the mother-daughter relationship is epitomised in the story of Demeter and her daughter Persephone. Demeter, the goddess of agriculture and growing things and her daughter Persephone, the maiden who represents youth and springtime, lived on an earth that was perpetually in summer (Poth, 1994). One day while gathering flowers, Persephone was kidnapped by Hades, the god of the underworld. "Demeter heard the echoes of Persephone's cries and rushed to find her. She searched for nine days and nine nights for her abducted daughter, over the entire land and sea. She would not stop to eat, sleep, or bathe in her frantic search" (Bolen, 1984, p. 169). When she lost hope of finding Persephone, Demeter, "sat alone in her grief for her abducted daughter, and refused to function. As a consequence, nothing could grow and nothing could be born. Famine threatened to destroy the human race, depriving the Olympian gods and goddesses of their offerings and sacrifices" (p. 170). In order to get Demeter working, that is, providing the world with food, Zeus, Persephone's father, negotiated with Hades to release Persephone from the underworld. Hades agreed to allow Persephone to return to earth as long as she did not eat anything in the underworld. On this condition, Persephone was released and mother and daughter were joyously reunited. However, it was soon discovered that Persephone had eaten a pomegranate seed. Zeus then ruled that Persephone could not remain with her mother on earth. She was to return to the underworld for a part of every year. In Persephone's absence each year, Demeter's grief was so intense she was unable to make things grow and the earth became barren. However, when Demeter and Persephone were reunited annually, the joy and happiness they experience being together was reflected in the world; summer arrived and the earth blossomed (Poth).

The theme of loss and reconnection in mother-daughter relationships is evident in contemporary novels and movies. In "The Salt Dancers" by Ursula

Hegi (1995) Julia is reunited with her estranged mother. Feeling weary, Julia lay down. "Rest," my mother whispered. A hand, her hand, brushed my cheek with the suddenness that used to distinguish her movements, and for the instant it lingered on my skin, I felt treasured in a way I hadn't known before" (p. 233). Likewise, in the movie *The Winter Guest* (Pressman, Lipper & Clark-Hall, 1998) the daughter submerges her head in the bath water seemingly to avoid her mother's perpetual chatter. Yet moments later, with panic in her voice she calls out, "I can't hear you" when, for a brief moment, her mother is silent.

The importance of the mother-daughter relationship in women's psychological development was first acknowledged in academic psychological literature by Freud (1964), who saw the mother as central to the development of women. However, his theorizing about female psychological development has been extensively criticized based on its misogynistic and ethnocentric assumptions (Chodorow, 1978; 1996; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Rosen & Zickler, 1996). Freud set forth the concept that "normal" human development involved the notions of separation from mother and of developing a sense of autonomy, independence and self individuation. In our culture, these characteristics have become associated with males. Women, generally, are not described as autonomous or independent and are therefore considered deficient when compared to men. In contrast, feminist American psychologists (Chodorow, 1978; Rubin, 1983) and feminist British psychologists (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983) have reframed and reconceptualized traditional psychoanalytic thought so that women's experiences are not viewed as deficient when compared to men's. Although these theorists, like Freud, contend that mothers are significant to the psychological development of daughters, unlike Freud, they do not pathologize the experiences of women. Rather, these theorists have redefined characteristics associated with women (e.g., being relationship oriented) as positive and desirable (Chodorow; Gilligan; Miller; Rosen & Zickler). Chodorow (1978; 1996) proposed that daughters' primary identification is with their mothers because mothers and daughters share the same gender. This identification serves to foster daughters' psychological development as relationship

oriented. Rubin (1983) explored how the early mother-daughter relationship impacts daughters' gender role identity and adult intimate relationships.

Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983) emphasized mothers' identification with their daughters and how this identification contributes to the life-long struggle for separation and connection between mothers and daughters.

Due to its unique nature, interest in mother-daughter relationships goes beyond academic psychological literature and appears in contemporary popular psychology books. For example, Friday (1977), whose work is based on her own mother-daughter relationship, as well as interviews with mental health clinicians and anecdotal accounts from mothers and daughters, conceptualized the mother-daughter relationship through a psychoanalytic lens. She outlined the merry-go-round of love and enmity within the mother-daughter relationship and discussed women's seemingly ongoing desire not to be like their mothers and to credit other people for their virtues. Overall, Friday painted a picture of mother-daughter relationships as conflictual. However, several researchers (Barnett, Kibria, Baruch & Pleck, 1991; Baruch & Barnett, 1983; Bromberg, 1983) argue that adult mother-daughter relationships are not the sources of tension that Friday asserted. Rather, adult mother-daughter relationships are reported to be positive (Barnett et al., 1991), are viewed as rewarding (Baruch & Barnett, 1983), and are characterized by mutuality, interdependence and positive connection (Bromberg, 1983). Although the majority of Friday's book focussed on negative aspects of mother-daughter relationships, she too revised her view of her own mother. With compassion directed towards her mother, she concluded her book by acknowledging the gifts she received from her.

As indicated, the mother-daughter relationship is imbued with historical, psychological, emotional, and cultural meaning. The common thread that runs throughout each myth, story, theory and piece of research is a desire to make collective and individual meaning from women's shared experience as daughters and mothers. Rich (1995) writes of daughters' never-ending longing for their mothers, "There was, is, in most of us, a girl-child still longing for a woman's

nurture, tenderness, and approval, a woman's power exerted in our defence, a woman's smell and touch and voice, a woman's strong arms around us in moments of fear and pain" (p. 224). As daughters, if this statement has meaning for us then we intuitively know that the death and subsequent loss of our mothers will be a powerful and formative experience, regardless of our age.

The death of their mothers may be one of the major losses that women have to face. Viorst (1986) identified mother loss as an "inescapable fact...that our mother is going to leave us, and we will leave her"...(p. 2). The significance of this loss is acknowledged in research on the long-term impact on children and adolescents of the death of their mothers. Parenting abilities (Altschul & Beiser, 1984; Zall, 1995), mental illness (Birtchnell, 1980), depression (Bifulco, Brown & Harris 1987; Bifulco, Harris & Brown 1992; Parker & Manicavasagar, 1986; Zall, 1995), feelings of isolation, unworthiness, guilt and insecurity in adolescence and adulthood (Pill & Zabin, 1997) have all been associated with daughters who, as children, experienced the death of their mothers. In addition, researchers (Berlinsky & Biller, 1982; Hatter, 1996) have identified a number of variables which appear to shape the experience of children who experience maternal death. These variables are environmental (e.g., circumstances of the death, the child's preparation for and involvement with the mourning process, etc.), family (e.g., the relationships between members before and after the death, cultural background and ethnicity, etc.), and child specific (e.g., age, cognitive state of development, special abilities or disabilities, coping styles, etc.).

Through anecdotes and her own personal experience of mother loss in adolescence Edelman (1994; 1995), addressed the meaning daughters attach to their mothers' lives and deaths. Through the stories of other women, Edelman found, that her feelings regarding her own mother's early death were shared by other daughters. She writes that "my mother's death had been the most determining, the most profound, the most influential event of my life. It had become my organizer, the focal point of my identity and the standard to which I compared and contrasted all the other stresses of life" (1994, p. xix).

Thus, it appears from the available popular and psychological literature that the death of their mothers may be a major life event for daughters. However, it is not always the case that mother loss is interpreted by our society as a tragic event for the surviving daughter. For example, when an older mother who has lived a long life dies of natural causes and leaves daughters who are in midlife, our society generally perceives this loss as being "on-time" and "normative" (Klapper, Moss, Moss & Rubinstein, 1994). In some situations, when illness is involved, the loss may be perceived as welcomed (Meyers, 1986). Therefore, while some attention has been paid to the developmental adjustment difficulties associated with mother loss in childhood (Altschul & Beiser, 1984; Berlinsky & Biller, 1982; Bifulco et al., 1987; Bifulco et al., 1992; Birtchnell, 1980; Hatter, 1996; Parker & Manicavasagar, 1986; Pill & Zabin, 1997; Zall, 1994) and adolescence (Edelman, 1994; Rainieri & Lester, 1997; Zall, 1994), little attention has been paid to the experience of this loss for women in midlife.

A limited amount of literature addresses the experience of parental loss in middle adulthood. Common reactions to this loss include: changes in self concept (Douglas, 1990; Moss & Moss, 1983; Scharlach & Fredriksen, 1993), a heightened sense of one's own mortality (Douglas; Moss & Moss; Scharlach & Fredriksen), and changes in personal priorities and relationships (Douglas; Moss & Moss; Scharlach & Fredriksen). However, most of this literature does not distinguish between the experiences of women and men or between the loss of a mother and the loss of a father. Therefore, from this research, we do not know specifically how women during the midlife decades experience the loss of their mothers with whom they have a relationship considered especially significant to their lifelong development.

The impact of their mothers' death on midlife daughters becomes an even more salient issue when one considers the current Canadian population statistics. In 1996, of the total population of Canadian women, 5,099,130 (34%) were between the ages of 35 and 59 years (Statistics Canada, 1998). In addition, death of a parent is most likely to occur when woman are in midlife (Rando, 1988;

Umberson & Chen, 1994). Thus, over the next 20 to 25 years, one third of the Canadian female population who have not yet experienced the death of their mothers will be faced with this issue. Consequently, women may be dealing with their mothers' death and its aftermath at a time of their lives that is often associated with a wide range of biopsychosocial changes.

Midlife characteristically is a time of developmental transitions during which women are often confronted with a host of sociocultural, biological, relationship, and role changes. According to Apter (1996), midlife women have a desire to complete past unfinished business and to bring to life any unfulfilled dreams. Similarly, Rubin (1979) states that, at midlife, women explore who they are and what they want. Thus, at a time when many women are revising and recreating their personal understanding of their sense of self culturally, physically, socially, and psychologically, many are also confronted with the death of their mothers and, subsequently, the physical ending of their longest relationship.

Purpose of the Study

Evidence has been presented supporting the developmental and social significance of mother-daughter relationships. It also appears that it is during midlife that daughters are most likely to experience their mothers' death, (i.e., a time when women may be experiencing a host of developmental transitions). How daughters in midlife experience this significant loss at a time in life when they are simultaneously confronted with numerous other challenges is unclear. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to document the subjective experience and meaning for daughters in midlife of their mothers' recent death.

As this topic is complex and is something about which little is known, it lends itself to qualitative method as a means of exploring and discovering, in depth and in detail, midlife daughters' experiences as they view them from within their own phenomenological worlds (Henwood, 1993). A phenomenological approach was selected as the most appropriate methodology for this research. Through in-depth, descriptive interviews, phenomenological researchers strive to understand the essence of a phenomenon as it is experienced within the context of the research

participants' lives (Van, Manen, 1994).

This research was also guided by a feminist perspective. Overall, feminist researchers value women's experiences and strive to make them the focus of inquiry and to de-mystify the research process by making details known to the participants. This approach also attempts to place both the researcher and the research participants on the same level (Allen & Baber, 1992), to avoid the kind of "context-stripping" that can result from using laboratory approaches that decrease women's individuality, and to reject the belief that there is an objective science free of the cultural, historical and personal experiences of the observer (Worell & Etaugh, 1994). These values are consistent with the objectives of this study.

A desired outcome of this study was to contribute to and build upon the existing knowledge of women in midlife. More specifically, this research was designed to give a voice to midlife women so that they could report on their own experiences regarding the death of their mothers. This research was intended to be a channel through which women could express their experiences. Ideally therefore, this research would be "for" women and not just "about" women (Rigor, 1992).

As 34% of the Canadian female population is between the ages of 35 and 59 years and, therefore, is either in or approaching midlife, counsellors/therapists can expect to be working with women who are confronted with their mothers' death and its aftermath. Hence, one goal of this research was to provide counsellors/therapists with information that may help elucidate the experience of mother loss for women in midlife.

Finally, this research was designed to contribute to and build upon the existing knowledge of mother-daughter relationships in general and, specifically, the experiences of midlife daughters. Much of the research on adult mother-daughter relationships focusses on daughters' caregiving to aging mothers (Brody, 1981; Brody, 1986; Crawford, Bond & Balshaw, 1994; Green, 1991; Lang & Brody, 1983; Levitt, Guacci & Weber, 1992; Walker & Thompson, 1983; Walker & Allen, 1991; Walker, Martin & Jones, 1992; Whitbeck, Simons & Conger, 1991). It is intended that this research will help broaden our knowledge of the

mother-daughter relationship from the perspective of the midlife daughter.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to delineate the current research that pertains to mother-daughter relationships and the loss of these relationships due to the mothers' death. Thus, I will summarize the theoretical literature and empirical research which will serve to clarify first, the significance of mother-daughter relationships; second, the research describing how female children and adolescents are impacted by their mothers' death; and third, the literature describing how women in midlife experience their mothers' recent death. Unless otherwise indicated, the research cited in this literature review is based predominately on Caucasian, North American females.

Significance of the Mother-Daughter Relationship

A host of psychological literature underscores the centrality of mother-daughter relationships in the psychological development of women. The significance of the mother-daughter relationship was first documented in academic psychological literature by Freud (1964) who theorized that the mother is the exclusive love object for the first three years of her daughter's life. Freud asserted that around the age of three, little girls realize they do not have a penis. This discovery is interpreted by daughters as an indication of their inadequacy and inferiority. Freud believed that, at this point, daughters turn away from their mothers as they hold their mothers responsible for their castration. The daughter thus moves towards her father because he has the desired penis. Freud contended, however, that the daughter must eventually realign herself with her mother in order to develop into an adequate female adult. When the daughter successfully represses her desire for a penis, she identifies with her mother and develops the basis for feminine gender identity. Thus, although Freud argued that daughters separate from their mothers and that mother-daughter relationships are conflictual, he also acknowledged that mother-daughter relationships are "rich in content and so long lasting" (p.121).

Following in Freud's theoretical footsteps, Mahler, Pine and Bergman

(1975) conducted a longitudinal observational study of mother-child pairs comprising 22 mothers and their 38 children. Based on their findings, these authors hypothesized that there is a universal intrapsychic aspect of human development involving a process of separation and individuation. Separation refers to the child's sense of separation from the mother and, ultimately, the external world. Individuation refers to the sense of developing a distinct identity. These authors concluded that the process of becoming a separate individual is generally more difficult for girls than for boys due to the fact that daughters and mothers share the same gender. Therefore, Mahler et al. supported the notion that mothers and daughters are inexorably linked due to the fact that they share the same gender.

Through the work of Freud and Mahler et al. the conception of "normal" human development encompassed the notions of separation from mother and of developing a sense of autonomy, independence and self individuation. In our culture these characteristics have become associated with males while women, in comparison, have been found deficient (Chodorow, 1978; 1991; Gilligan, 1982; Miller, 1986; Rosen & Zickler, 1996). Due to this dissatisfaction with the classical psychoanalytic view of female psychological development and the role of the mother-daughter relationship from this viewpoint, Chodorow (1978) reframed traditional psychoanalytic thought. She proposed that the psychological development of both men and women is significantly affected by the reality that throughout Western societies children's primary caregivers and initial socializers are female. It is within the context of this relationship with a female that an infant's self identity develops. First, the infant begins to develop a sense of body integrity. Sensations and feelings within the individual become central, or core, to the sense of self. Second, the child begins, psychologically, to view her/himself as separate. Thereby, infants develop ego boundaries which are "a sense of personal psychological division from the rest of the world" (Chodorow, 1978, p. 68). For little girls this has particular significance because they share the same gender as their mothers. Due to the fact that daughters and mothers are both female, daughters tend to perceive themselves as less separate from their mothers than do sons. In

psychodynamic terms, females develop flexible ego boundaries which result in the female personality being defined in terms of connection with others. In comparison, little boys separate themselves from their mothers and what they represent. They develop rigid ego boundaries and learn to value autonomy and independence. Unlike Freud's (1964) theory, Chodorow argued that little girls do not reject their mother and seek their fathers (Chodorow, 1978; 1989). Rather, she states that daughters maintain a strong, lifetime attachment to their mothers because a daughter's sense of identity develops within a relationship with an "other" of the same gender.

Rubin (1983) conceptualized the mother-daughter relationship as an on-going struggle to separate; however, her rationale is from a different perspective. Rubin elaborated on the work of Chodorow (1978) and Dinnerstein (1976). Like Chodorow she emphasized that the psychological differences between males and females reside in the fact that women are children's primary caregivers. However, based on object relations theory, interviews with 150 couples between the ages of 25 and 55 years, and her clinical work as a psychotherapist, Rubin went a step further and examined the impact on adult intimate relationships of being cared for by a woman in infancy. She concluded that identity is a two-fold process involving the development of ego boundaries and gender identity. As the initial internalization of the daughter is the female mother, the development of female gender role identity comes easily to daughters. There is no need to replace the initial female internalization because mothers and daughters share the same gender. However, the development of ego boundaries, upon which the concept of separation/individuation is based, is more difficult for daughters as there is not the natural gender separation that there is in mother-son relationships. Like Chodorow, Rubin concluded that daughters develop permeable ego boundaries which enable them to empathize with others and be connected to people throughout their lives more than males. But, because mothers and daughters never completely separate, they tend to engage in a life-long struggle of unity versus separation (Rubin, 1983).

Whereas Chodorow (1978) and Rubin (1983) focussed on the experience of

daughters and their identification with their mothers, Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983) outlined mothers' identification with their daughters (Boyd, 1989) based on their clinical work with women with eating disorders. Like Chodorow, Eichenbaum and Orbach acknowledged the significance of mothers as the primary childcare providers in Western culture. They also highlighted the importance of mothers and daughters sharing the same gender and, as such, the same social role identification, social expectations, and positions as second class citizens in our patriarchal society and in our traditional family structure.

According to Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983), there are three major aspects of the mother-daughter interaction. First, when a mother gives birth to a girl, she feels that she is, in a sense, recreating herself. The mother sees the daughter as one who will be just like her, that is, a nurturer of others; a mother; and a second class citizen. Second, through the mother-daughter interaction, the mother projects onto her daughter her own desires to be nurtured. At times the mother responds to the neediness she acknowledges in her daughter because she wants her daughter to receive what she requires. However, at other times she resists satisfying her daughter's needs because she fears her daughter will not develop the ability to place her own needs second to the needs of others; a female characteristic required in a patriarchal society. The result is a mother-daughter relationship that is both satisfying and frustrating. Eichenbaum and Orbach contend that this push-pull dynamic is characteristic throughout the duration of mother-daughter relationships. Third, just as the mother was forced to repress the needy little girl within herself while being socialized into the female gender role, she views her daughter in a similar fashion. Since the mother had to deny her own needs and cast them into her unconscious, she is also driven to purge her daughter's overt desires for nurturing and dependence (Eichenbaum & Orbach, 1983).

These theorists, Chodorow (1978), Rubin (1983), and Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983), describe how daughters' psychological development is influenced by first, the fact that women are the primary caregivers in Western culture (Chodorow; Rubin), second, that mothers and daughters share the same gender

(Chodorow; Rubin; Eichenbaum & Orbach), and third, that mothers teach their daughters appropriate female behavior that is required in a patriarchal culture (Eichenbaum & Orbach). As a result, daughters develop flexible ego boundaries that serve to enhance daughters' ability to be empathic and lead them to be relationship oriented (Chodorow; Rubin). Daughters also learn how to ignore and/or deny their own desires for nurturance in order fit within the expectations of females in a patriarchal society (Eichenbaum & Orbach). In addition, as a result of the development of permeable ego boundaries in daughters (Chodorow; Rubin) and, as a result of mothering which sometimes means ignoring the needs of daughters in order to foster their growth into a patriarchal culture (Eichenbaum & Orbach), the mother-daughter relationship is characterized by a life-long struggle for separation and unity. These theories support this researcher's belief in the complex and dynamic nature of mother-daughter relationships and in the enduring importance of mothers in the lives of daughters.

