FEMALE ADOLESCENTS AND PERCEPTIONS OF DEATH

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The purpose of this research design is to explore the meaning of death for the female adolescent. A qualitative design was used as the method of research. Twelve participants were selected from a snowball sample ten females and two males. Four participants reported witnessing the death of an individual, five reported a moderated death experience in which they were not present but were told after the fact and three reported no significant experience with death. The study indicated relationships and cause of death as among the pre-conditions towards meaning development for the adolescent female. The two main themes derived from the pre-conditions are an understanding of the inevitability of death for themselves and the experience of death as qualia. Consequences to the experience of death include increased emotional tolerance under stress and a perceived increased maturity suggesting resilience in the adolescent female following a loss. Future areas of research are also addressed.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

Research regarding adolescents and the experience of death are varied. Multiple studies differ on the statistics regarding how often the average teenager is exposed to death. Corr and Balk (1996), reported various findings suggesting 90% of high school juniors and seniors had experienced the death of a loved one. Another study mentioned by Corr and Balk (1996), reported of college students studied, the average of their most recent loss was 19.6. The adolescent age is unique in that they are old enough to experience the loss of a peer, younger and older generations and possibly even the loss of a child. Adolescence is the first time period during the human life span that this possibility is an option.

Depending on the circumstances surrounding the death, the adolescent faces potential for difficulty in adolescent development as a result of experiencing death. Consider the possible effect of an adolescent seeking greater independence from parental ties who suddenly suffers the loss of a parent. Similarly, if the adolescent seeking to increase social bonds loses a peer the repercussions might have lasting effects.

Adolescent grief responses have the potential to conform to prescribed social norms. Yet, due to their differences in development, adolescent responses do not mimic that of adults perfectly. The outcomes may vary for the adolescent who has experienced a death versus the adolescent who actually witnesses a death. Also, a matter for concern is what effect the absence of death experience has on the inexperienced teenager. Although there may be varying research on specific dynamics of adolescents and death, there is little to compare and contrast the similarities and differences
between the varied death experiences for the adolescent, and minimal research with regard to meaning development specifically geared toward females.

Potential consequences resulting from the adolescent experiencing death are complicated grief (Nader & Salloum, 2011), prolonged grief (Spuij, et al., 2012) and depression (Dillen, Fontaine, & Verhofstadt-Deneve, 2009). Important research includes determining the similarities in death experiences and the qualitative meaning of death for the bereaved adolescent. Therefore, this research is important and significant due to the potential consequences for the adolescent female experiencing a death.

**Statement of Problem**

The problem posed is the dilemma of meaning making for the adolescent female facing loss. What are the preconditions for the development of their perceptions of loss and what are the consequences to the meanings derived from such experiences? The meaning of death during adolescents is a particular problem due to the nature of the social roles prescribed to the adolescent and the multiple influences on perception that drive the female adolescent to conceptualize the loss in various potential ways. If one does not attempt to fully assess these thoughts then there is less aptitude to support the grief of the teenage girl who faces such an experience.

**Research Questions**

The primary question of the research is to determine the meaning of death through the eyes of the adolescent female. What does death mean for them? What influences this meaning? Is how a person dies important to the development of meaning? What are the consequences for the adolescent girl experiencing death? Are
there physical, emotional, psycho/social changes in how the teenager views life and their interactions with others a result of the experience of loss?

This writing will first work to review two critical works related to the sociology of death and dying. Then an evaluation of literature to review of current and previous information regarding adolescent development, death, and the development of a life meaning in the adolescent will be presented. The methodology of the research will be reviewed followed by the results, a discussion of the results and areas for future research.

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this research is to explore the differences in the experience of death and the effect of such experiences on the development of a meaning of life by the adolescent female.

Research Method

The chosen method for this research is an in-depth qualitative grounded theory research design. The qualitative analysis is used to increase the contextual analysis and allow for improved examination of language utilized by the adolescent group. Grounded Theory is the selected form of qualitative analysis to structure the theoretical framework and allow for participant’s voices to be heard. Grounded theory allows for the researcher to enter into the study with a blank slate open to the exploration of what the participant’s experience
Organization of Thesis

The organization of the following research will begin with a review of literature. Chapter three will explore the methods used in the design of research. Chapter four will be a review of the results found throughout the study. Chapter five will be used to develop a theoretical framework. Chapter six will summarize the work presented throughout, as well as offer potential areas for future research and policy implications.

Summary

The need to explore adolescent females and their experience with death and grief is significant. The hope is to shed new light on this particular experience through the eyes of the adolescent female themselves. The desire is to utilize qualitative methods of research to formulate a theoretical framework of what it means to the adolescent to experience loss. The goal is not to generalize the experience for all teenagers but to provide a voice to teenagers like those interviewed in order to better understand how sociologists can better address the adolescent female in grief.
This chapter reports current research with regard to adolescents and their experiences with death. The chapter begins with a review of two signature works “A Social History of Death and Dying” by Allan Kellehear and Clive Seale’s “Constructing Death,” followed by studies on adolescent’s response to death. The review will then present four themes of adolescent bereavement.

In Kellehear’s (2007) *A Social History of Death and Dying*, the author provides a social overview of the history of death and dying, marking a distinction between challenges that society has faced with regards to death. The first challenge of death identified by Kellehear is the anticipation of death. According to Kellehear during the stone age, awareness at the time of death was minimal. Due to the drastically high rate of deaths related to accident and trauma, little time was available for anticipatory preparation. Kellehear (2007) argues the following:

> Death motivates and activates people like little else, because historically biological death has been viewed as no death at all, but rather, the most complicated and challenging part of living.

We develop defense responses to the anticipation of death and wanting to predict our own death and the death of others. Society’s desire is to find ways to prevent death and identify risks that encourage death.

Kellehear (2007) identifies the second challenge of death as the development and preparation of death which occurs more during the middle ages. Once the need to anticipate death has been determined, society attempts to prepare for the inevitable by developing a concept of the “good death.”
Good deaths are found to be those where preparation was conducted, or those where the moral or noble death was chosen. Also, as part of the good death, an acceptance of an inevitable was expected. This acceptance was usually as a result of affirmation of death being a result of “God’s Will” (Becker, 2003). In the second challenge of preparing for death, we identify the need to “trim away” those things that are not needed, as well as indicating the new roles of those we leave behind.

The third challenge Kellehear (2007) identifies is the taming of death. In doing so, there is a more peacefully accepted and pain-free death. The evolutions of religion as a spiritual method of acceptance of death, along with the development of medicine were both ways in which society sought to tame death. Yet, while there were considerable efforts made to tame death, protests to this agenda still evolve and exist - poverty, contagious diseases, minimal healthcare to certain areas, and protests to the social norm (such as suicides).

The challenge that faces today’s society most is identified as the challenge of timing death. Kellehear explains how the nursing units on hospitals and family members identify a person as dying and then begin the preparations for death. Once everything is prepared, then a “waiting period begins.” Kellehear brings into question various aspects of timing death critically, such as the evaluation of those members of society who are presumed to have lived “past their time.” The timing of harvesting donor organs is also more ideal with premature deaths rather than later in life deaths.

Kellehear (2007) identifies the consequence of all of these historical aspects is a disassociation of the society with the dying. “Deaths” occur socially, he clarifies, but “dying” does not.
Dying as a shared set of overt social exchanges between dying individuals and those who care for them is increasingly unrecognized in institutional settings outside hospital or health service settings in both global or domestic contexts.

Although the work of Kellehear is not all encompassing it does allow for a firm foundation with which to begin understanding