Researchers from the Stone Centre for Developmental Services and Studies, specifically, Jordan (1991), Surrey (1991), and Miller (1986; 1991), base their theoretical perspective of women's development on clinical experience and through collaboration with other mental health professionals. Thereby they approach women's development and the key role of the mother-daughter relationship from a different perspective. Whereas Chodorow (1978) and Rubin (1983) argued that females become society's primary caregivers because they are mothered by women and, as such, develop permeable ego boundaries, the theory espoused by the researchers at the Stone Centre is grounded in the belief that human beings are innately oriented towards connection. As a result the "self" that develops is an "interacting-sense-of-self" (Miller, 1991, p.14) for both females and males. Caretakers of infants, primarily women, are influenced by the culturally imposed beliefs about males and females and these beliefs influence how an infant's interacting-sense-of-self develops. Girls are encouraged by their mothers to empathize with and learn about others while boys are not encouraged in this manner. Thus, Miller argued, that it is not girls' inability to separate from their

mothers that results in their empathic, connected way of being-in-the-world; it is that girls are encouraged to develop their natural capacity to be connected to others while boys are discouraged from being relationship oriented. Miller pointed out that mother-daughter relationships are the context within which daughters are socialized to be other-oriented just as their mothers were socialized by their mothers, and so on. In this sense, mothers are the "most direct agents of an oppressive system" and are "themselves victims of the system" (Miller, 1986, p. 139).

Whereas Chodorow (1978), Rubin (1983), and Eichenbaum and Orbach (1983) contend that the essence of female psychological development resides in the fact that females in Western culture caretake children and that mothers and daughters share the same gender, Miller (1986, 1991) argues that females and males are equally relationship oriented but mothers foster this quality in their daughters but not in their sons. The crux of her argument is that mothers' influence on their daughters' psychological development is based on cultural beliefs of what constitutes appropriate female versus male behavior.

Regardless of the specific nature of the impact of mother-daughter relationships on women's development, one theme pervades all of the theories. That is, mothers and daughters are uniquely connected to each other and this connection is life-long. Due to the profound nature of this relationship, it is likely that the loss of this relationship for daughters due to the death of their mothers will have a significant impact on surviving daughters, whether or not this event is socially construed as on-time and normative.

Research on the Impact of Mother Death on Children/Adolescents

The emphasis of the research related to children and adolescents appears to be on the long-term impact of their mothers' death. Altschul and Beiser (1984), from the Barr-Harris Centre for the Study of Separation and Loss during Childhood, studied the effects of the death of a parent in childhood on parenting functions of adult patients. Data were gathered during psychoanalysis or intensive therapies with these adults. The authors found that, among patients who undertook

intense psychotherapy, the greatest parenting difficulties occurred for those individuals who experienced the death of a parent of the same sex and who experienced that death during middle childhood. Altschul and Beiser presented a case study involving the effects of mother loss on a particular woman. The authors concluded that this woman was not an effective parent for her daughter because she lacked the experience of being parented in childhood and adolescence by her own mother. Zall (1995), on the other hand found different results when comparing questionnaires of 28 women whose mothers had died in childhood or adolescence with 23 women who lived with both parents throughout their childhood and adolescence. In this study the authors reported no differences in the perceptions of the subjects' ability to parent effectively.

With regard to the relationship between maternal death in childhood and adolescence, and subsequent psychological problems in adulthood, Bifulco et al., (1992) used data from two London studies to explore the effects of mother loss. Data were analyzed from interviews with 139 women between the ages of 18 and 65 who had either experienced the death of their mothers prior to the age of 17 or who had experienced a separation from their mothers for a minimum of one year prior to the age of 17. Results indicated that those women who had experienced the early loss of their mothers, either through death or separation, had double the risk of experiencing depression and anxiety disorders in adulthood.

Using data from the same two London studies as Bifulco et al. (1992), Bifulco et al. (1987) analyzed interviews with 281 women between the ages of 18 and 50 years who had experienced their mothers' death prior to the age of 17. These researchers corroborated the findings of Bifulco et al. (1992); that is, women who had lost their mothers prior to the age of 17 were likely to experience clinical depression in adulthood. However, Bifulco et al. (1987) concluded that the significant factor associated with depression in adult daughters was the lack of parental care that often occurred subsequent to the death of their mothers. This would suggest that "parental" rather than "maternal" care may be the significant factor in the adjustment of children and adolescents who experience the loss of their

mothers.

Birtchnell (1980) also refuted the notion of a causal relationship between adult mental illness and childhood maternal death. On the basis of interviews and a battery of assessments, Birtchnell compared 160 female psychiatric patients whose mothers had died before they were 11 years old with 80 female controls. He determined that there is no relationship between early maternal loss and later mental illness in adult daughters. However, he concluded that psychological problems were more likely to be experienced by women who claimed to have negative relationships with their replacement mothers (e.g., aunts, cousins, housekeepers, etc.), lending some support to the findings of Bifulco et al. (1987) regarding parental care for daughters adjusting to mother loss.

Similarly, Parker and Manicavasagar (1986) studied the experience of depression in 79 women whose mothers died when the daughters were between the ages of 8 and 12 years. Although these researchers did not divulge the details of the study within their publication, they concluded that low social class and not the death of mothers is the most significant predictor of depression in adulthood.

Finally, Rainieri and Lester (1997) gave 87 undergraduate students a depression and a self-esteem inventory. In a single page publication, these authors reported that depression and suicidality were not related to parental losses through death or divorce during childhood and adolescence.

As indicated, conflicting results have been obtained with regard to the impact on adult daughters of the death of their mothers' during childhood and adolescence. Specifically, inconclusive results have been found with regard to parenting abilities (Altschul & Beiser, 1984; Zall, 1997) and psychological problems (Bifulco et al., 1987; Bifulco et al., 1992; Birtchnell, 1980; Parker and Manicavasagar, 1986; Rainieri and Lester, 1997). These contradictory research results accentuate the need for more research in this area.

Research on the Impact of Mother Death on Women in Midlife

As mentioned earlier, there is very little research exploring how women in midlife are impacted by their mothers' recent death. Only three published articles

by Klapper et al. (1994), Moss, Moss, Rubinstein and Resch (1993), and Robbins (1990) explore this phenomenon exclusively. It appears that Klapper et al. and Moss et al. used the same data for each of their studies. One sample of 107 bereaved daughters between the ages of 40 and 68 who had experienced their widowed mothers' death 3 to 6 months earlier participated in an interview and completed a battery of standard measures of grief, depression, and well-being. Klapper et al. and Moss et al. each considered different aspects in the data analysis and results were published in separate articles.

Through the analysis of the qualitative interview, Klapper et al. (1994) concluded that adult daughters control their grief to meet the standard cultural belief that the death of an elderly mother is on-time and normative and, as such, acceptable and not requiring a strong grief reaction. Though the manner in which daughters managed their grief varied (e.g., avoiding thoughts of their own finitude; desiring to appear "strong" for family and friends; etc.), Klapper et al. concluded that the process of controlling their grief served to both curtail their external expression and modify their internal experience. In addition, these authors suggested that the process of controlling their grief may serve to help bereaved daughters maintain a connection to their deceased mothers. By not expressing their grief fully, these daughters release their grief gradually over a period of time. Questions concerning the impact of these contained feelings were not discussed in this article.

Klapper et al. (1994) argued that adult daughters modify their internal experience and external expression of grief through the commingling of social cues, cultural demands, and internal processes involved in acknowledging the death. As such, this research indicates that the impact on adult daughters of the experience of their mothers' death may be, to varying degrees, scripted and controlled by one's social and cultural milieu. Therefore, women in midlife who experience their mothers' death may not acknowledge, even to themselves, the significance of this event. However, these data were obtained from women still in the early stages of bereavement and may not be relevant for daughters who have had more time to

adjust to the death of their mothers.

Moss et al. (1993) focussed their analysis on a 17 page self-administered questionnaire that respondents filled out after the qualitative interview. These researchers compared grief reactions among four categories of daughters defined as (a) heavy caregivers, which included daughters who lived with their mothers and provided hands-on caregiving (e.g., feeding, bathing, etc.) for at least six months prior to their mothers' death; (b) nursing home, which included daughters whose mothers resided in nursing homes less than a one hour drive from the daughters' homes; (c) distant mothers, which included daughters who lived at least 1.5 hours away from their mothers; and (d) local light caregivers, which included daughters who lived close to their mothers but were not involved in hands-on caregiving. In addition to characteristics of the daughters and characteristics of the mothers' functioning in the year preceding their death, these researchers made comparisons on the following bereavement measures: "GRIEF" - the emotional response to the death and the experience of loneliness, "SOMATIC" - changes in health or health related behavior, "ACCEPTANCE" - the sense of the death being fair and timely and the belief that the daughter can go on with her life without her mother, "FINITUDE" - the sense of one's death being closer in time, "COMFORT" - represents an aspect of an enduring tie to their mothers in which memories are perceived as comforting, "REUNION" - another aspect of an enduring tie to mothers and involves thoughts of reconnecting with mothers in the future.

Overall results for the six bereavement measures indicate the following: "GRIEF" - 74% of daughters reported that their mothers' death was "one of the hardest things they have ever had to deal with" (Moss et al., 1993, pg. 8); "SOMATIC" - 48% reported that they experienced somatic difficulties (e.g., insomnia, weight gain or loss, etc.); "ACCEPTANCE" - 75% reported the death as a blessing; "FINITUDE" - 55% reported sensing that their own death was closer; "COMFORT" - 71% reported finding comfort in their memories of their mothers; "REUNION" - 52% reported that they still communicate with their mothers; and 80% reported they believe they will be with their mothers again (Moss et al.).

With respect to the four categories, Moss et al. (1993) concluded that there were many similarities in the grief responses of the four groups of daughters. However, differences were found between daughters whose mothers were in a nursing home and for light caregiving daughters. Daughters whose mothers were in a nursing home reported experiencing less "GRIEF" relative to the other daughters. Further investigation by these researchers revealed that living in a nursing home rather than the mothers' mental or physical impairment resulted in these daughters experiencing less "GRIEF." In contrast, light caregiving daughters appeared more likely to experience depression relative to the other daughters. Moss et al. concluded that local light caregiving daughters were not expecting their mothers' death and thus perceived their death as an untimely shock.

Moss et al.'s (1993) research suggests that the circumstances of the mother-daughter relationship before their mothers' deaths may have an effect on how daughters in midlife are affected by their mothers' death.

Robbins (1990) conducted two in-depth interviews with 10 middle-class women between the ages of 39 and 53 years in order to investigate the effect of their mothers' death from psychodynamic, constructive-developmental and family systems perspectives. The participants' mothers had died between 18 months to 15 years prior to the interview. The average length of time between the death of the mothers and the interviews was 4.7 years. Details of the data analysis were not included in this publication; rather, categories of findings were presented.

Central to Robbins's (1990) research is the concept of the "myth of mother/hood." The myth of mother/hood is an "overarching construct that encompasses the daughter's mythic images of self-in-relation to mother (others), world and the Divine within a particular historical context" (pg. 42). The slash in "mother/hood" represents the "dynamic interaction between the daughter's formation of her personal myth of mother and the cultural myth of motherhood (pg. 42). Robbins found that the women in her study were more involved with grieving the "lives" of their mothers than they were in grieving their deaths. As such, she contends that a mother's death serves to "unravel and reweave" (pg. 42) a

daughter's conception of her "myth of mother/hood."

In the process of understanding mothers' lives and deaths, Robbins (1990), concluded that there are four interrelating factors: (1) the early mother-daughter relationships which influence the daughters' formation of their myth of mother/hood; (2) the aspects of grief that result from the daughters' confrontation with their myth of mother/hood; (3) the process of mourning resulting from the undoing and rebuilding of the "mythic images of self-in-relation to mother, self and the Divine"; and (4) the developmental phases of both the mourning and transformation processes.

Robbins (1990) argued that the death of a mother presents an opportunity for daughters' to rework their "myth of mother/hood" and as such, recreate their pattern of interactions with themselves, their mothers, and the world around them in more meaningful and truthful ways. For example, some women who felt distant from their mothers in life felt a need to reconstruct their mothers' lives within their mothers' historical context. The daughters who engaged in this process were able to separate themselves from their mothers and to create a new internal representation of their mothers, one that related to their mothers' time in history. Other daughters revised their visions of their mothers through shifting their self-understanding. By acknowledging their own special abilities, these daughters were able to separate and relate to their mothers from a new developmental perspective.

Many daughters felt regret that they were not able to renegotiate their mother-daughter relationships during their mothers' lives. However, acceptance of the limitations of the mother-daughter relationships and acknowledgment of their changing perspectives of their mothers, themselves, and others, helped these daughters to shift their regret into forgiveness of both themselves and their mothers (Robbins, 1990). Some daughters also reported a spiritual transformation. Through the process of renegotiating themselves in relation to others, these daughters reported experiencing a sense of connection to all others and the universe (Robbins).

Robbins (1990) proposed that there is a series of phases that daughters

progress through in their transformation. In phase one, daughters are closely identified with their mothers and there is no conscious conflict. Phase two is characterized by daughters' experiences of guilt as they move away from mothers. In phase three, daughters experience a tangled web of guilt and anger as they overtly repudiate their mothers' lives and strive to create vastly different lives for themselves. During the fourth phase, daughters acknowledge the cultural influences on their mothers' lives, yet blame their mothers for not being different. In the final phase of their transformation, daughters accept their mothers as separate individuals. Daughters at this phase of development are able to understand the historical and cultural influences on their mothers' lives and on their own lives. As such, these daughters experience a deepened sense of compassion and respect for their mothers and themselves, and this renewed sense of caring enriches all of their other relationships. However, not all daughters appear to progress through these five phases or adapt to their mothers' death. Robbins noted that neither the age of the daughter nor the length of time since the mother's death is related to the daughter's transformation. Unfortunately, Robbins did not clearly delineate the circumstances that serve to enhance or hinder a daughter's transformation. In addition, it is unclear as to whether Robbins is suggesting that daughters engaged in this process only after their mothers' death or whether this process of transformation may begin prior to their mothers' death.

This limited research on the impact on midlife daughters of the recent death of their mothers indicates that the loss of a mother is a significant event (Moss et al., 1993) which may precipitate a developmental change in midlife daughters (Robbins, 1990). How women respond to this loss seems to be based on a number of psychosocial factors (Klapper et al., 1994).

While these studies provide some interesting information regarding midlife women's experiences of their mothers' death, they are limited based on time since the death of the mother (Klapper et al., 1994; Moss et al., 1993). These researchers interviewed women 3 to 6 months after their mothers' deaths. I interviewed women approximately 2 to 7 years after their mothers' death with the

expectation that different issues could arise from these women's experiences. In addition, Robbins (1990) conceptualized the experience of midlife women using psychodynamic, constructive-developmental and family systems perspectives. In contrast, I attempted to let the "data speak for themselves" (Osborne, 1990, p. 179) and did not impose a theoretical structure upon them. In this study, a phenomenological approach employing largely unstructured interviewing techniques served to present a more complete description of midlife women's experiences of their mothers' death in order to further elucidate the meaning of this lived experience.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

The goal of this research was to explore the meaning and experience for midlife women of their mothers' death. In particular, I was interested in learning how the phenomenon in question - women's experiences of the death of their mothers - was related to the individuals in question - daughters in midlife. To achieve this goal, the research method was qualitative. As relatively little research has been published in this area, a qualitative method in which the emphasis is on "discovery, description and meaning" (Osborne, 1990, p.168) served to elucidate the meaning of this lived experience.

In order to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the nature or meaning of the phenomenon in question (Van Manen, 1994), phenomenology, an exploratory methodology of inquiry, was used (Osborne, 1990). The goal of phenomenological research is to develop a description of a phenomenon that permits the reader to understand the meaning of the experience (Osborne). Phenomenology is a way of "exploring lived-experience - the actuality of experience - from the inside" (Osborne, p. 168). Therefore, the goal of this phenomenological research was to provide detailed, meaningful descriptions of midlife women's personal experiences of their mothers' recent death, within the current historical period.

Personal Assumptions

As every aspect of a researcher's chosen study is permeated with her presuppositions, it was necessary to explicitly state these assumptions in order to understand how they are implicit throughout all aspects of the research (Colaizzi, 1978). In addition, by acknowledging my personal interest in the phenomenon in question, I was agreeing with feminist researchers who refute the assumption that phenomenon can be decontextualized, or separated, from the researcher (Gergen, 1988). The catalyst for this research was my relationship with my mother. Throughout most of my life, my relationship with my mother has been riddled with strife. I feel like we have been in an on-going power struggle for control of my

life. There have been times in the past, when I felt particularly tormented by this relationship and have anticipated feeling a great deal of relief when she is no longer alive. I have imagined feeling a sense of liberation; a freedom to fully express myself without fear of ridicule or condemnation. However, I have also acknowledged the likelihood of experiencing a barrage of emotions at the time of her death including, remorse, sadness and guilt. Therefore, I believe there will be many emotions and thoughts that will continue to keep me immersed in my relationship with my mother for a period of time after her death. It was the reflections of daughters, after this initial grieving period, when the painful emotions have been expressed, that I was interested in exploring. Despite my difficult mother-daughter relationship, I am still inextricably bonded to my mother and this attachment holds despite no communication. My relationship with my mother and my imagined feelings of emancipation upon her death have inspired me to explore how other women have been impacted by the death of their mothers.

In addition to my personal experience of my mother-daughter relationship, I was also inspired to explore this phenomenon due to the experiences of several friends. Each of these friends are women in midlife who recently experienced their mothers' death. In the years following the loss of their mothers, I watched these women embark on a process of reevaluating their lives and engaging in uncharacteristic behaviours. One friend was contemplating ending a long-term marriage, another was engaging in extra-marital affairs, and another was struggling with accepting the fact that she is getting older. These observations fostered my curiosity to explore the possibility of a connection between a mother's death and her midlife daughter's subsequent experience.

As this research endeavour was grounded in my personal experiences with my mother and my friends, I entered this research project with the following biases: First, I assumed that women in midlife will be significantly impacted by the death of their mothers due to the uniqueness of the mother-daughter relationship. Second, I assumed that the nature and quality of the experience of the loss of their mothers' on women during midlife will depend upon and reflect the nature and

quality of their pre-death relationship. By making my assumptions or presuppositions explicit (Van Manen, 1994), I was attempting to set them aside or to “bracket” them. Through the process of bracketing my presuppositions, I was trying to “see the phenomena as it is” (Osborne, 1990, p. 170) and not merely as a projection of my presuppositions.

Participants

Participants in this study were also referred to as co-researchers due to the fact that they were volunteers who had a personal interest in exploring the phenomenon in question (Osborne, 1990). Participants were also considered co-researchers as they had an opportunity, during the validation interview, to say whether the themes accurately represented their experiences. By referring to research participants as co-researchers and by inviting their comments regarding the analysis and interpretation of the data, I was adhering to an important tenet of conducting feminist informed research. I was avoiding turning the co-researchers into “objects” to be used by myself, the researcher. Rather, I was inviting them to be collaborators in the research process (Worell & Etaugh, 1994).

The co-researchers were selected for this research through a method known as “purposeful sampling” (Patton, 1990). Patton, defines purposeful sampling as a means of selecting co-researchers on the bases that they fit the purpose of the study. Further, the type of purposeful sampling that was employed is referred to as “convenience sampling” and involved selecting co-researchers who were available and easy to study (Patton).

Co-researchers were required to meet the following three criteria. First, they had to be women who perceived themselves to be in midlife. Although these women determined whether they considered themselves to be in midlife at the time of their mothers’ death, for the purposes of this study, a wide age range (35 to 65 years) was selected as the parameters of midlife. An age range was set in order to ensure there was some degree of consistency between co-researchers’ understanding of midlife. A broad range was selected as midlife is an arbitrary designation (Jacobson, 1995), and chronological age is not always the

distinguishing feature of midlife. For example, Neugarten (1964), in her study of the association between personality changes and chronological age, concluded that age is not always a significant variable. Rather, in people over the age of 50 years, factors such as work status and health were more related to personality changes than age. Thus, as chronological age alone does not define midlife, co-researchers determined whether they considered themselves to be in midlife.

Women in midlife were selected as the individuals of interest due to the fact that there is a lack of research about the lives of women in midlife (Jacobson, 1995). In fact, Gergen (1990) sums up this point of view when she states, "to judge from the major studies on lifespan development at midlife, one would think only men survived the third decade of life" (p. 475).

Second, co-researchers had experienced the death of their mothers approximately 2 to 7 years prior. The rationale for stating that a minimum of two years had passed since the death of their mothers was twofold. First, one cannot reflect on lived experience during the experience (Van Manen, 1994). Thus, in order to explore the experience and meaning of the phenomenon in question, the experience must be reflected on in hindsight. Second, the goal post of two years was set based on grief and mourning research. Grief and mourning processes vary considerably between individuals (Kalish, 1985; Parkes, 1985; Rando, 1993) and an end-point cannot be specified (Solsberry, 1984). However, after at least a year and possibly two (Kalish, 1985), and after the anniversary of the death and all occasions have been experienced at least once without the deceased (Raphael, 1983), bereaved individuals are generally thought to be on the road to recovery. Thus, I was assuming that by the passing of the second anniversary of the death of their mothers, the co-researchers would be able to reflect back on their experience and gain insights into its meaning. The end point of seven years (approximately) was selected as the end of the desired time span of 5 years. This end point was selected in order to ensure that the co-researchers were not too far removed from the phenomenon to be able to reflect upon and describe it in detail.

Third, co-researchers had a desire to understand and explore the meaning of

their experiences (Gall et al., 1996) and were able to articulate their experiences (Colaizzi, 1978). Selecting co-researchers who wanted to explore the experience and meaning of their mothers' death and who were able to articulate their experiences were pragmatic decisions. As the goal of phenomenological research is to explore the inner world of co-researchers (Osborne, 1990), unwilling participants and/or participants who are unable to express their feelings, thoughts, beliefs, perceptions, etc. verbally were not conducive to this type of exploration.

The number of co-researchers that were selected involved a trade-off between breadth and depth (Patton, 1990). With fixed resources and time and with the emphasis being on "information-rich data" as opposed to focussing on diversity and variety, depth of experience was sought by engaging a small number of co-researchers. Co-researchers continued to be selected to participate until the descriptions provided began to become redundant and no new information from subsequent interviews was gleaned (Patton). Nine women participated in the study.

Although socioeconomic status was not explicitly measured, all of the participants could generally be classified as middle-class.

Procedure

Recruitment

Co-researchers were recruited through word-of-mouth and through advertisements (see Appendix A) posted at a number of locations where women are likely to frequent. (e.g., UBC's Women Students' Office, Department of Counselling Psychology, The Women's Resources Centre, Yes Canada-BC, and various recreation and community centres) Those interested in the study contacted the researcher directly.

During the initial contact, I first, described the nature of the study, second, discussed issues of confidentiality, third, determined the date of the potential co-researcher's mother's death, fourth, ascertained the potential co-researcher's age at the time of her mother's death, fifth, explained the time commitment, sixth, offered to answer any questions she had about the study, and seventh, if she was

appropriate for the study, we set up a time for the first interview. The first nine women who met the criteria specified were accepted for the study.

The Interview

Interviews with each co-researcher were conducted at a mutually agreed upon location with consideration given to issues of confidentiality and to ensuring distractions were minimized. Eight of the nine interviews took place in the co-researchers' homes and one took place at a co-researcher's work place. The objective of each interview was to obtain a detailed, comprehensive description of the prereflective experience and meaning of the death of each co-researcher's mother (Gall et al., 1996).

To maximize consistency between co-researchers, the following procedures were conducted with each participant at the outset of each interview. As the material that was addressed in this research was of a personal nature, it was important for co-researchers to feel safe and comfortable. Thus, it was crucial to establish "empathic rapport" with each individual (Osborne, 1990). This was done by initially engaging in casual conversation. When the co-researchers became comfortable with each other, issues of confidentiality were addressed and an invitation given to each participant to choose a pseudonym which enabled the individual to retain anonymity throughout the documentation of the study. Co-researchers were reminded that the interviews were being audio taped. In addition, co-researchers were reassured that I was not interested in making moral judgments about their experiences. Rather, I reassured them that I was interested in understanding their experiences. Co-researchers were asked to read and sign two copies of an ethical consent form (see Appendix B) with one copy being retained by each co-researcher. Co-researchers were reminded that their participation was voluntary and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time. After the co-researcher had an opportunity to ask any questions, the purpose of the study and the orienting statement (see Appendix C) were read. When the co-researcher was ready, she began by interpreting her experience and expressing her experience verbally (Osborne).

As the researcher, I attempted to assist the co-researcher in tapping into her prereflective level of experience (Osborne, 1990). The prereflective level of experience refers to what a person knows prior to interpretation and articulation. Thus, it is the "naive descriptions" rather than interpretations or embellishments that are the focus of phenomenological data gathering (Osborne). I attempted to reach this prereflective level of experience through advanced empathy, paraphrasing and reflection, by remaining fully present, by attending to the co-researcher's verbal and non-verbal responses, and by asking clarifying and probing open-ended questions that deepen the co-researcher's exploration of significant issues that she raised during the interview (see Appendix D). In addition, I kept process notes describing co-researchers' non-verbal responses and noted any salient thoughts or insights that occurred to me during the course of the interview.

Each interview was approximately two hours in duration. At the end of the interview, co-researchers were reminded that a validation interview would be conducted after the data was analyzed to ensure I had accurately represented their lived experiences of the loss of their mothers in my delineation of the salient themes.

Data Analysis

The outcomes in phenomenological research are the descriptions of the phenomenon that have been provided by the co-researchers (Marton, 1988). These descriptions are categorized by identifying the most salient characteristics of the data. More specifically, I was looking for the "most essential and distinctive structural aspects" (p. 147) between the midlife woman and the death of her mother.

The data was analyzed according to the general outline provided by Colaizzi (1978). Following each interview, I transcribed all audio tapes verbatim. Twenty hours of taped interviews were transcribed into approximately 200 pages of transcription. The descriptions provided by each co-researcher, referred to as protocols, were then read in order to attain a general "sense" or "feeling" about them. From each protocol, significant statements pertaining to the phenomenon

under study, the death of midlife women's mothers, were extracted. From each significant statement, the meaning of that statement was formulated. With "creative insight" I endeavoured to "discover and illuminate those meanings hidden in the various contexts and horizons" (p. 59) of the death of their mothers, while maintaining connections with the original protocols. Thus, I attempted to interpret each co-researcher's verbal expressions in terms of "meaning structures" that went beyond the obvious, surface characteristics of the expressed descriptions (Osborne, 1990). When the meanings were formulated for each protocol, I organized them into "clusters of themes." In order to validate these themes, they were compared to the original protocols. I ensured that everything contained in the original protocols was represented in the cluster of themes and ensured that anything expressed in the cluster of themes was implied in the original protocols. All of the clusters of themes were written into an "exhaustive description" of the meaning and experience of the death of their mothers' for the women in this study. I formulated the exhausted descriptions into a statement delineating the fundamental structure of this experience. At this point, co-researchers were given an explanatory letter (see Appendix E), a copy of their own bio-synopsis and each of the extracted themes. Co-researchers were asked to compare the bio-synopsis and each of the themes to her own experience. After the co-researchers had the opportunity to read and reflect on the themes, we met for a validation interview which lasted approximately one hour. During the validation interviews, the women were asked to determine how well each of the themes resonated with, and reflected, their own experiences. The women were invited to comment on their perceptions, feelings and thoughts of each of themes. Of the nine women, seven felt that their experiences were accurately represented within all seven themes. One addition was made to a theme subsequent to the validation interviews. In this case, one women whose transcript did not reflect an enduring connection to her mother said that she did indeed experience this through her love of music that she believed her mother inspired in her. As such, two sentences were added to the theme of enduring connection in order to include this woman's experience.

Another woman felt that two themes did not apply to her experience. In light of this information, I reread the transcript from her original interview in order to determine if I had misinterpreted her experience. I examined the statements that I had attributed to these themes and concluded that one theme was representative of this woman's description of her experience at the time of the interview, while another theme was not. Therefore, I revised the theme, "Sense of Regret Concerning Lost Opportunities" to reflect that not all of the women were represented in this theme.

During the validation interview, another woman stated that her experience did not extend to five of the themes. This did not surprise me as during the interview, I felt that her experience of mother loss was very different from the other women I had interviewed. However, I reviewed the transcript from the initial interview and concluded that statements in her original transcript were consistent with two of the themes. Thus, three themes "Sense of Regret Concerning Lost Opportunities," "Need to Reassess Meaning in Their Lives," and "Sense of Enduring Connection to Their Mothers" were revised to note that not all of the women were represented by these themes.

Limitations of the Study

First, the participants or co-researchers in this study did not constitute a representative sample of all women in midlife as the technique of random sampling was not be utilized (Rybash, Roodin, & Santrock, 1991). Thus, this research is not generalizable to the entire population of women in midlife. However, the purpose of this research was to understand the meaning and experience for women in midlife of their mothers' recent death and "the tendency to generalize may prevent us from developing understandings that remain focused on the uniqueness of human experience" (Van Manen, 1994, p. 22). However, if a reader is able to see herself in the research then "empathic generalizability" has been obtained (Osborne, 1990).

Second, the descriptions gathered were retrospective as they were recollections of past experience (Van Manen, 1994). Positivists consider

retrospective data faulty as they assume there is an independent (objective) social reality that is consistent across time and place. On the other hand, post-positivists or individuals who engage in qualitative research assume that social reality is constructed by the interpretations of individuals. Thus, social reality is situational, transitory and subjective (Gall et al., 1996). By using phenomenological methodology, I have been able to discover, through retrospective data, the "internal meaning structures" (Van Manen, p.10) of the "lived experience." Therefore, retrospective data is only a limitation for the positivist researcher.

Third, as the researcher, my personal biases coloured every aspect of this research. I employed two procedures to limit the influence of my biases. First, by making my biases explicit and by reflecting on them rigorously (bracketing) (Osborne, 1990), I was in a better position to recognize their influence when they infiltrated my thoughts and feelings. Second, I asked the co-researchers to critique my interpretation of their descriptions of their experiences. Not only did this give co-researchers more involvement and input into the final analysis, it also helped to safeguard their interpretations from being diluted by my biases.

Fourth, a disadvantage of quantitative research is that the researcher is looking for data to fit a particular theory. The qualitative method permitted me to enter this research free of a priori theorizing. An advantage of not using a priori theories is that these women's subjective experiences were more likely to remain central and less likely to get over-written by potentially inappropriate and/or androcentric theories (Henwood, 1993). A limitation of not fitting data into a priori theories was that I was confronted with a vast amount of unstructured data that I needed to sort without the guidelines of theory (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). However, the data analysis followed the procedures, previously outline, required of a phenomenological researcher. Thus, the data analysis was guided by the research method and was not restricted by a particular theory of human behavior.

Fifth, concerns about social desirability may also be a limitation of this study. Social desirability refers to the tendency of co-researchers to respond in a manner they perceive to be socially desirable to the researcher (Davison & Neale,

1994). Co-researchers may assume that it would be socially undesirable to cast a shadow over their relationships with their deceased mothers or to present their mothers in a less than favourable light. In an attempt to prevent co-researchers from feeling a need to monitor their comments for fear of being judged, I reassured each co-researcher that my goal was not to judge her actions, experience or feelings. Rather, my goal was to, as fully as possible, understand her experience of the loss of her mother.

CHAPTER FOUR

Results

This chapter contains the bio-synopses of the nine women who participated in this research. Each woman is identified by her chosen pseudonym. The bio-synopses are brief summaries that describe these women's perceptions of their overall mother-daughter relationships, their mothers' death, and the meaning their mothers' death has had in their lives.

Following the women's bio-synopses are the seven themes that were identified through this research. The meaning of each theme is described and supported by quotes from the women.

Women's Bio-synopses

Wishbone

Wishbone is a 46 year old Caucasian woman. She is not married and does not have children. She is employed as a sales representative for a major television network. Wishbone has one older and one younger brother and her father recently died, although he was alive at the time of the interview.

Four years ago, at the age of 67, Wishbone's mother died of breast cancer. Her mother's death was both unexpected and expected. It was unexpected in the sense that her mother was in "remission for 13 years which had created this assumption that she had recovered from breast cancer and that she would go on forever." However, when her death occurred it was expected as her period of remission had ended eight months earlier. With the unexpected re-diagnosis of cancer, Wishbone said she "did not realize what was going on" and that she "just couldn't comprehend that her mother was dying."

During the last eight months of her mother's life, Wishbone and her mother discussed and healed many of the troubled aspects of their relationship. Over time, their relationship had endured difficult periods. Wishbone described her mother as "domineering" and she felt her mother was frequently critical of her. The relationship improved greatly during the last six years of her mother's life as both Wishbone and her mother shifted their perspectives and began to view each other

more like peers. Even though their relationship had improved, subsequent to her mother's death, Wishbone feels more of a sense of freedom to be herself than she did when her mother was alive.

The death of her mother shifted Wishbone's relationships and roles with her family members. Until his recent death, she had taken on the role as caretaker for her father, a role she still assumes, to some degree, with her brothers. Coupled with the new role of caretaker, her mother's death also seems to have allowed space for Wishbone to create new relationships with other family members. For example, she now talks directly to her mother's sisters, whereas before the connection had been through her mother.

Since the death of her mother, she believes that she has come to know her mother better. With hindsight, Wishbone sees how restricted her mother was by the social conventions of her generation and how that impacted their mother-daughter relationship and her mother's quality of life.

Jonnie

Jonnie is a 50 year old Caucasian women. She is trained as a nurse and is employed in the resource centre of a hospital. She is separated from her husband. Her separation occurred shortly after the death of her mother. She has two adult daughters.

Jonnie was born in England and came to Canada for a visit in her early 20s, but ended up making Canada her home. Her mother continued to live in England until her death, from cancer two years ago, at the age of 74 years.

Throughout her mother's illness, Jonnie frequently travelled back and forth between Canada and England. However, at the actual time of her mother's death Jonnie was in Canada. As she had planned to be with her mother at the time of her death, she was very regretful, unhappy, and frustrated that her mother had died when she was not with her. Subsequent to her mother's death, Jonnie was solely responsible for selling her mother's house and belongings as she is an only child.

Jonnie believes that her relationship with her mother was emotionally distant since childhood. Jonnie's parents separated when she was a young girl, an event

that served to heighten the emotional distance between herself and both of her parents. Her mother's illness was an opportunity for Jonnie to spend some concentrated time with her mother alone, and to care for her in a manner she had never done before. She described it as a "way of making up for lost time" as she believes that she had always put her husband and children first.

Although the time she spent caring for her ailing mother helped Jonnie get to know and understand her mother better, it has been since to her death, that Jonnie's understanding of her mother has deepened. Through reflecting back on the circumstances of her mother's life, Jonnie has forgiven her mother for the distance between them and for what Jonnie perceived as lack of caring on her mother's part.

For Jonnie, her mother's death has opened her to experiencing a new sense of her spirituality. In addition, she has come to value certain aspects of her mother and has tried to incorporate those characteristics into her own identity. Jonnie is working on living her life more like her mother did; peacefully and without anger.

Alice

Alice is a 42 year old Caucasian woman. She is self employed as a dental office support person. She is married and has three children; an adult son and daughter from her first marriage and a seven year old daughter from her current marriage. She has two older brothers and a younger sister. Her mother died almost two years ago at the age of 74.

Alice's mother died suddenly. She had a stroke three weeks prior to her death that lead to another stroke that ended her life. Her mother phoned Alice the morning she had the first stroke and Alice was not home. She felt extremely guilty and sad that she missed her mother's call for help. The last three weeks of her mother's life were very traumatic for Alice. She knew her mother was scared and she could not help her. Her mother's death ended three weeks of worry and fear for the whole family.

Early in the interview, Alice said that she and her mother had always been close. As the interview progressed, she said she loved her mother but acknowledged that there was a distance between them; a distance created by her

mother's dependency on Alice. Since her father's death, when Alice was 19 years old, she felt solely responsible for her mother's well-being. Although her mother lived independently, Alice was always concerned about her and felt that her mother depended on her to be available for her. At times, Alice felt overwhelmed with juggling the responsibility of looking after her own family, her career, and her mother. She regrets her mother was not more independent and that their relationship was not more reciprocal.

Since her mother's death, Alice has been confronted with a host of other events that together have served to influence Alice's quality of life. Part of what Alice has been experiencing is what she describes as a feeling "she is missing something, like [she is] floundering." She finds it difficult to believe that her mother is no longer alive and she wonders if it "will ever sink in." Alice misses being able to talk with her mother, but also feels like a "weight has been lifted off [her] shoulders." She has freedom to move to another place or to travel; a freedom she did not feel when her mother was alive; a freedom she feels guilty for experiencing.

Betsy

Betsy is a 42 year old Caucasian woman. She is a nurse, is partnered and does not have children. She is the the third youngest child in a family of seven children. Her mother died suddenly of a heart attack, just over two years ago, at the age of 74. Her father is still living.

Betsy believes she had a close relationship with her mother. However, it was subsequent to her mother's death when Betsy realized the profundity of their closeness. In the depth of her despair over her mother's death, Betsy came to appreciate the extent of the importance of her mother in her life. It is the unique role of a mother in a daughter's life that Betsy misses most. As she described, "friendships with girlfriends could never be as deep as the friendship I had with my mother because she knew me inside and out. More than anyone else."

Betsy feels the death of her mother has created enormous losses in her life. For example, her family has become divided and, as such, she realizes that her

mother was the glue that had held the family together. In addition to losing her mother's friendship, her father has become very dependent on her and that has added strain to her life. Her losses have served to accentuate her desire to have a child. A child would be someone she could pass her mother's legacies on to and she/he would mean another family for Betsy. By the time of the interview, she felt she was too old for a child.

Betsy has fond memories of the relationship she had with her mother and believes that their relationship was improving over time. She regrets the loss of the relationship she could be having with her mother today. She thought that her mother was really starting to enjoy her life and she feels sorry that her mother did not have more time to do the things she wanted.

Although Betsy still misses her mother greatly, she said the "blue days have become blue moments." When she is missing her mother, she will seek comfort by spraying on her mother's favourite perfume, wearing her mother's ring, or remembering that her mother is "still a part of the universe - just in a different form."

Emma

Emma is a 50 year old Caucasian woman. She is a nurse and teaches nursing. She has been married for over 20 years and does not have children. Emma was born in England and has lived her adult life in Canada. She has a younger brother and sister who live in England. Emma's widowed mother lived in England until her death, at the age of 75, two years and 4 months prior to the interview.

Although Emma's mother had been ill for several years, her death was not imminent and as such, was unexpected. Emma was in Canada at the time of her mother's death, however she had been visiting her mother three weeks prior. Emma perceived her mother's death as an ending to the illness that was progressively negatively affecting her mother's quality of life. The actual death was quick. A fact that gave Emma some degree of comfort.

As Emma was raised in a culture in which boarding school was an accepted

part of life, she was physically separated from her mother at a young age. Coupled with this physical separation, Emma also felt, to some degree, emotionally separated from her mother. This physical and emotional separation was perpetuated into adulthood as Emma moved to Canada in her early 20s. Her mother's death initiated a review and reevaluation of the quality of their mother-daughter relationship.

For Emma, her mother's death signified not only the loss of a mother and the loss of Emma's perception of unconditional love, but also the loss of everything Emma associated with her mother. Her mother was the primary connection to Emma's childhood home, her country of origin, her siblings, and her family history. Coupled with the losses, Emma also perceived some new opportunities. For example, with her mother no longer her primary focus during her trips to England, space has been created to establish new relationships with her siblings.

Emma said a mother's death "shakes up every aspect of your life." She believes her mother's death was a catalyst for her to begin a process of self reflection. Since her mother's death, Emma has been reviewing decisions she has made in the past and reconsidering the direction for her future. She has been seeking to recreate her understanding of who she is, what her priorities are, and how she can learn to love herself unconditionally. At the time of the interview, Emma believed she was in the midst of this process of self reflection that began after her mother's death.

Jane

Jane is a 47 year old Caucasian woman. She is employed as a sales manager. She is married and does not have children. Her mother died of cancer two and a half years ago, when she was 69 years old. Jane's mother predeceased her father; a fact that surprised Jane. She has one older and one young brother.

Jane's mother died at home in the presence of Jane and other members of her immediate family. She was very involved in the caretaking of her mother throughout her illness and believes it was a "privilege to be there with her." At the time of her mother's death, Jane felt relief as the woman she knew as her mother

was "already gone" due to the illness. She is grateful she took the time and energy to care for her mother as she believes that she learned a lot about herself and about death through the experience. As a result of being with her mother during her death, she says she no longer fears death.

Except for very brief periods of time, Jane believes that she and her mother had a good relationship. They enjoyed spending time together and the relationship was getting more rewarding as time passed. One of Jane's major regrets stemming from her mother's death is that she misses the relationship she could be having today with her mother. She feels "ripped off" that her mother died just when the relationship was really starting to flourish.

Subsequent to her mother's death, Jane felt numb to the loss of her mother. She had been so wrapped up in her mother's illness for so many months, that after her death she wanted to focus on life. As such, she believes that she really did not start to miss her mother for about a year. Now, a longing for her mother washes over her, every so often, in a "wave of nostalgia" that reminds her how much she is missing not having her mother in her life today. Jane believes that she will always experience these waves and that she "will always miss her mother."

Jean

Jean is a 65 year old Caucasian woman. She is married and has two adult children and 4 grandchildren. Jean was employed as a nurse at the time of her mother's death and has since retired. In a family with two daughters and a son, Jean is the youngest.

Her mother died just over two years ago, at 94 years of age. At the time, Jean perceived her mother's death as a "relief." She felt the last four years of her mother's life were "lonely" and "unhappy" and she believed there was no hope of these circumstances changing in the future. Her mother lived in a nursing home which accentuated Jean's sadness and guilt concerning the quality of her mother's life.

Jean feelings of relief upon the death of her mother were coupled with her feelings of sadness. Jean's mother requested not to have a service. Thus, Jean felt

that she had neither an opportunity to celebrate her mother's life nor closure of her mother's passing. After several months of guilt and sadness, Jean arranged a small family gathering which served to bring a conclusion to her mother's life and to assuage Jean's feelings of guilt.

Although Jean described her relationship with her mother as distant, she feels the loss of having her in her life today. Jean misses talking with her mother and she regrets never having known her mother as a person not just her mother. Jean seems to have experienced a longing for something in her relationship with her mother that she never obtained. She speculates that she was always looking for her mother's approval and believes she only had limited success in achieving it.

Jean wishes her mother had had a more pleasant life. She had hoped that after the death of her father, her mother would begin to experience more joy in her life. However, it was not long after Jean's father's death that her mother was unable to live on her own.

For Jean, her mother's death has accentuated a sense that her own death will be next. Thoughts of her own death have inspired Jean to plan for her funeral and to ensure her relationships with her own children are close and meaningful.

Laine

At the time of the interview Laine was 48 years old. She is Caucasian, was born in Canada, and has a younger brother. Laine is married and has one son. She is employed as a teacher. Her mother died five years ago at the age of 72 years. Laine's father predeceased her mother by 4 months. His death occurred after a lengthy illness.

Laine's mother's death was sudden and a "terrible shock" to her. Although her mother had been diagnosed with cancer a year earlier, Laine was not expecting her mother to die that day, nor had she ever conceived of the possibility that her mother would die. As Laine said, "it was just totally out of my realm that she was going to die."

Laine believes that her relationship with her mother was warm and supportive. She says that she could always count on her mother to be there to talk

with and to help with her son. For Laine, her mother's presence provided a sense of safety that made life seem easier. With her mother's death, she has lost the belief that she has someone to fall back on; someone who will always be available for her. Coupled with this loss of support, Laine fears that her mother died without knowing how much she appreciated her.

Laine regrets the fact that her mother never had the opportunity to live the life she planned to live after the death of Laine's father. Her mother had cared for Laine's father for many years as he progressively became more and more incapacitated by illness. Her mother had made plans to travel and Laine looked forward to seeing her mother experience more joy in her life. However, as her mother's death followed closely after her father's, her mother was not able to fulfil her plans.

As she remembers her mother's presence in her life fondly, it appears that her death has accentuated Laine's awareness of how she would like her son to have similar fond memories of his mother. Thus, wanting to be involved in her son's life is one of the legacies passed down from Laine's mother to her daughter and to her grandson.

Mary

Mary is a 65 year old Caucasian woman who works as a home care nurse for people with terminal illnesses. She is married and has four adult children and several grandchildren. Her widowed mother died five years ago at the age of 91. Mary was in England, where her mother lived, at the time of her death.

Mary has lived her adult life in Canada. Her mother and two younger brothers all remained in England. Throughout her life in Canada, she continued to take trips to Europe to see her mother, and her mother visited her in Canada. Her mother's health had been progressively getting worse during the year prior to her death. In retrospect, Mary believes that her mother knew she was approaching death as she seemed to be visiting family in order to say goodbye. During her mother's last visit, Mary had also wondered whether she would be returning.

Mary describes her relationship with her mother as "intermittent." For the

majority of her childhood, she lived in boarding schools. When she completed school, Mary went into nurses training, also at a boarding college. After graduation, she took a temporary job in Canada which turned into a permanent residency. She describes her mother and her relationship with her mother as “distant.” Nonetheless, Mary indicates she was satisfied with the nature of their relationship and reports that she “didn’t need more from the relationship.” She accepted her mother the way she was and does not dwell on wishing things were different. However, her relationships with her own children are much closer and warmer.

With the death of her mother, Mary felt the loss of her connection to her family history and to her extended family members. She found that she had to create her own family contacts in order to keep herself connected. As Mary’s mother was in her 90s, her death was not difficult for her to make sense of, nor did her death leave a gaping hole in her life. Rather, Mary notes that the time between her mother’s visits continues to get longer and she misses being able to share the unfolding events of her life with her mother.

Common Themes

The process of data analysis revealed seven themes which emerged from the women’s in-depth interviews. In the validation interviews, seven of the nine women reported experiencing aspects of all of the seven themes. Two women did not feel that all seven themes were representative of their experiences. Upon reconsideration of the transcripts from the initial interview, three themes, “Sense of Regret Concerning Lost Opportunities,” “Need to Reassess Meaning in Their lives,” and “Sense of Enduring Connection” were revised to reflect that these themes were not representative of all nine women’s experiences.

The seven themes are as follows:

1. Profound Sense of Loss
2. Need to Make Sense of Their Mothers’ Death
3. Need to Reassess Their Relationships with Their Mothers
4. Sense of Regret Concerning Lost Opportunities

5. Sense of Shifting Roles and Responsibilities
6. Need to Reassess Meaning in Their Lives
7. Sense of Enduring Connection to Their Mothers

Profound Sense of Loss

All of the daughters experienced a profound sense of loss following the death of their mothers. For these daughters, the loss of their mothers resulted in a longing for that which was gone forever. This loss was fuelled by the realization that no other person could replace their mothers in their lives. Although some of these daughters were able to recreate some aspects of their mother-daughter relationships with another person, there remained a deeply experienced awareness that the breadth of what their mothers' contributed to their lives could never be replicated. The nature and depth of the losses these daughters experienced after the death of their mothers reflected the extent to which their mothers touched their lives. Some daughters reported feeling abandoned by their mothers' death. They also reflected on the loss of unconditional love, companionship, and family connections.

For the daughters in this study, the magnitude of their mother's death and the losses that ensued were realized and digested over a period of time. A number of daughters spoke about their initial disbelief that their mothers' had died, their numbness to the impact on their lives, and their incredulity concerning their own reactions. Several struggled with comprehending that their mothers had actually died; a perception that was not limited to daughters whose mothers died suddenly. That these daughters described experiencing a sense of disbelief at the death of their mother was consistent with their deep rooted and implicit beliefs that their mothers would "go on forever." As one daughter described:

it was just totally out of my realm that she was going to die when she - I didn't - I didn't think she was going to die! Just die anyway. I didn't mean at that moment. I mean I really didn't think she was going to die! That's how much of a presence she was. That she would just always be there. I didn't realize until - obviously till she passed away.

Although this daughter's mother's death was sudden, her mother had been

diagnosed with cancer the previous year. Despite this diagnosis, she had never permitted herself to contemplate her mother's death and what her death would mean. As this daughter said, "I didn't allow myself to think that the cancer would come back. Although, the doctor had told me that there was a good chance that it might."

A number of daughters believed that they went through a period of "numbness" before they became acutely aware of what their mothers' death meant in their lives. Several daughters described how this state of numbness permitted them to perform the tasks they were confronted with in the days and months following their mothers' death. They described moving into "automatic pilot" and needing to "keep busy" in order to cope. As one daughter described:

I just had to kind of shut it off because I just knew that I had to do it. I knew that my dad wouldn't be able to cope [with the funeral]. He wouldn't even know where to begin to - I mean there's certain things that he can arrange; but like for caterers and the food and all this and how it's going to happen and down to the music and all this sort of stuff, I mean I just knew that I had to be there to help do it. So I think - I missed my mother way more a year later than I did right after she died. I didn't miss her right away. I didn't - I guess it's part of the numbness.

Many daughters reflected on their unpreparedness for their reaction to their mothers' death. One woman believed: "I am a nurse, I thought I would have handled this much better. This should not be a problem. I am tough. I am strong. I can handle this." However, as this daughter concluded "nothing in life can prepare you for the death of a parent." Another woman who had previously experienced her father's death, had believed:

when he died, I was not prepared for that sort of 10% of me - the gap - gone - nothing - this emptiness. But with my mother, I thought okay, well, I have been through this before. Yes, I can see what's happening. I took on the nursing sort of uniform and that was fine while I was caring for her. But I'd also thought I'd prepared myself for this gap that I knew. But her

death - since she has died, I have found it a lot more - almost more difficult than the first time with my father.

These daughters were surprised to find that not only were they unprepared, they were, to varying degrees, overwhelmed by the repercussions of their mothers' death.

For other daughters, the full reality of their mothers' death continued to remain somewhat elusive. One daughter, whose mother has been gone for almost two years commented on how it:

seems too unreal that she's [her mother's] gone....I still think that's she's there because I don't think I really - you know - that's reality - and I don't know if it will ever really sink in.....It feels like she is still here until something comes up where you know, I'd like to phone her or talk to her about something and she's not there....It will be her birthday coming up pretty soon and those are the times that really hit home that she's not here.

The women in this study went through a gradual process as their awareness of their mothers' death and the accompanying losses reverberated through all parts of their lives. One daughter described this process as:

very, very gradual. I don't know. There was not this big burst. For me personally, it was just - it just sort of seeped in until you finally - until you - I think you just finally comprehend that that's that and you don't even know when the transition is that you have fully - have fully understood it.

Thus, like sand trickling through an hour glass, these daughters reported that the full impact of the loss of their mothers, in time, was gradually understood and integrated.

As these daughters became more aware of the losses their mothers' death created in their lives, their sense of being abandoned or orphaned magnified. They talked about the sense of being cast out into the world, alone without a safety net to fall back on and without roots with which to remain attached. One woman referred to it as feeling "cut off" and "cut loose." The experience of being "tossed about in a

lonely sea” was described by one woman who said:

I felt anchorless. I really did feel that when she died. A real physical - I didn't know if I were to put my foot down - if it would actually - if it would actually touch the ground. It was a very physical reaction. That feeling I was being - I had lost an anchor.

Coupled with feelings of abandonment, several daughters talked about the tremendous impact of the loss of their mothers' love in their lives. One daughter described how she missed the hugs her mother, who was five feet two inches, gave her. Another spoke of the “incredible love that was gone” with the death of her mother. The predominant characteristic of maternal love as expressed by these daughters was their belief that their mothers would always be available for them, despite anything these daughters might have done, or might not have done. For many women it was the experience of the loss of this unconditional love that they spoke most poignantly about affecting their lives. For example, while reflecting on her mother's death, one participant said:

It [mother's death] made me realize that I - that I was - that there was no longer someone who would unconditionally - be unconditionally there for me which probably wasn't true but - I mean, I don't think my mother was foolish enough to think that I had no faults but it was an exception. She was someone who would be there when - other people in your life tend to put conditions on their love.

For this daughter, as for others in the study, she lost the comfort and security of knowing that someone would always be there for her. Without the safety of their mothers' unconditional love, many of the women felt alone. They felt that none of their other relationships offered them as much freedom to be themselves, with the knowledge that they would always be loved.

For many of these women, the death of their mothers also meant the loss of their confidants with who they shared their problems, joys and successes. Several women spoke about how it was only with their mothers that they shared difficult problems. For these women, their mothers provided a safe place for them to voice

their concerns ranging from relationship to financial issues. In addition to sharing their problems, these daughters spoke about the loss of sharing major life events, such as the birth of their children, with their mothers. Although other family members and friends were interested in such occasions, it was from sharing this information with their mothers that these daughters seemed to derive the most pleasure. As one daughter said, "When you're talking about on-going life, she missed the birth of the next one [grandchild] because she is only three years old. These are the events that one misses being able to tell."

For many of these daughters, the most salient loss subsequent to their mothers' death was the loss of the constant, regular presence of their mothers in their daily lives. These daughters spoke about missing phoning their mothers and sharing the unremarkable, everyday events of their lives with them. As reflected in the words of one participant, what she missed the most about her mother was:

Just that you could phone her up. Just somebody to phone up. Could always find her I guess. I always knew where she was. She was always home. Whereas friends, you can never get them. You get an answering machine and you know, whereas mom you just knew she was there. Or I could always - I always had a place to go. I - if I was bored, if I was upset, if I just wanted a place to go - whereas with friends you've got to make an appointment. Mom was just always there and I'd just pick up the phone and just talk. Just talk about your day. Nothing - nothing important but just to be able to talk. I don't - I don't get to talk enough I find any more.

For these women, the death of their mothers resulted in the perceived loss of the one person who was always willing to share in the nuances of their daily lives. This loss and the resulting loneliness was described by many daughters in terms of the "void," the "emptiness," and the "hole" that occurred in their lives after their mothers' death.

With the death of their mothers, these daughters also lost their hopes for their future mother-daughter relationships. Several spoke about how their relationships with their mothers had improved over time. Many of these daughters

were anticipating that these improvements would continue into the future. Thus, they lamented the fact that their relationships with their mothers would not continue to grow. One daughter described this experience:

I realize in this wave of nostalgia how much I miss her. It's definitely a feeling of huge loss and sadness that just comes over you in this big wave. And it just feels awful. You just realize all over again how much you are missing - how much you really miss - the fact that this person is not there. You know, you wish they could have lived a longer life so you could have developed your relationship further and you could have explored new possibilities.... I really feel cheated that she's still not here today. I think that we would be even closer than we were back then, you know. Our relationship was just getting better and better. And like my husband said, like geez you know, we were just getting to the stage where we enjoyed doing things like travelling with them.

For those daughters who commented on how their relationships with their mothers had been inconsistent in terms of the quality of the time they spent together, they experienced a sense of injustice related to the time lost in earlier stages of their relationships when conflict was more prevalent. For many of these daughters, they felt "ripped off" that time had run out just when their relationships with their mothers were becoming better and more rewarding.

Many of the daughters also talked about how their mothers were the main link between them and their siblings, extended family members, country and/or towns of origin, childhoods, and family histories. With the death of their mothers, these daughters felt they lost their sense of connection to their earlier lives, to their "roots." One daughter expressed this sentiment in relationship to her siblings:

some of them I have gotten closer to while others - we have drifted apart which is really sad. What I realized, it was my mother that sort of kept it all together because everybody would phone her and she has the memory. My father doesn't. So they phone my father but he forgets a day later. So I don't know what's going on.

Without her mother, this daughter no longer felt connected to the lives of her siblings in the same intimate way as when her mother was alive.

Three of the daughters in the study were born in Europe and lived their adult lives in Canada. For these women, the death of their mothers, who resided overseas, resulted in the loss of their connection to their countries and birth places.

As one daughter said:

when she died it was a loss not only of a mother but also - I think that there was a loss of the connection to what had been my home where I had grown up. My country of origin, my connections to family because my mother and I had written every week - it was a connection that I had with my brother and sister and the rest of the family and that was something that was gone with her death.

Several daughters also lamented that a consequence of their mothers' death was the loss of their family's history. For example, one daughter believed that many of the details of her history and ancestry died with her mother. For this daughter, her mother's death meant that she had to face the "knowledge that now there is no one else to ask [about family history] because she's the last of - almost the last of her generation." Another woman reiterated this sentiment when she said:

one of the things that the loss of my mother meant was the loss of the family history. People who were friends of my parents - you could always ask questions about things that had happened and about my grandparents and so there was a real loss of the family connection and the story and getting things straight as to who was who. Now I happen to be quite interested in who was in the family and the family has quite an interesting history in terms of my grandparents being in India and some of that is now lost and in fact what happened was a couple of my cousins went to India for a holiday and then ended up sending me pictures. The pictures would have meant so much more if my mother had been able to share them.

Perhaps one of the most enduring aspects of their mothers that the participants reflected on was that their presence reminded them of having once been

children. Without mothers in their lives, these daughters seemed to lose a sense of themselves as children. As one daughter described:

You can be 80 years old and there's still a part of you that's a kid. But you lose - you lose part of that feeling of being a kid I think, when - I feel when my mom died. Like it's just that you know, because she's not there any more you don't feel as much like a kid any more. I guess it's the only way I can put it. You know, it's just one more step to being an adult. And then I guess when both parents go it's even more of a confirmation that you're kind of - now you are the leader of the pack. Like there is just nobody up above any more.

With the loss of their sense of having been children came the realization that they were entirely responsible for themselves; that they no longer had their mothers to lean on when necessary; and that there was no buffer between them and death.

In summary, the significance of the loss of their mothers in the lives of these women unfolded over time. Subsequent to their mothers' death, these daughters, were confronted with a wide range of losses. They reflected on the loss of their mothers as sources of unconditional love; as companions, friends and supporters; as the connection to their personal and family histories; and as the magnet that kept them connected to their families. They were saddened that they were denied all that their future relationships with their mothers might have been, and knew at a profound level that this pivotal relationship could never be replicated or replaced in their lives.

Need to Make Sense of Their Mothers' Death

All of the daughters described the need to try to make sense of their mothers' death. In order to sustain their belief that death occurs for meaningful reasons, these daughters sought to explain, rationalize, and in essence understand the necessity of their mothers' death. To understand and reconcile the nature and timing of their mothers' death, these daughters reflected back on the recent circumstances of their mothers' lives and the course of their illnesses. At the time of the interviews, some daughters were able to reconcile their mothers' death, while

others had not come to terms with their sense of injustice concerning their loss.

When reflecting back on their mother's lives, several daughters attained a sense of peace concerning their mothers' death when they acknowledged circumstances that indicated that death versus life was perhaps becoming more preferable for their mothers. The daughters who perceived their mothers' lives as "lonely" and "unhappy" found it easier to reconcile the fact that she had died. As one daughter whose mother lived the last four years of her life in a nursing home explained:

I think the whole family - we were delighted that she finally made it because she had wanted to go and somehow couldn't. I even fantasised at certain times of putting a pillow over her face, you know. I mean you think, she is so unhappy and there's no hope for her and she just - she's like a vegetable lying there. And when she was sane, she was so lonely.

Like others in this study, this daughter's sense of hopelessness concerning the quality of her mother's life reinforced her belief that it was time for her mother to die. Thus, her mother's death was meaningful in that it occurred when both she and her mother were ready for her to go.

The daughters whose mothers died of a prolonged illness were also able to more easily make sense of their mothers' death. In fact, these daughters described experiencing a sense of "relief" when their mothers died. Death became an "ending to an illness" that was negatively impacting their mothers' quality of life. As one daughter said while reflecting back on her mother's death :

I learned so much about life and well death because that's a part of life. I don't think I am as afraid of death as I use to be funnily enough even having seen it, you know. At the time, it was - when she died, I have to say at that moment, I really wanted her to go. I really did. You know, I never thought I could have been a person that could have said that. But I really wanted her to stop breathing....It was almost like when she was that ill, it was almost like she wasn't the same person any more. It was kind of funny cause it made it seem a bit more removed. She almost wasn't my mother any more.

She became another person which in some ways made it a little bit easier to deal with...I thought death would be a lot more tragic. It just seemed natural. It's just - it feels like it's more meant to be and it feels right, you know. This person had - it's their time. They have to die at this point.

For some daughters then, death was welcomed and deemed necessary, particularly considering that the illness had already taken away the women they knew as their mothers. It appeared then, that the "relief" they experienced at the time of their mothers' death was due to their sense that they had already lost their moms as they had known them. To some degree, they had already distanced themselves from the women who were dying in front of them. As their mothers' death were perceived as appropriate and timely, these daughters were able to more easily reconcile themselves to the loss of their mothers.

The perceived quality of their mothers' actual death also helped some daughters make peace with their loss. Several daughters described their mothers' death as "peaceful," "gracious," "dignified," and "quick," all of which added to their ability to reconcile the reality of the loss of their mothers. Remembering that her mother "never struggled - didn't stir - just never woke up" gave one daughter "great comfort" and helped her find peace in the timing of her mother's unexpected death. For another daughter, it was knowing that her mother was not immediately anticipating her own death that served to help her come to terms with her mother's death. As this daughter described, her mother died on Sunday and:

Then on the Monday I got a letter from her which was - it was sad but it was also joyful because - it was just an everyday letter written - there was nothing in it that would indicate that this was going to be the situation. It was kind of weird getting it after [her death] it was also reassuring because it was just a - a happy letter. Things were okay.

For these daughters, knowing that their mothers died peacefully, without fearfully anticipating their own deaths, helped assuage their sense of loss, and make their mothers' death more comprehensible: it was their time to go. For the daughters who were able to find some meaning in their mothers' deaths, death as an integral

part of life became less of a paradox for them. Rather death came to be perceived as “one side of a coin” with life on the other side. With this renewed, or new, conception of death, death also became less fearful for these daughters.

However, those daughters who could not weave together circumstances pertaining to either their mothers’ lives or deaths that indicated that death was appropriate and meaningful at that particular time, despaired in their attempt to make sense of their mothers’ death. One daughter described how her mother’s 13 year remission from breast cancer had “created this assumption that she [her mother] had recovered and that she would go on forever.” As her mother had “beat” cancer once before, this daughter felt a sense of injustice with the return of the cancer and her mother’s subsequent death. It was the expectation created by her mother’s 13 year remission that accentuated the difficulty this woman had in coming to terms with her mother’s death.

Another daughter, who was struggling with making sense of her mother’s death, was not able to see how her death was meaningful, given her mother’s life at that time. This daughter perceived her mother’s death as unjust, and as such, incomprehensible. She described this experience:

she [her mother] had started to plan to do things that she had wanted to do and then four months later she was dead. She never got to do them. And I thought she should have been able to do them. It didn’t - it just didn’t seem right. That she had done everything for everybody else including my dad. You know, my dad had been ill for a long time. So she didn’t get to do the things she wanted to do. She was planning a - a you know, a trip. Maybe go on an Alaskan cruise with her sister. She was coming here to stay for Christmas, rather than have it at her house for the first time in 43 years. We had it all planned and she never got to do the things she wanted to do. And it just - I just kept thinking it wasn’t fair - it wasn’t fair! I know it seems silly. Fair to who? Life isn’t fair. I’m not a particularly religious person so I don’t think when people said, “Oh it’s her time. God wanted her.” I don’t believe that. I just think it happens. And there is no rhyme or reason for it.

It just happens....I don't remember when it was after she died. I don't think it was right away but it wasn't a long time after either. Maybe within the first year. It was like a bolt - the typical bolt of lightning hit me - that's all there is. We're born and we die and that's it. It was really scary because I'd always thought that I had a faith.

For this participant the unjustness and untimeliness of her mother's death appeared to be the catalyst that caused her to question her faith. She was unable to glean meaning from the timing of her mother's death, and experienced a despair that challenged her faith in a just and fair God.

In summary, these daughters described a need to understand, rationalize and/or justify the timing and circumstances of their mothers' death. In reviewing the quality of their mothers' lives and the nature of their death, several daughters found the meaning that helped them comprehend and reconcile their loss. For other daughters who felt their mothers were not ready to die and who themselves were not prepared for their death, there was an on-going struggle to create some meaning of their death. As the women in this study endeavoured to reconcile themselves to the loss of their mothers, they found themselves confronted with having to understand the meaning of death in relation to life. As a consequence, some daughters were able to make peace with the fact that death is an integral aspect of life. For others, however, the death of their mothers left them feeling like death is a thief with which to be reckoned.

Need to Reassess Their Relationships with Their Mothers

To varying degrees, all of these women embarked on a process of reassessing their mother-daughter relationships subsequent to the death of their mothers. By engaging in this review, daughters sought to understand the nature and meaning of their mother-daughter relationships in their lives. The outcomes of this review process were painful for some daughters as they removed their "rose coloured glasses" and saw more clearly their less than ideal mother-daughter relationships. For other daughters, the review process accentuated the depth of love and support that characterized their relationships with their mothers. Through

a process of stepping back and widening their lenses, these daughters reflected back on the nature of their relationships with their mothers and on their roles within these relationships. It was from this broader perspective that several daughters came to see their mothers as individuals, and not as just their mothers. It was also through this review process that several women revised their perceptions of their past mother-daughter relationships and came to feel differently about these relationships.

When reflecting on their relationships with their mothers subsequent to their death, these daughters critically evaluated the extent of their involvement in their mothers' lives. Many daughters questioned whether they had spent enough time with their mothers and assessed whether they could legitimately consider themselves to be "good" daughters. It appeared that because their mothers had cared for and loved them throughout their lives, these daughters felt a need to reassure themselves that they had reciprocated their mothers' love. Several of the participants looked to their partners and/or friends for validation and acknowledgement that they had indeed been "good" daughters. One daughter explained how:

people use to ask me, oh are you close to you mom? And I use to think, well not that close. But then when I put it into perspective, the fact that we did - we wrote to each other every week and in her last - the last years of her life, I use to go and spend probably at least two weeks almost concentrated time living in her house and being with her. And I realized that I was probably a lot closer than a lot of people ever get to be with their mothers.... And people helped me recognize - in that they would say, well you know, you were a good daughter and that you were there when she need to have surgery or something like that.

By contemplating her role and acknowledging that she had indeed been a "good" daughter, this woman was able to feel more peaceful about her mother's death. For all of these daughters, the death of their mothers signified the end of their opportunity to give back to their mothers the love that had been given to them.

With the acknowledgement from others that they had been helpful and available for

their mothers, these daughters felt confident that they had done their part to make these relationships rich. Knowing that they had invested time and energy into these relationships helped free the daughters from any guilt they might have felt for any perceived lack of care or compassion on their parts.

For several daughters it was through reviewing their mother-daughter relationships after their mothers' death, that they were able to expand their perceptions of their mothers and their relationships. These daughters discussed how they came to see their mothers more "objectively;" that is, as individuals not as just their mothers. For example, one daughter commented:

She's [mother's] much more of a real person than when I was with her because now I am starting to see her more objectively. I am starting to see her weaknesses. I only ever saw her strengths....I know her so much better now.

With this new perspective, this daughter felt closer to her mother than she did when her mother was alive. For another daughter, who harboured a great deal of resentment toward her parents for perceived inadequacies in their raising of her, this experience of viewing her mother (and father) more objectively occurred when she opened an envelop that contained a photograph of her parents, taken around the time she born. As she reiterated, when she took the photograph out of the envelop:

it hit me that these were - I said my goodness - they were babies when they had me. I saw this picture and I thought, they were so young. And I felt - I felt this huge sense of forgiveness that when they had me - they had - they were babies! They didn't know what they were doing. And so in death, I have forgiven them for what was a lot of resentment.

By looking at her mother in this photograph, this daughter saw her mother as a young woman; who, like herself, was trying to navigate through motherhood. As this daughter described:

I look at them [parents] and think they were babes. They didn't know. And having had two [children] of my own and one being very much more of a challenge than the other - I have said many times that they don't come

with instructions. So you do your best, and I think they probably did their best. More or less. But it is sad that they both had to die for me to acknowledge that.

Through connecting to her mother, as a mother herself, this daughter was able to forgive her mother. Whereas before, she had viewed her relationship with her mother through the lens of anger and resentment; after her mother's death, this daughter viewed her mother with a new sense of compassion and her mother-daughter relationship with a new sense of understanding. However, with this new perspective came regret. She wished she could have had this awareness while her mother was alive. Like others in this study, it was only when no longer constrained by her own needs as a daughter, that she was were able to perceive her mother more "objectively."

For two participants, reflecting on their relationships with their mothers was a difficult process as they came to see their relationships with their mothers in a less favourable light. One participant who devoted a great deal of time attending to her mother wished that their relationship had been more enjoyable. Reflecting on her relationship with her mother, this woman said:

I started looking at our relationship differently. You know, I was sort of - I was taking care of her and it was kind of one sided and I wish it had been different. I wish she had had a better outlook on life and if she had been more positive to be around, then I think we would have had a better relationship than the one we did have....But because it was one-sided and she wasn't a real happy person to be around, that the quality of time together was not good.

With this new perspective came sadness. What both daughters had hoped to have with their mothers, and what they had, at times, believed they had had with their mothers, in hindsight was tinged with the reality that these relationships were not as rich and enjoyable as they might have been. This realization exacerbated their sense of loss and regret as they confronted the reality that there was no time left in which to create more rewarding relationships with their mothers.

For other daughters, it was the process of reviewing their relationships with their mothers after their death that opened the door for the realization of how important their mothers were to them and how much they valued having them in their lives. As one participant commented:

I grew closer to my mother, more than I realized. And it was the impact of my mother's death that made me realize how close I was to her. I - I took that for granted. I never realized that she was a very dear friend of mine.

For this women, as with other women in the study, the importance of her mother in her life became more salient when her mother was no longer living. This realization also helped her understand the depth of the grief she experienced with the loss of this special relationship.

In summary, after the death of their mothers, these daughters were propelled into a process of needing to reevaluate and develop a better understanding of their mother-daughter relationships. These daughters were challenged to look at themselves, their mothers, and the nature of their mother-daughter relationships in new ways. From this new perspective, the women in this study found that their perceptions of their mothers expanded and deepened, and they gained greater understanding of the nature and significance of this relationship in their lives. By understanding their mothers as women who lived in a certain place and time in history, some increased their compassion for their mothers' lives and actions. With this new sense of compassion, these daughters were able to reflect back on their mother-daughter relationships with more understanding. However, for others there was an element of sadness that accompanied this new understanding. Some daughters lamented the fact that their new perceptions of their mothers emerged not during their mothers' lives but subsequent to their mothers' death; when there was no time left to change these relationships.

Sense of Regret Concerning Lost Opportunities

While reflecting back on their mothers' lives, seven of the nine daughters expressed some degree of regret with regard to the circumstances of their mothers'

lives, and/or their relationships with their mothers. For some daughters, events that occurred around the time of their mothers' death caused them distress. Other daughters described situations that pertained to missed opportunities during their mothers' lives. With regret, these daughters considered what they would have liked, in hindsight, to have shared with, or known about their mothers. Regret was also a key feature of many of these daughters' experiences as they reflected on the lives their mothers lived due to the time in which they were born. For the women in this study, reflecting back on their mothers' lives engendered feelings of regret with regard to circumstances that occurred around the time of their death, missed opportunities for sharing with their mothers, and the nature and quality of their mothers' lives.

At the time of their mothers' death, several daughters related circumstances surrounding their death that they wished had not occurred. For example, one daughter described the guilt and regret she experienced when she missed her mother's call for help the morning she had a stroke:

I felt really bad because you know, she couldn't reach anybody close to her. ...I remember feeling really bad for her because she was so overwhelmed. She was obviously really scared of having the stroke and being in the position she was in. It was really hard for her to take....I mean, I think the worst part is - is remembering those - those last 3 weeks and her - her being so scared.

This daughter regretted that in the last three weeks of her mother's life she was unable to alleviate her mother's fears and was unable to care for her mother as she had always been able to before.

Another daughter who made a point of being with her mother in Europe during her illness, reported feeling "shocked" and "angry" when her mother died while she was making a brief trip back to Canada:

the sadness for me over that whole event was not that she died because she needed to die at that point....But it got to December 30th and I had two university students back in Canada and I hadn't seen them for ages. So I

wanted to go back and see them before they went back to university. So I said to my mother, I'm not very good at saying goodbyes so I am not going to say goodbye because I'll be back on Friday....I got the call in the early hours of Wednesday morning that she had died. And my initial reaction was why, why couldn't you wait?! Why did you have to die when I wasn't there?

This daughter had hoped to be with her mother at the time of her death and was hurt that her mother did not wait for her to return before she died. She deeply regretted that she had missed the opportunity to say goodbye to her mother.

Another daughter recounted her feelings of regret at the time of her mother's death. This woman's mother also lived in Europe. Three days before her death, she had phoned her daughter to wish her a happy birthday. This participant missed her mother's last phone call. Tearfully, she reflected:

one thing that was sad for me was that she called me on Thursday, which was my birthday. And she died on Sunday. And she missed me. I hadn't been around but she spoke to my husband - so I thought that was sad.

The missed phone call, which ordinarily would not have been significant, became imbued with meaning in light of the fact that it was the last phone call this daughter would ever receive from her mother.

In addition to regrets concerning events that occurred around the time of their mothers' death, several women spoke about feelings of regret pertaining to things they wished they had shared with their mothers. One daughter, who was not anticipating her mother's death, regretted the fact that she never told her mother how much she appreciated her. After her mother's death, this daughter looked for reassurance from her mother's sister as to whether her mother realized just how much she was valued. As this daughter described:

I needed to know that - I wanted my aunt to tell me that - I never got to tell my mother that I appreciated everything she did....I don't - I guess I worry that I didn't get the time to tell her. I didn't! I didn't get the time to tell her!...I don't know if I told her enough, you know, how much she did for

me - what she meant to me.

Having not told her mother explicitly how important she was in her life, this woman feared her mother died without knowing how much she was loved and valued by her daughter.

Another daughter regretted not getting to know her mother as an individual before her death. This daughter felt that her relationship with her mother was distant and there were many things that she regretted not talking to her mother about. When reflecting on her relationship with her mother, she said:

I am sure that mother had lots of sides that I didn't know....My sister got to know her the way that maybe I should have you know, and didn't. I never felt the need to cause I guess I always liked her. I mean I didn't - she wasn't a problem for me. But my sister got to really like her. And saw a different side of her.

This daughter regretted that she never tried to know her mother in a more intimate manner, and that she did not allow her mother to know her at a deeper level. She felt that she never received the approval from her mother that she longed for so deeply and she resisted opening herself to her mother and confronting the disapproval she feared was there. She regretted that due to fear, she did not pursue a more intimate relationship with her mother.

Six of the nine women also shared their feelings of regret concerning the lives their mothers had lived. These daughters regretted the fact that their mothers were not able to experience all the joy, love, and excitement life has to offer. They expressed regret as they reflected on how their mothers' lives had been impacted by the time in history they had lived. They spoke of the limitations that were placed on their mothers' lives due to the dynamics between the genders and to the social expectations of women at that time. Many daughters said they regretted the fact that their mothers were not given the same freedom that they are permitted within today's social structure. These daughters discussed their mothers' unfulfilled desires for careers that were not readily available to them due to their socialization as women and due to the structural barriers that inhibited their participation in the

paid labour force. One daughter commented that "mother said that she didn't really want to get married. That she would have liked to have had a career. She had liked working and she was good at it." Another daughter noted that her mother was a:

frustrated CEO...She wanted a career. She wanted to be a nurse but she had to leave school to look after her siblings after her mom died. She had career goals and they didn't include just getting married and having children.

It was a period in history where many women did not have the confidence to venture into the business world. As one daughter reflected on her mother's career aspirations:

She was a very creative woman and she was an extremely good designer and seamstress and in a time when people weren't doing - well women of her age weren't doing much, she would design blouses and take them to Eatons and sell them. You know, take them across Canada. She had a lot of potential and a lot of energy and it is sort of sad that she didn't have the confidence to do anything with it.

Not only did these daughters see their mothers as being inhibited from pursuing their career dreams, many daughters also regretted the reality that their mothers were in marriages that restricted their lives. One daughter said her mother: married my father to sort of escape her family and start over. And then my father was very domineering and very chauvinistic and you know, she use to complain about that a lot....Her life was controlled and she was very dependent on my dad.

Several of the daughters who saw their mothers as having been in hindering marriages, regretted that their mothers never had the opportunity to do the things they wanted. As one woman said:

because of my parent's marriage, I felt that my mother didn't get to do what she wanted to do. Cause of my dad - just his illness and the kind of personality my dad was - he was a difficult man. When he died, of course she was upset and hurt and lonely but she started to plan to do things that

she had wanted to do and then four months later she was dead. And she never got to do them. And I thought she should have been able to do them. Several daughters commented that they had hoped their mothers would “blossom” after the death of their fathers. Others spoke about how they wished their fathers had died first so that their mothers would have had the opportunity to live life more freely. One woman said:

My mother was a very strong woman, Very traditional - she had all these kids - she was married to a cop - he was the boss....She didn't have a voice and that was a stumbling block in their marriage....It would have been much better if dad had gone first cause then she would have had a real life....I regret she wasn't able to do more of what she wanted to do.

Thus, these daughters regretted that their mothers never had the opportunity to live their lives free of the expectations inherent in their marriages, and in the social structure of their mothers' generation.

In summary, several of these daughters felt regret when they reflected back on their relationships with their mothers. There was a sense of regret concerning lost opportunities: missed phone calls, appreciation not expressed, questions never asked, and goodbyes never said. Many of these daughters also felt regret as they contemplated the lives their mothers lived. They regretted their mothers' unfulfilled career dreams and the trips they never took. These daughters regretted that fact that their mothers never experienced the freedom to be, and to live, how they wanted due to the pressure to conform to society's expectations of women during that generation. These daughters regretted that their mothers never had the opportunity to experience the freedoms that they, due to their time in history, have been able to experience.

Sense of Shifting Roles and Responsibilities

All of the daughters sensed a shift in their roles and responsibilities with regard to themselves and their families subsequent to their mothers' death. The extent of the shift in their roles and responsibilities appeared to be, in part, determined by the roles their mothers had played within their family's relational

tapestry. Daughters whose mothers were actively involved in caring for their family members, or who were the focal point of communication between family members, initially stepped in to fill these holes their mothers' death had left. The daughters whose mothers either did not have family members to care for, or who themselves required care, did not perceive the same gaping holes in their families when their mothers died. In fact, the daughters who had invested a great deal of time in ensuring the well-being of their mothers, felt relief at the easing of this burden. The death of their mothers actually released them from the responsibility of caregiving and worrying about their mothers' comfort and happiness. However, for these daughters this newly acquired freedom had a bittersweet quality in terms of the feelings of guilt that accompanied this sense of relief. Whatever their particular circumstances, all of the women in the study sensed changes in their roles and relationships with their widowed fathers, their siblings, and their extended family members following the death of their mothers.

For three of the participants, their relationships with their fathers changed after their mothers' death. In each of these cases, the parents had been married for many years and had well established patterns of caring for each other. As such, these daughters believed it was their responsibility to take over where their mothers had left off; that is, to assume their mothers' caretaking roles for their fathers. One daughter described this transfer of responsibility in the following way: "It was sort of like the responsibility is switched and you are it! It was like tag!" Their sense of responsibility to care for their fathers was particularly intense in the period immediately after their mothers' death. One daughter described her experience of caring for her father after her mother's death in this way:

I soon realized that not only had I lost my mother and a dear friend, but I had taken on a dependent....The difficulty I had was - what can happen is - I would take on sort of the wife role....So for a while I was spinning my wheels to keep it all going like mom....And then I got annoyed and I thought, no I am not here to be mom. I'll never be mom and I'll never be his wife. And he is going to have to wing it on his own. For example, I

use to remind him of birthdays and anniversaries. I don't do that any more. I figure, they [siblings] can phone, they can do whatever. If they want to make the time for him great. But I am not going to be constantly reminding him. I will remind him of doctors appointments but that's the extent of it. Or certain things that he has to do. But other than that I think, well no. He is forgetful and he'll just have to deal with it and if you get a birthday card late, fine. So be it.

By trying to keep the family the same as when her mother was alive, like others in this study, this daughter was in a sense, shielding her father, her siblings, and herself from the full impact of her mother's death. However, she came to realize that she could not be both a daughter and a wife for her father. Nor could she be both a sister and a mother for her siblings. She discovered that she needed to step back and allow her father to create his new life without his wife, allow her siblings to create new relationships with their father, and allow herself to adjust to the tremendous impact of her mother's death on her life and on the lives of her entire family.

Many of these daughters also perceived a shift in their relationships with their siblings following the death of their mothers. For some, these relationships became closer. It appeared that when their mothers were alive, being with their mothers had taken precedence over spending time with siblings. Now, however, with their mothers being gone, their brothers and sisters became their link to their families. As one participant reflected:

I could never go to [mother's home town] and stay at my brother's because my mother would be so upset. So now I get to go stay with him. So we, you know, we even spend more time together.

For some of these daughters then, the loss of their mothers, while painful, resulted in some new opportunities. Many found they had more time and more freedom to devote to their sibling relationships, which served to strengthen these bonds.

Other daughters reflected on how their relationships with their siblings became more distant after their mothers' death. These daughters talked about how

their mothers were often the primary source of communication between family members. When their mothers were no longer organizing family gatherings or relaying information, the communication between siblings broke down. For example, while considering why her sister is not very involved in her life any more, one daughter said, "It was just my mom keeping everything together, so she's [sister] just drifted off."

For several participants, the death of their mothers necessitated them becoming more proactive in their communication with immediate and extended family members. One daughter explained how her mother, "was actually very good at keeping contact with family members. And she visited all over the world." This daughter acknowledged her need to "make my own contacts if I am going to be aware of what's happening to other members of the family." Another participant, shared a similar experience. This daughter, whose mother had four sisters, reflected on how she had, in a sense, replaced her mother as one of the sisters.

My mother's sisters - I keep in touch with. Now instead of the sisters all chatting, I have become a sister. The five sisters with one replacement. So I'll talk to my aunts and communicate all the different family news and I talk to my cousins more than I would have. My mom use to be the connection.

For these daughters, their mothers' death left a gap in the family tapestry. To maintain their ties to relatives and family friends, they found themselves consciously assuming their mothers' roles as the thread that wove family members and friends together.

Not only did many of the daughters take on their mothers' roles within the family, they also tried to maintain the connections with other significant people in their mothers' lives. For example, one daughter discussed how she found herself taking on her mother's role within her mom's circle of friends:

I found myself, over the course of going back and forth, that I had taken on a fair bit of her role over there [mother's home]. She had several friends who were much older and so she was - she looked after them. So what I

found - had found myself doing, was doing the driving for them you know, taking them to visit the doctors or picking up their groceries. Things that she'd done. And I actually realized particularly with the funeral too that I was worrying about how - who was going to bring Mrs. so-and-so and where - what time would she need to get home because she was tired and you know, this - so I was orchestrating - and it was really the sort of thing that my mother would have been doing.

After a period of about six weeks, this daughter realized that she could not resume her mother's life. Nor could she keep the full force of her mother's death from reverberating throughout her life. So she put her mother's house up for sale, and returned to Canada.

Another shift in responsibility that these daughters experienced occurred for those who devoted a great deal of energy caring for and worrying about the welfare of their mothers. These daughters experienced a sense of relief as they realized they no longer needed to be concerned about the health and well-being of their mothers. However, the pleasure of relief was offset by feelings of guilt. One daughter described how this experience unfolded for her:

There is a part of me that I find really upsetting because it almost seems selfish. But there are times when I feel like I have had a weight lifted off my shoulders. Because she was getting to the age where she would have needed at some point to move into a smaller place because she had a fairly big yard and she had animals which were her best friends. The animals were who kept her company when she was on her own. And it was always a really big concern as to what was going to happen next - what the next step would be. And you know, just worrying about her being on her own and being lonely. Cause I know she did get lonely a lot. And so, when she did pass away, that was one thing I did notice - was like I don't have to worry about her any more. And that - and I use to think that's such a horrible, horrible thing to think! Like how could you think that when you are talking about your mother! But I did feel I was the one responsible for

looking after her.

Although, it was difficult for this daughter to acknowledge the relief she felt, she noted feeling a sense of freedom she was unable to experience when her mother was still alive. As she described, "I said to my husband, after my mom passed away, that you know, I could really go somewhere now and not feel like I am abandoning her." For this participant, as for others, the loss of her mother engendered a complex array of emotions - both negative and positive.

In summary, following the death of their mothers, these daughters sensed a shift in their roles and responsibilities. Initially many of these daughters willingly tried to replace their mothers by filling their mom's roles and assuming their responsibilities within their immediate and extended families. By stepping into their mothers' shoes, these daughters were attempting to assuage the full impact of their mothers' death on themselves and on their family members. However, there came a time for each daughter when she had to step back and open the door for herself, and the other members of her family to create new lives. Other daughters were faced with the challenge of dealing with their mixed emotions in response to the loss of their mothers.

Need to Reassess Meaning in Their Lives

Eight of the nine participants in this study reflected on how the loss of their mothers propelled them into a review of the values and priorities in their lives. These women engaged in this exploration following their mothers' death but acknowledged that their death were only one factor in the reassessment of their lives. Rather, they spoke about how this period in their lives had been filled with many events and that maybe it was the culmination of all these factors that ignited their introspection. However, it was subsequent to their mothers' death that these daughters reported experiencing a "void" and an "emptiness" in their lives. As such, several daughters commented on how their mother's death was perhaps the "catalyst" or the "stimulation" that encouraged them to begin this process of reassessment in earnest. These daughters reported contemplating and questioning who they are, how much time they have left to live, what they want to do with the

time they have left, and what is important to them in life. It was this search for meaning that caused participants to reevaluate and reflect on their understanding of themselves and the meaning of family in their lives.

Several daughters ruminated on how it was the death of their mothers and the subsequent sense of being abandoned that compelled them to seek to recreate meaning in their lives. For example, one daughter who embarked on this journey said:

I felt kind of abandoned and so that was what made me - what I think made me begin to question a few things in my life. It was to find out - to look inward rather than always looking outward. I guess to find - to have that inner sense of - now I am on my own so I am going to - I need to look within myself to find - to love myself unconditionally because that's what's important.

For this daughter, with her mother no longer available to her, the experience of feeling abandoned fuelled her quest for self knowledge. This daughter's search for meaning lead her to explore her inner world; to find a source of love and to find meaning within herself.

Another participant who described her process of searching for meaning was also urged on by the distressing sense of being on her own. This participant's quest lead her to ponder spirituality. It was through connecting to spirituality that she discovered a sense of not being alone. This woman described a dream in which her car had broken down and:

this mechanic appeared from nowhere and just said with this wonderful gentle soft voice and a lovely smile, can I help you? And I remember waking up thinking, I just saw Jesus and I am not alone. There is somebody.

For this participant, the loss of her mother highlighted her own aloneness, which was eventually assuaged by a budding sense of spirituality in her life. While reflecting on the connection between her mother's death and her developing spiritual interest, this participant said:

Actually, you could take this down a really sort of left field-ish route by saying Jesus died on the cross to save the world. Well you know, my mother had to die - she had to die for me to open up to this spiritual thing....But my father had died, my patients have died, I've had relatives and friends die but it was my own mother's death that made me so much more open or vulnerable to these sorts of experiences. I think maybe this is a mother's role. We teach - we are our children's teachers. It didn't hit me with my father but with my mother - that is, how the real meaning of life - we are on a journey. I have found myself more and more.

This daughter was acutely aware of the role her mother's death played in enriching her life. As compared to others whose deaths have touched her, this participant noted how her mother's death was a gift in opening the door for her to embrace the spiritual aspects of life.

A third woman described how her self awareness had changed since her mother's death. This daughter reflected on the freedom "to be" she experienced after her mother's death:

I think I finally have this freedom of criticism for you know, appearance and things like that - there was always a ton of that. So then you do - you establish your own - a real person that's not - it was always there, but it was always being regulated and commented and packaged and moulded. And all of the sudden you go, wow! You know, I am an outright human being.

Subsequent to her mother's death, this daughter appreciated the freedom to let herself unfold as she wished. She no longer felt she had to live up to her mother's expectations of how a woman should be or look. With her mother's values no longer being a salient part of her daily life, this woman was free to create her own self definition.

Several participants also described reevaluating the importance and meaning of family in their lives following the death of their mothers. Reconsidering the significance of family was particularly notable for the four women in the study who did not have their own children. Of these four, two stated that in the period

following their mothers' death, they questioned whether being childless was what they wanted, contemplated what they were missing in their lives without children, and considered whether they had made the right choices in earlier years. For both of these women, it was the feeling that they didn't have "family" that caused them to question their decisions not to become mothers. One daughter described the experience as:

something that occurred to me after mom died was for the first time in my life - I had always been indifferent about having children - I had thought, yeah, well, one day I will get married and have a family. Well that one day never came. And now I feel too old for children. But at that time, I had just turned 40. And about 8 months to a year after she died I wanted to have a baby. Never had the urge ever, till then. I thought, I know what this is - because you want mom to live on. You want to carry on mom's love by giving it to a child.

This woman did not have a child to whom she could pass on her legacy, as her mother had to her. As she said, "What she [mother] gave me I can carry with me till I die. The only regret that I have is that I don't have a child to pass that on to." With the death of her mother, this woman was confronted with her only connection to family dwindling and with the knowledge that her mother's legacy would die with her own death. For the childless participants, the meaning of children, as the recipients of the legacies of their parents, became more salient.

The participants who had children also reflected on their understanding of the meaning of family in their lives. These daughters looked back on their relationships with their mothers and made choices about whether they wanted to parent their own children as their mothers had parented them. With sadness, some daughters noted that they were never able to achieve the type of close relationships they had wished to have with their mothers. These daughters chose to create different, "more meaningful," and more "caring" relationships with their own children.

Other daughters who had experienced rewarding relationships with their

mothers however, believed their mothers left them a legacy which they strove to emulate with their own children. For example, one daughter, while reflecting on how she wanted to be remembered by her son, said:

I want him to have those memories of the pool, the parties - that when he grows up, he remembers his mom fondly. You know, that she was really involved in his life. So I guess that must be what my mom did. You know, that she was really involved in my life....No, I believe she was there. She was a great part of my life. She always will be and that's how I want to be for my son.

For these women, their relationships with their mothers taught them about how they wanted to be in their relationships with their own children. Thus, their mothers' legacies extended not only to them, but also to their own children.

The participants in this study not only questioned their meaning of family with regard to children. They also reconsidered the importance of their relationships with siblings, other family members, and friends. This led several participants' to reconsider the priority of relationships in their lives. These daughters commented on how they developed a renewed appreciation for relationships in their lives. As one daughter said:

one thing - one thing that's changed with the loss of my mother, it's reinforced my beliefs about how important people are and your relationships with people. That you can have a whole household of crap and that's all it is because once you are gone it's of no meaning unless you know what - what the significance is of that article. But if there is nobody there to tell you what it is, in my mind it's a dust collector. So I think that is the biggest reinforcement.

Some daughters also commented on how they have reevaluated the significance of particular relationships in their lives following the death of their mothers. As one daughter described: "I questioned my relationships. Especially my marriage. Was that something that was - how important was that to me."

In summary, following their mothers' death, several of the participants in

this study found themselves embarking on a exploration of what they valued in their lives. They questioned their understanding of themselves, and the importance of family and relationships in their lives. Some of these daughters became poignantly aware of their desire to continue their mothers' legacies, either through reconsidering their lives without children or by allowing the influence of their mothers to permeate their relationships with their own children. By reflecting on what was important in their lives, several daughters developed a renewed appreciation for the centrality of relationships in their lives.

Sense of Enduring Connection to Their Mothers

Eight of the nine daughters shared experiences that indicated their sense of having an enduring connection to their mothers. Although their mothers were physically no longer present, these daughters spoke poignantly about how they continued to connect with their mother and keep their mothers alive within their hearts and minds. In this way, the daughters found solace from the loss they felt due to their mothers' death. For these women, it appeared that death did not end the mother-daughter bond, as their mothers' legacies served to keep their mothers alive. The daughters described remaining connected to their mothers in terms of their spiritual beliefs; their mothers' characteristics; surrogate mother relationships; and physical memories/symbols.

Through their spiritual beliefs, these daughters sensed their enduring connection to their mothers. These spiritual beliefs allowed these daughters to conceptualize their mothers' presence in non-physical forms. The daughters in this study discussed feeling comforted by their sense that their mothers "were not gone altogether." Rather, they experienced their mothers as still being "part of this universe, just in a different form." For example, one daughter described how she visualized her mother as an angel:

On my bedside table I have this - this wonderful picture of my mother when she was two years old. It's just her face. It's like a portrait. She had this mass of golden curls. She had the most unbelievable hair. She looks like an angel. She really looks like an angel in that picture. It's just so adorable

and I just love that photograph because that's - I didn't even know her when she was that age, obviously, but when I look at it, I almost kind of think that - that she's kind of like this little angel. Like that's the way she looks now. I know that sounds really funny but I don't - when I think of her I don't think of her looking like her any more.

For this daughter, the picture that captured the angelic essence of her mother became the means by which she continued to experience her connection to her mother.

A sense of their enduring connection to their mothers was also evidenced by participants who engaged in activities their mothers had enjoyed or who embodied characteristics that they valued in their mothers. For example, one daughter attributed her appreciation for classical music to her mother and said that she felt connected to her mother whenever she listened to classical music. Other daughters described their desire to maintain their link to their mothers through nurturing the similarities between themselves and their mothers that were passed on either genetically or interpersonally. One woman fondly attributed her "spunk" and "sense of humour" to her mother. For another daughter, her mother's death:

helped me look at who, more at who she was as a person and to who she was as a mother. Whether it was her death or whether the time - the time I spent with her, to see what was important to her and to begin to try and be in a way - in some ways, to take the things that were really good in her life, about her - take things that I identify in her way of being and learn how - and to think about being that way myself in terms of being positive and always enjoying people and making the most of opportunities.

For this daughter, her mother's death forced her to see her mother's attributes and values in a clearer way. Several women also discussed how their strength was their mothers' strength. As one daughter said, "I think in her time and place she had strength as a woman and I ultimately do too. I think she has helped pass that on and I think it has evolved." After their mothers' death, these daughters actively strove to identify aspects of their mothers that they wished to integrate into their

own identities as a way of keeping their mothers' legacies alive in their own lives.

For some participants, this need to acknowledge and embrace characteristics passed on to them through their mothers was quite different from their perceptions and experiences of their mothers when they were alive. For example, one daughter noted how, prior to her mother's death, she did not like to see certain characteristics of her mother reflected in herself. As this daughter described:

when you are a lot like your mother - when they're alive you tend to - when you see yourself - you don't like it - when I saw myself in her, I didn't like it. If there was a mannerism that I - that she had that was the same as mine - I didn't like it in her. It would remind me that I am the same. You know, things - maybe I didn't like about myself and if I saw it in my mother, I'd go like, oh my god, you know. And I didn't even like it when people would say to me, "Oh you're so much like your mother." I didn't like that. I didn't feel that way about her that I wanted to be just like her. Cause she was so different from me in her life and what she did in her life.

When her mother was alive, this daughter wanted to be separate, and to differentiate herself from her mother. However, after her mother's death, when asked how she would feel if someone said she was just like her mother, this daughter responded, "I would feel totally different now. Totally different because it wouldn't be irritating any more. It would be - I'd take it as a compliment now." For some daughters then, there appeared to be a shift. From actively working towards defining themselves as separate and different from their mothers, to actively seeking to embody their mothers' valued characteristics. By doing so, these daughters were reinforcing the enduring connection between themselves and their mothers.

In addition to specific characteristics that these daughters noted wanting to identify and incorporate into their own lives, there seemed to be a more general, all encompassing, intrinsic part of their mothers' being that each felt had been transmitted from mother to daughter. This perception was captured by one daughter who said, "She made me what I am and who I am." Another daughter acknowledged her sense of her mother's continued presence in her life when she

said, "Who she was and what she has given me still exists in me today, to help me get through and continue doing what I need to do." These daughters sensed that their mothers' influence permeated their entire beings. They could not separate who they are today from the influence of their mothers, nor did they desire to do so.

It also appeared that several participants were able to connect to their mothers through their relationships with women who, in their perceptions, exuded a motherly quality. Their relationships with these surrogate mothers evoked feelings of comfort similar to the way these daughters experienced comfort in the presence of their own mothers. Home cooked meals and foods that were reminiscent of foods their mothers cooked were key to creating these feelings of comfort. One daughter summed up this sentiment when she commented, "If there is a chicken dinner served by a mother, I'm there." For some daughters, it was being with women who knew their mothers well, that helped reinforce their enduring connection to their mothers. One daughter commented:

you know where I feel happiness is - this woman, I would never choose to have as a pal - my mom's best pal - and we talk on the telephone and I know that we sort of connect on some of the same levels that my mother and her did. We - cause my personality is very much like my mom's was in a way, we have a lot of fun on the phone. And I know that it reminds me of those days and we remember her through doing this dialogue and having fun.

Through their relationships with surrogate mothers, these daughters remembered their own mothers and recreated aspects of their original mother-daughter bonds. By doing so, they were strengthening the enduring connection between themselves and their mothers.

Owning and wearing things that belonged to their mothers was also a way some of these daughters kept their mothers' presence alive in their lives. One woman spoke passionately about wanting her mother's engagement ring. This woman stated that this "little wee solitaire engagement ring has great meaning to me." Another woman expressed a similar emotional attachment to a ring of her

mother's when she said, "I wear it all the time. I mean, I just need it on." Their mothers' rings for these daughters were symbols of their enduring connection to their mothers' lives:

In summary, many of these daughters had a sense that their mothers were never entirely gone from their lives. Irrespective of their relationships with their mothers prior to their death, these daughters strove to create connections with their mothers after their death, illustrating the enduring quality of their mother-daughter bonds. The words of one daughter, who likened her connection with her mother to an elastic band, eloquently captured this sentiment. She said that since her mother's death the:

elastic band is very stretched out because she is not physically around any more. But in another way it is very closed up because the relationship can still exist in that I guess the love that I feel for her and the appreciation - it's - it's a force that helps me even though she is not here.

For many of the women in this study, their bond to their mothers was powerful enough to withstand death as their mothers' legacies remained ever-present in their lives.

CHAPTER FIVE

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to document the subjective experience and meaning for daughters in midlife of their mothers' recent death. A phenomenological methodology was used in order to gain a deeper and richer understanding of the nature and meaning of the phenomenon in question (Van Manen, 1994), that is, women's experience of the death of their mothers. The research question asked was: What was it like for you to experience your mother's death and what meaning does her death have for you today?

Seven themes emerged from this research which elucidate the experiences of nine midlife women participants. This chapter includes a comparison of these findings with the findings from the available literature, and a discussion of the implications of this study in terms of future research and counselling.

Comparison with the Literature

A comparison between the available research and the results of this study indicates that there are many similarities. Three studies (Klapper et al., 1994; Moss et al., 1993; Robbins, 1990) concentrated exclusively on daughters in midlife who experienced their mothers' death. The following analysis focusses on the similarities and differences between this study and first, Klapper et al., second, Moss et al., and third, Robbins. Similarities between the current study and the research that considers more generally the impact of parental death on "adults" in midlife will be included throughout this discussion where relevant.

Based on their findings, Klapper et al. (1994) argued that women in midlife who experience their mothers' death modify both their internal experience and external expression of grief in order to fit within their cultural, social, and personal expectations of how grief for the death of an elderly mother should be expressed. Interestingly, however, feeling pressured to curtail their expression of grief was not a salient issue for the women in this study. In accounting for this difference it is important to note that in the current study the average length of time between the death of the participants' mothers and the interviews was 34 months. Klapper et

al.'s participants had lost their mothers more recently (three to six months). At the time of the interviews, the participants in Klapper et al.'s study may have been more actively engaged in the early phases of the grieving process, characteristically a more intense phase in responding to such a loss (Rando, 1984, 1993).

Therefore, these women may have felt more pressure, both from within themselves and from their social environments, to restrain their experiences and expressions of grief. Although the majority of the women in the current study did not discuss engaging in a process of controlling their grief a couple of participants noted on reflection that they felt a need to mask their feelings of grief immediately following their mothers' death. As one daughter described it, "I would go out and be very brave in the world everyday and then coming home - there would be a lot of crying and grieving and it was very private." Klapper et al.'s sample size was 107 daughters while the current study included only nine participants. It is possible, therefore, that with the inclusion of more participants, there would be more instances of women reporting their need to control their expression of grief.

Moss et al. (1993) identified six themes that pertain to the experience of mother loss for the adult daughters in their study. A comparison between these themes and the themes generated in the current study revealed several commonalities. The loneliness aspect of "GRIEF" reported by Moss et al. corresponds with the experience of loss of companionship, the sense of being abandoned, and the loss of unconditional love illustrated in the theme "Sense of Profound Loss" in the current research. This similarity points to the significance of mothers as a major source of love and companionship for the adult daughters in these studies.

Moss et al.'s (1993) theme of "ACCEPTANCE," defined as pertaining to a sense of fairness concerning their mothers' death, appears to correspond with the theme in the current research, "Needing to Make Sense of Their Mothers' Death." Moss et al. found that daughters whose mothers were in nursing homes experienced less "GRIEF" and more "ACCEPTANCE" than other daughters. The mother of one participant in the current study spent the last four years of her life in a

nursing home. This daughter's experience of loss was not qualitatively different from the loss experienced by the other women in this study. However, she described her mother's death as a "relief" and, as such, was able to make sense of her mother's death more easily than some of the other daughters in this study. This would suggest that the specific circumstances of their mothers' lives at the time of their death may indeed be a factor for some of these women in coming to terms with their loss. Further support for this was found in the current study. For example, women whose mothers were ill or who perceived their mothers' lives as "lonely" and/or "unhappy" appeared to be able to reconcile their mothers' death more easily than other daughters.

In both Moss et al. (1993) and the current study, daughters mentioned a heightened awareness of their own mortality subsequent to their mothers' death. Moss et al. referred to this as a sense of "FINITUDE." The theme from the current research which reflects this experience is "Reassessing the Meaning in Their Lives." Douglas (1990), Moss and Moss (1983), and Scharlach and Fredriksen (1993) also reported that the adult children in their studies who experienced the death of a parents felt an increased awareness of their own approaching death. This would suggest that both mothers and fathers act as buffers between their adult children and their children's sense of their own mortality.

Moss et al. (1993) also identified "COMFORT" and "REUNION" as two aspects of adult daughters' enduring ties to their deceased mothers. In the current research, the theme "Sense of Enduring Connection to Their Mothers" captures the same quality of experience in terms of "COMFORT." These findings underscore the apparent need and desire of the daughters in both studies to remain connected with their mothers, even after they were no longer physically present. While the daughters in this study did not directly express their beliefs in reuniting with their mothers, some felt that their spiritual beliefs helped to sustain their connection with their mothers. Others kept memories of their mothers close to them and drew comfort from wearing their mothers' rings, by embodying valued characteristics of their mothers, and through creating surrogate mother relationships.

In both the Moss et al. (1993) study and the current study, the age range of participants was approximately 40 to 65 years. However, age appeared to be especially salient in Moss et al.'s study. They found that younger daughters experience more "GRIEF" and engage in more thoughts of "REUNION," while older daughters experienced greater "COMFORT." However, age differences were not evident in the current study. Given the difference in sample size (106 in Moss et al. versus 9 in the current study), it may be that with a larger sample size in the current study, age related differences would have emerged.

Moss et al.'s (1993) theme of "SOMATIC," described as health related changes, was also not evident in the current study. Health related changes (e.g., loss of appetite) are reportedly more likely to occur early in the grieving process (Parkes, 1985). Given that the time period between their mothers' death and the interview in the Moss et al. study was shorter, health related changes may not have been as salient in the current study.

Based on her study of 10 women, Robbins (1990) concluded that women in midlife who have experienced their mothers' death engage in a process of redefining their conceptions of their "myth of mother/hood." Through this process, adult daughters reconsider their beliefs about their mothers, themselves, the Divine, and the world around them. A number of aspects of the current study lead to similar conclusions. Robbins reported that, through grieving their mothers' death, the adult daughters in her study reflected on the historical context of their mothers' lives. By doing so, these women were able to shift their perceptions of their mothers which, in some cases, opened the door for these daughters to forgive their mothers. Similarly, in the current study, some midlife women began to see their mothers more "objectively" subsequent to their death. As in Robbins's study, through viewing their mothers more "objectively," some of these daughters in this study were able to forgive their mothers. In both studies, daughters who felt a sense of forgiveness for their mothers lamented the fact that forgiveness came after death. This similarity suggests that for some of these women death creates a distance between themselves and their mothers, which permits them to reconsider

their mothers in light of the context of their lives. This in turn suggests that for some daughters it is only after their mothers are no longer physically a part of their lives that they are able to assume a more objective and compassionate posture towards their mothers.

Robbins (1990) also found that some of the women in her study changed their beliefs about themselves subsequent to the death of their mothers. In the current study, many daughters also engaged in a process of reevaluating themselves and their lives, following their mothers' death. However this did not appear to be linked to changes in their perceptions of their mothers. Many of the daughters in the current study stated that their mothers' death may have been a "catalyst" for this type of exploration. However, they noted there was also a number of other occurrences in their lives that may also have contributed to their need to reflect on their themselves and their lives. Similarly, Douglas (1990), Moss and Moss (1983) and Scharlach and Fredriksen (1993) found that the adults in their studies reflected on and shifted their priorities following the death of a parent. The similarities found between these studies suggest that for some women and men, the death of a parent significantly impacts their lives such that they engage in a reassessment of their self perceptions and their lives.

Robbins (1990) found that following the death of their mothers, many women in her study experienced a spiritual transformation in which they felt an increased sense of connection to all others and the universe. In the current study, only one daughter, through her self exploration subsequent to her mothers' death, discovered a new sense of her spirituality. This is also somewhat consistent with the findings of Scharlach and Fredriksen (1993) who reported that, following the death of their mothers, 26% of the adult children in their study reported becoming more religious, while 11% said they became less religious. The fact that all of these researchers noted that some percentage of their participants experienced some sort of religious transformation following the death of their parent supports the significance of this loss in terms of reevaluating the nature and meaning of their lives for some women and men.

In the current study, participants described experiencing feelings of regret related to their perceptions of the quality and nature of their mothers' lives. For example, some daughters believed their mothers' lives were inhibited due to social and marital expectations placed on women of their mothers' generation. Similarly, Robbins (1990) found that adult daughters in her study who lost their mothers engaged in a process of reconsidering their mothers in light of their social, historical, and cultural contexts. Robbins concluded that by doing so, these daughters grieved the lives of their mothers more than their deaths. That some of the daughters in these two studies lamented some of the circumstances of their mothers' lives, suggests that these daughters were aware of how their mothers' lives and choices were restricted by the social conditions and proscription of their time. Many regretted that their mothers did not have the opportunities to experience the freedoms permitted women today.

When comparing the current research to the research that exclusively considers midlife daughters' experiences of their mothers' death (i.e., Klapper et al, 1994, Moss et al. 1993 and Robbins 1990), five new findings in the current study emerge. First, in the current study participants described how the losses that ensued subsequent to their mothers' death were realized and gradually understood. That other researchers (e.g, Klapper et al, and Moss et al.), did not discuss this finding is likely related to the fact that they interviewed daughters earlier (3-6 months) after their mothers' death. At this point in time, these daughters may not yet have recognized and mourned the secondary losses (Rando, 1984, 1993) associated with their mothers' death. The losses that coincided with the death of their mothers were acknowledged gradually, suggesting that for the daughters in this study, the enormity of the impact of their mothers' death on their lives could not be acknowledged all at once. It also suggests that dealing with the reality of the many losses associated with a mother's death may indeed be a process that takes years, rather than months.

Second, many of the daughters in the current research talked about how they thought their relationships with their mothers had changed over the years and

had become more characteristic of "peer" relationships. These daughters believed that their relationships were "getting better and better" and they regretted the reality that their mothers' death ended their hopes for their future relationships with them. This finding is consistent with other research on adult mother-daughter relationships which suggests that these relationships grow and improve during adulthood (Barnett et al., 1991; Baruch & Barnett, 1983; Bromberg, 1983). It may be that aspects of mother loss are qualitatively different depending on the age and life stage of the women at the time of their mothers' death.

Third, in the current study, several daughters reported that their roles and responsibilities shifted subsequent to the death of their mothers. Daughters reported initially stepping in and filling their mothers' shoes as caregivers for fathers, and as links between family members and friends. By taking over their mothers roles, these daughters were, in essence, shielding their family members and themselves from fully experiencing the impact of their mothers' death. It appeared that although they eventually had to let go of these responsibilities, stepping into their mothers' roles was a way for the daughters in this study to cope with the enormity of their loss.

In addition, several daughters became the point of communication between other family members, which suggests that for many of the daughters in the current study, their mothers' death resulted in the loss of the person who held the family together. This type of role shift was also noted by researchers who examined the impact of parental death on adults. For example, Scharlach and Fredriksen (1993) found that, of the women and men in their study who experienced their mothers' death, 20% became the family decision makers, 12% assumed responsibility for maintaining the family connections, and 7% took on a more parental role in the family. It is interesting to note that in the current study, six of the nine women (67%) reported becoming the family members' primary source of connection, while in the Scharlach and Fredriksen study only 12% of adults assumed this role. This finding suggests that there may be gender differences in responding to the loss of a mother, with women taking on greater responsibility for filling their mothers' roles

after death .

Fourth, several daughters in the current study reported that they reviewed the meaning of children in their lives subsequent to the death of their own mothers. Perhaps for some women, the loss of their mothers causes them to reconsider their own decisions relative to mothering. In this study, some women questioned their decisions not to raise children, while others reconsidered their relationships with their own children. All contemplated the legacies they would be leaving subsequent to their own death.

Fifth, in this study several daughters reported experiencing the loss of their birth places and their family histories as a result of the death of their mothers. Although, each of the daughters had created their own homes and had established new "roots" while their mothers were alive, they retained their connection to their first homes. This finding suggests that for the daughters in this study, their mothers' death served to separate them not only from their mothers' physical presence, but from their personal and family histories. Mothers as keepers of family histories is consistent with the literature on adult development (Stevens-Long & Commons, 1992), and underscores the myriad of losses that may be experienced by women when mothers are no longer available to fill their roles.

In summary, the stories of their mothers' death, as told by the nine women who participated in this study, revealed a loss that deeply and profoundly affected their lives. It was evident that the death of their mothers was significant for these women by the extent to which the impact of their mothers' death and the ensuing losses reverberated throughout their lives. Although there are similarities between mother-loss and other losses associated with death experienced by these women, they reiterated how this loss touched aspects of their lives that other losses had not.

In this study, the loss of their mothers was significant because even when the women were expecting it and, for some, even wishing it would happen due to illness, they were taken off guard by the ways in which they were impacted by this loss. For some, the extent of the losses was recognized over a period of time, which suggests that the nature and meaning of the loss was a process that changed

as their awareness of its impact grew. For these women, the death of their mothers was also significant as no previous death or loss had challenged them to reconsider and question their self understanding, spirituality, priorities, values, choices concerning raising children, choices concerning parenting, mortality, other relationships, and beliefs about death. Also, for these women their mothers' death carried with it a breadth of losses, from the loss of companionship and unconditional love to the loss of their connections to family members, their countries of birth, and their personal and family histories. For these women, their mothers' death created an array of emotions: sadness, guilt, anger, relief, and regret. It was perhaps this range of emotions that encouraged these women to reconsider their perceptions of their mothers, as women living in a particular culture, at a particular time in history. The death of their mothers touched these women deeply and was illustrated by their desire to keep their mothers present in their lives in some way, through wearing their mothers' rings or modelling their mothers' characteristics.

To determine why these daughters were affected in such a profound manner is beyond the scope of this study. Perhaps it is because mothers and daughters share the same gender, and because mothers and daughters share the same roles in society. Whatever the reason, this study underscores the significance of the death of their mothers for the nine midlife women in this study.

Implications for Future Research

In this section, I will attempt to delineate suggestions for future research based on the limitations of the current study, the previously unreported findings, and the differences between the findings of the current study and the available research.

There are several limitations of the current study that pertain to the sample of participants involved. As all of the participants in this study were white, middle-class and born in either Canada or Britain, research into the experiences of mother death for women from other cultures, racial backgrounds and socioeconomic classes would provide additional information about midlife daughters' experiences

of their mothers' death. The technique of random sampling was not employed in this study and the sample size of 9 participants was small. Therefore, the results of this research can not be generalized to the population of women in midlife. Rather, these results are suggestive of issues that may apply to Caucasian, midlife women, living in North American culture who have experienced the death of their mothers. The participants in this research were selected based on whether they "fit" the purposes of this study, whether they were easily available to study (Patton, 1990), and whether they had a personal interest in exploring the phenomenon in question (Osborne, 1990). Therefore, the experiences of the women in this study may vary from other women who did not meet the criteria mentioned above. Further research using random sampling and larger sample sizes may be useful in supporting the results in the current study, and expanding our knowledge of midlife women's experiences of mother loss.

New findings in this study suggest several areas for future research. First, the women reported that the losses they experienced subsequent to the death of their mothers, that is, secondary losses, were realized and gradually understood. Future research, perhaps with longitudinal designs, would help to identify the process adult daughters may go through as they become aware of all the losses that accompany their mothers' death. In addition, understanding these losses may also shine light on the ways in which mother loss is related to developmental and social issues in the lives of midlife daughters.

Second, the adult daughters in this study lamented the loss of the relationships they could be having with their mothers today. Future research exploring what adult daughters are missing in not having their mothers in their lives, and the nature and prevalence of surrogate mother relationships, would help to identify some of the relationship needs of women in midlife.

Third, although some of the literature that considered the impact of "parental" death on "adult" children (e.g., Scharlach and Fredriksen, 1993), found that adult children experience shifts in their roles and responsibilities, the findings in this study suggest that some of the women stepped into their mothers' roles as a

means of coping with their mothers' death. More research is required in order to understand the different coping strategies that women in midlife use to deal with the death of their mothers.

Fourth, some of the women in this study considered the legacies left by their mothers and what their own legacies would be subsequent to their own death. Research comparing the experiences of women without children to women with children would help to elucidate if there are differences in the experiences of and meanings created by women with children versus women without children.

Fifth, the women in this study who were born in Britain reported experiencing a loss of their connection to Britain. This finding suggests that women who are immigrants to Canada, and whose mothers remain in their countries of origin, may be confronted with additional personal losses subsequent to the death of their mothers. Future research focussing on women who are immigrants to Canada would help to identify unique issues these women may face subsequent to the death of their mothers.

Sixth, several published articles (e.g., Moss et al. 1993; Scharlach & Fredriksen, 1993) found that adult children reported a heightened sense of their own mortality subsequent to the death of their parent. Research comparing daughters' with sons' increased sense of their own mortality subsequent to the death of their mothers, their fathers, or both parents would help to determine whether there are gender differences, and whether the issue of mortality is different depending on the gender of the parent.

Seventh, as adult mother-daughter relationships change over time and improve during adulthood (Barnett et al., 1991; Baruch & Barnett, 1983; Bromberg, 1983), studies that compare the experiences of adult women at various ages throughout adulthood, who have experienced their mothers death, would help to identify whether there are qualitatively different aspects of this experience for women of different ages.

Eighth, for the women in this study, the quality and nature of their mother-daughter relationships varied. Some daughters perceived their relationships as

close, while others described their relationships as “distant.” However, all of the women were in contact with their mothers prior to their mothers’ death. Further research that explores how women in midlife who were estranged from their mothers experience their mothers’ death would help to identify the relationship between mother-daughter dynamics and daughters’ experience of their mothers’ death.

Differences and similarities between this research and the literature on “adult” children’s reactions to “parental” death suggest that more research separating the experiences of daughters from sons, and separating mother death from father death would further help to illuminate the unique experiences of daughters and sons, as well as their commonalities.

Implications for Counselling

In this section, I will attempt to outline several implications for counselling based on the seven themes that emerged from this study. The women in this study experienced a multitude of losses subsequent to their mothers’ death. Many daughters described a sense of disbelief that their mothers’ had died, and felt that a period of numbness inhibited them from fully realizing the full impact of their mothers’ death. This is very much in keeping with Rando (1993) and others who talked about the role of denial or numbing in helping the psyche cope with the loss. Counsellors would benefit from knowing that the breadth and depth of these losses may be realized slowly, over a period of time. As many of these daughters discussed their experiences of feeling abandoned, and the loss of unconditional love, companionship, and their connection to their childhood homes, it is important that counsellors be aware of women’s support networks. Women who have experienced the death of their mothers may need to reconnect with friends and family in order to reestablish their sense of stability and identity. This may be particularly salient for counsellors working with women who were born in other countries, who perceive their mothers as their main connection to their birth places. As many daughters also commented on how they will “always miss their mothers,” counsellors working with women in midlife who have experienced the death of

their mothers, might help these women to understand that dealing with the death of a mother is a life-long process.

Many of these daughters expressed feeling regretful due to the circumstances of their mothers' lives and/or due to their relationships with their mothers. Several daughters in the current study reported viewing their mothers' lives as restrictive due to the social expectations placed on women of their generation. Women clients may find it helpful to explore with counsellors the gender role expectations of women in our culture (e.g., being nurturing, self sacrificing, family focussed, etc.) and how these expectations influenced their mothers' and their own lives. Several daughters in the current study also discussed their remorse concerning their perceptions of missed opportunities to share with their mothers in more significant ways (e.g., "knowing" their mothers in a deeper sense, expressing their appreciation, etc.). As counsellors, it is important to understand that women in midlife may experience feelings of regret subsequent to their mothers' death. These women may need help coming to terms with their perceptions of having missed opportunities to reach out to their mothers prior to their death. This may be a particularly important consideration for women in midlife whose mothers' death are imminent. In anticipation of their mothers' death, daughters in midlife may choose to consider exploring their mother-daughter relationships in order to identify any need to make changes in their roles as daughters, or to open doors for new possibilities.

Many of the daughters in the current study discussed their need to come to terms with their mothers' death. Through considering the circumstances of their mothers' recent lives, these daughters sought to find meaning in the timing and nature of their mothers' death. Counsellors working with women in midlife who have experienced their mothers' death may benefit from understanding their clients' needs to make sense of the ending of their mothers' lives. By helping women to review the pre-death circumstances of their mothers' lives, counsellors can assist women with reconciling their mothers' death. In addition, it may be helpful for counsellors to be aware that difficulties experienced by daughters who struggle with

coming to terms with their mothers' death may be felt in other areas of their lives. For example, one daughter in this study found herself questioning her faith in a just and fair God when she struggled with understanding the "fairness" of her mother's death at that particular time.

The daughters in this study discussed their reassessment of their relationships with their mothers. For many women, this meant reconsidering their involvement in their mothers' lives. These daughters looked for reassurance that they had, indeed, been "good" daughters. This review may be very difficult for daughters who question their contribution to their mother-daughter relationships. It may be useful for counsellors working with women engaging in this process to help these women expand their perceptions of what constitutes their definitions of the "good" daughter, and to consider factors that may have hindered them from attaining their idealized conception of the "good" daughter. Other daughters in this study struggled with reconciling their new perceptions of their mothers. Seeing their mothers as women who, like themselves, were trying to do their best, helped some daughters to feel a new sense of compassion for their mothers. With this new understanding came an ability to forgive their mothers for perceived injustices. However, with this feeling of forgiveness came a profound sense of loss; that is, forgiveness came after death, when there was no time left for reconciliation. Counsellors working with women struggling with understanding their mother-daughter relationships in light of these new feelings of forgiveness, could help women to understand that perhaps forgiveness is a gift of their mothers' death. They could help these women understand that perhaps forgiveness can only be attained after death due to the dynamics of their mother-daughter relationships.

Many of the daughters in this study described shifts in their relationships and roles with family members. For counsellors working with women in midlife who have recently experienced their mothers' death, it is important to note that daughters may feel that it is their responsibility to take over their mothers' roles within the family. As indicated in this study, subsequent to their mothers' death, women in midlife may be grappling with many issues (e.g., loss, regret, etc.).

Thus, the additional perceived pressure of needing to fill their mothers' roles may be experienced by female clients as overwhelming and unmanageable. Counsellors could help their clients develop and maintain boundaries concerning which roles, and what degree of responsibility, they can realistically assume. Counsellors could also help to normalize this experience by validating women's perceived need to take on their mothers' responsibilities after their death. It may be helpful for counsellors to know that, for many women, filling their mothers' shoes may be a way in which daughters can initially cope with the impact of their mothers' death. Counsellors may also benefit from understanding that some women are confronted with a host of conflicting emotions concerning their mothers' death and their subsequent role and responsibility changes. For example, in this study women whose mothers' death resulted in relief from caregiving duties, experienced a new sense of freedom accompanied by feelings of guilt. These feelings of guilt may need to be addressed and worked through.

For the women in this study, the death of their mothers served as the catalyst that prompted a reassessment of the meaning in their lives. This reassessment resulted in a reconsideration of their values and priorities. Counsellors who work with women in midlife who have experienced their mothers' death should understand that their clients may need support through this process of self exploration, a process that may be perceived as challenging, frightening, and unsettling.

The women in this study discussed the ways in which they continued to experience their mothers' presence in their lives. By remaining connected to their mothers through their spiritual beliefs, by embodying their mothers' valued characteristics, by developing relationships with surrogate mothers, and by holding onto physical symbols of their mothers, these daughters found solace in the enduring non-physical presence of their mothers. For counsellors and their clients who have experienced the death of their mothers, it may be helpful to know that other daughters have found solace by creating ways to remain connected to their mothers. The manner in which a daughter may choose to connect with her

deceased mother is idiosyncratic; however it may be helpful to know the different ways in which other daughters have been comforted subsequent to the death of their mothers. It might be helpful for counsellors working with women who have experienced their mothers' death to assist clients to develop ways of creating and maintaining their connections to their mothers.

Finally, as the majority of the women who participated in this study believed that they did not have ample opportunities to discuss how they have been impacted by their mothers' death, it would be helpful for counsellors to be aware that their offices may be one of the few places women in midlife have to discuss, lament, and process the loss of their mothers.

In conclusion, it would appear that a mother's death impacts her midlife daughter in many ways. The women in this study described experiences of love, loss, regret, shifting roles, changing priorities, and enduring ties to their mothers after death. Furthermore they stated that they were glad for the opportunity to discuss their mothers' lives, their mothers' death, their mother-daughter relationships, and their experience of how their mothers' death had impacted their lives. These women described the experience of being part of this study as "therapeutic," "comforting" and "helpful." Many said they felt they learned more about their individual experiences and were reassured to know that other women shared similar experiences. Several women expressed their desire to keep the themes so that they could reread them, share them with their own children, and share them with friends who had experienced the death of their own mothers. These women believed that they benefited from talking about their experiences which suggests that this may be a salient issue for counsellors working with women in midlife.

REFERENCES

Allen, K. R., & Baber, K. M. (1992). Ethical and epistemological tensions in applying a post modern perspective to feminist research. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 16, 1-15.

Altschul, S., & Beiser, H. (1984). The effect of early parent loss on future parenthood. In R. S. Cohen, B. J. Cohler, & S. H. Weissman (Eds.), Parenthood: A psychodynamic perspective (pp. 173-182). New York: Guilford Press.

Apter, T. (1996). Paths of development in midlife women. Feminism & Psychology, 6(4), 557-562.

Barnett, R. C., Kibria, N., Baruch, G. K., & Pleck, J. H. (1991). Adult daughter-parent relationships and their associations with daughters' subjective well-being and psychological distress. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 53, 29-42.

Baruch, G., & Barnett, R. C. (1983). Adult daughters' relationships with their mothers. Journal of Marriage & the Family, 45(3), 601-606.

Berlinsky, E. B., & Biller, H. B. (1982). Parental death and psychological development. Toronto: Lexington Books.

Bifulco, A. T. Brown, G. W., & Harris, T. O. (1987). Childhood loss of parent, lack of adequate parental care and adult depression: A replication. Journal of Affective Disorders, 12(2), 115-128.

Bifulco, A., Harris, T., & Brown, G. W. (1992). Mourning or early inadequate care? Reexamining the relationship of maternal loss in childhood with adult depression and anxiety. Development & Psychopathology, 4(3), 433-449.

Birtchnell, J. (1980). Women whose mothers died in childhood: An outcome study. Psychological Medicine, 10(4), 699-713.

Bolen, J. S. (1984). Goddesses in every woman: A new psychology of women. Toronto: Fitzhenry & Whiteside.

Boyd, C. J. (1989). Mothers and daughters: A discussion of theory and research. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 51, 291-301.

Brody, E. M. (1981). "Women in the middle" and family help to older people. Gerontologist, 21, 471-485.

Brody, E. M. (1986). Filial care of elderly and changing roles of women (and men). Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry, 19(2), 175-201.

Bromberg, E. M. (1983). Mother-daughter relationships in later life: The effect of quality of relationship upon mutual aid. Journal of Gerontological Social Work, 6(1), 75-92.

Chodorow, N. (1978). The reproduction of mothering: Psychoanalysis and the sociology of gender. London: University of California.

Chodorow, N. J. (1989). Family structure and feminine personality. In N. J. Chodorow (Ed.). Feminism and psychoanalytic theory (pp. 45-65). New Haven: Yale University Press.

Chodorow, N. J. (1996). Theoretical gender and clinical gender: Epistemological reflections on the psychology of women. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 44(suppl.), 215-138.

Colaizzi, P. F. (1978). Psychological research as the phenomenologist views it. In R. S. Valle, and M. King (Eds.). Existential-phenomenological alternatives for psychology (pp. 48-71). New York: Oxford Press.

Craik, D. M. M. (1980). Young and old. In E. M. Beck (Ed.). Bartlett's familiar quotations: A collection of passages, phrases and proverbs traced to their sources in ancient and modern literature, 15th Ed, (pp. 597). Toronto: Little, Brown & Company.

Crawford, L. M., Bond, J. B., & Balshaw, R. F. (1994). Factors affecting sons' and daughters' caregiving to older parents. Canadian Journal of Aging/ La Revue Canadienne du Vieillissement, 13(4), 454-469.

Davison, G. C., Neale, J. M. (1994). Abnormal psychology (6th ed.). Toronto: John Wiley & Sons.

Dinnerstein, D. (1976). The mermaid and the minotaur: Sexual arrangements and human malaise. New York: Harper Perennial.

Douglas, J. D. (1990). Patterns of change following parent death in midlife adults. Omega: Journal of Death and Dying 22(2), 123-137.

Edelman, H. (1994). Motherless daughters: The legacy of loss. Don Mills, Ont.: Addison-Wesley.

Edelman, H. (1995). Letters from motherless daughters: Words of courage, grief, and healing. Don Mills, Ont.: Addison-Wesley.

Eichenbaum, L., & Orbach, S. (1983). Understanding women: A psychoanalytic approach. New York: Basic Books.

Freud, S. (1964). Femininity. New Introductory Lectures. In XXII Standard edition of the complete psychological works of Sigmund Freud (1932-1936). (pg. 112-135). London: Hogarth Press.

Friday, N. (1978). My mother my self: The daughter's search for identity. New York: Dell Publishing.

Gall, M. D., Borg, W. R., & Gall, J. P. (1996). Educational research: An introduction (6th. ed.). New York: Longman.

Gergen, M. M. (1990). Finished at 40: Women's development within the patriarchy. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 14, 471-493.

- Gergen, M. M. (1988). Building a feminist methodology. Contemporary Social Psychology, 13(2), 47-53.
- Gilligan, C. (1982). In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Green, C. P. (1991). Clinical considerations: Midlife daughters and their aging parents. Journal of Gerontological Nursing, 17(11), 6-12.
- Hatter, B. S. (1996). Children and the death of a parent or grandparent. In C. A. Corr and D. M. Corr (Eds.). Handbook of childhood death and bereavement (pp. 131-148). New York: Springer Publishing Company.
- Hegi, U. (1995). Salt dancers. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Henwood, K. L., & Pidgeon, N. F. (1992). Qualitative research and psychological theorizing. British Journal of Psychology, 83, 97-111.
- Henwood, K. L. (1993). Women and later life: The discursive construction of identities within family relationships. Special issue: Discourse, institutions, and the elderly. Journal of Aging Studies, 7(3), 303-319.
- Jacobson, J. M. (1995) Midlife women contemporary issues. Boston: Jones and Bartlett.
- Jordan, J.V. (1991). Empathy and the mother-daughter relationship. In J. V. Jordan, A. G. Kaplan, J. B. Miller, I. P. Stiver, & J. L. Surrey (Eds.). Women's growth in connection: Writings from the stone centre (pp. 28-34). New York: Guilford Press.
- Jung, C. G. (1959). The archetypes and the collective unconscious. Vol 9 Part I. In The Collected Works of C. G. Jung (pp. 188). Princeton University Press: Princeton.
- Kalish, R. A. (1985). Death and survivorship: The final transition. In R. A. Kalish (Ed.), The final transition (pp. 75-86). New York: Baywood Publishing Company.
- Klapper, J., Moss, S., Moss, M., & Rubinstein, R. (1994). The social context of grief among adult daughters who have lost a parent. Journal of Aging Studies, 8(1), 29-43.
- Lang, A. M., & Brody, E. M. (1983). Characteristics of middle-aged daughters and help to their elderly mothers. Journal of Marriage and the Family, 45(1), 193-202.
- Levitt, M. J., Guacci, N., & Weber, R. A. (1992). Intergenerational support, relationship quality, and well-being. Journal of Family Issues, 13(4), 465-481.
- Mahler, M. S., Pine, F., & Bergman, A. (1975). The psychological birth of the human infant: Symbiosis and individuation. New York: Basic Books.

Marton, F. (1988). Phenomenography: A research approach to investigating different understandings of reality. In R. R. Sherman, & R. B. Webb (Eds.). Qualitative research in education focus and methods (pp. 141-161), New York: Falmer Press.

Miller J. B. (1986). Towards a new psychology of women (2nd ed.). Boston: Beacon Press.

Miller, J. B. (1991). The development of women's sense of self. In J. V. Jordan, A. G. Kaplan, J. B. Miller, I. P. Stiver, & J. L. Surrey (Eds.). Women's growth in connection: Writings from the stone centre (pp. 11-26). New York: Guilford Press.

Miller, A G. (1995). A typology of mother-daughter relationships patterns for young adult women and their mothers. Issues in Mental Health Nursing, 16(4), 377-394.

Moss, M. S., & Moss, S. Z. (1983). The impact of parental death on middle aged children. Omega: Journal of Death & Dying, 14(1), 65-75.

Moss, M. S., Moss, S. Z., Rubinstein, R., & Resch, N. (1993). Impact of elderly mother's death on middle age daughters. International Journal of Aging & Human Development, 37(1), 1-22.

Myers, E. (1986). When parents die: A guide for adults. New York: Penguin.

Neugarten, B. L. (1964). Summary and implications. In B. L. Neugarten (Ed.). Personality in middle and late life: Empirical studies (pp. 188-200). New York: Atherton Press.

Osborne, J. W. (1990). Some similarities and differences among phenomenological and other methods of psychological qualitative research. Canadian Psychology/Psychologie Canadienne, 35(2), 167-189.

Parker, G. & Manicavasagar, V. (1986). Childhood bereavement circumstance associated with adult depression. British Journal of Medical Psychology, 59(4), 387-391.

Parkes, C. M. (1985). Bereavement. British Journal of Psychiatry, 146, 11-17.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.). Newbury Park: Sage.

Pill, C. J., & Zabin, J. L. (1997). Lifelong legacy of early maternal loss: A women's group. Clinical Social Work Journal, 25(2), 179-195.

Poth, D. (1994). The goddess speaks: Myths and meditations. Portland: Sibyl.

Pressman, E., Lipper, K., & Clark-Hall, S. (Producers), & Rickman, A. (Director). (1998). The Winter Guest (Film). Toronto: A Fine Line.

- Rainieri, N., & Lester, D. (1997). Parental loss, depression, and suicidality. Psychological Reports, 80, 378.
- Rando, T. A. (1984). Grief, dying, and death: Clinical interventions for caregivers. Champaign: Research Press.
- Rando, T. A. (1988). How to go on living when someone you love dies. New York: Bantam.
- Rando, T. A. (1993). Treatment of complicated mourning. Champaign, Illinois: Research Press.
- Raphael, B. (1983). The anatomy of bereavement. New York: Basic Books.
- Rich, A. (1995). Of women born: Motherhood as experience and institution. New York: W.W Norton.
- Rigor, S. (1992). Epistemological debates, feminist voices: Science, social values, and the study of women. American Psychologist, 47(6), 730-740.
- Robbins, M. A. (1990). Mourning the myth of mother/hood: Reclaiming our mothers' legacies. Special Issue: Motherhood: A feminist perspective. Women & Therapy, 10(1-2), 41-59.
- Rosen, H., & Zickler, E. (1996). Feminist psychoanalytic theory: American and French reactions to Freud. Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association, 44(suppl.), 71-92.
- Rubin, L. B. (1979). Women of a certain age: The midlife search for self. New York: Harper & Row.
- Rubin, L. B. (1983). Intimate strangers: Men and women together. New York: Harper & Row.
- Rybash, J. M., Roodin, P. A., & Santrock, J. W. (1991). Adult development and aging (2nd ed.). Dubuque, IA: Wm. C. Brown.
- Scharlach, A. E., & Fredriksen, K. I. (1993). Reactions to the death of a parent during midlife. Omega: Journal of Death & Dying, 27(4), 307-319.
- Solsberry, V. (1984). Adults' reaction to bereavement. In M. Osterweiss, F. Solomon & M. Green (Eds.). Bereavement: Reactions, consequences, and care (pp. 47 - 70). Washington, DC: National Academy Press.
- Statistics Canada, (1998). Annual Demographic Statistics 1997. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- Stevens-Long, J., & Commons, M. L. (1992). Adult life: Developmental processes (4th ed.). Mountain View, CA: Mayfield Publishing.

Surrey, J. L. (1991). The relational self in women: clinical implications. In J. V. Jordan, A. G. Kaplan, J. B. Miller, I. P. Stiver, & J. L. Surrey (Eds.), Women's growth in connection: Writings from the stone centre (pp. 35-43). New York: Guilford Press.

Umberson, D., & Chen, M. D. (1994). Effects of a parent's death on adult children: Relationship salience and reaction to loss. American Sociological Review, *59*(1), 152-168.

Van Manen, M. (1994). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. London, Canada: Althouse.

Viorst, J. (1986). Necessary losses: The loves, illusions, dependencies and impossible expectations that all of us have to give up in order to grow. New York: Facett.

Walker, A. J., & Thompson, L. (1983). Intimacy and intergenerational aid and contact among mothers and daughters. Journal of Marriage and the Family, *45*(4), 841-849.

Walker, A. J., & Allen, K. R. (1991). Relationships between caregiving daughters and their elderly mothers. The Gerontologist, *31*(3), 389-396.

Walker, A. J., Martin, S. S. K., & Jones, L. L. (1992). The benefits and costs of care giving and care receiving for daughters and mothers. Journal of Gerontology, *47*(3), S130-S139.

Whitbeck, L. B., Simons, R. L., & Conger, R. D. (1991). The effects of early family relationships on contemporary relationships and assistance patterns between adult children and their parents. Journal of Gerontology, *46*(6), S330-337.

Worell, J., & Etaugh, C. (1994). Transforming theory and research with women: Themes and variations. Psychology of Women Quarterly, *18*, 443-450.

Zall, D. S. (1994). The long term effects of childhood bereavement: Impact on roles as mothers. Omega: Journal of death and dying, *29*(3), 219-230.

APPENDIX C

Orienting Statement

The following statement will be read by the researcher to all participants at the beginning of the first interview.

I am interested in learning about your experience of the death of your mother. I will be asking you to describe your experience of your mother's death and how you understand and make meaning of her death. This research is designed to explore how women in midlife experience their mothers' death as there is very little research available on this topic. The main question I am asking you is: **What was it like for you to experience your mother's death and what meaning does her death have for you today?**

Please feel free to take the time you need to reflect on and answer this question. You may wish to talk about your experience like a story, with a beginning - a middle - and an end

During the interview I may ask you for more information or clarification about something you have said in order to ensure that I understand your experience. It is important that you understand that you are in no way obligated to answer or discuss anything with which you are not comfortable.

I am interested in understanding your experience of your mother's death and your response to her death. This could involve a wide range of feelings and behaviours and there is no "correct" answer.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

APPENDIX D**Interview Questions****General Research Question**

What is the meaning and experience for midlife women of the recent death of their mothers?

Probes

1. How did it happen that...?
2. How did you feel about...?
3. Please tell me more about...?
4. You mentioned_____. Could you please say more about that?
5. What do you mean by_____?
6. What did this relationship mean to you?
7. Is there anything more you would like to add about that?

Backup Questions

1. Is there a metaphor that describes how you experienced your mother's death?
2. How would you describe your life now that your mother is no longer alive?
3. Has your perspective of death changed since your mother's death?
4. Has your experience of your mother's death changed:
 - your understanding of your mother?
 - your understanding of yourself?
 - your relationship with your mother?
5. Is there anything else that you feel you would like to add that we have not yet addressed?

APPENDIX E**Letter - Validation Interviews**

Dear :

RE: Validation Interviews for Thesis:

What is the Experience and Meaning for Women in Midlife
of the Recent Death of Their Mothers

Well, the time has finally arrived. This package contains the outcome of the past several months of analyzing the interviews we did together last fall. Since I last saw you, I have completed all of the interviews - nine in total. Once the audio tapes were transcribed, I then began the process of drawing out the common feelings and perceptions expressed by each of you regarding your experiences of living with the loss of your mothers.

I have written seven themes that I believe are representative of the experiences each of you described. I would like you to consider whether these themes are truly representative of your individual experience of the death of your mother. You may not agree with every aspect of every theme. The important thing is whether the theme, in some way, is consistent with your experience. When you have had a chance to look over the themes, I would like to meet with you for a final interview to share your thoughts about these findings, and to be certain that the information in your bio is accurate and that you are comfortable with it. The most important part for me as a researcher is that I accurately represent your experience and the experiences of the other women, in the writing of this thesis. As such, your feedback is an important part of the research process.

I will contact you within the next couple of weeks to arrange a time that is convenient for you to meet with me for an hour or so. You are also welcome to contact me. My phone number and email address are at the top of this page.

I look forward to talking with you soon.

Thank you very much for your continuing participation.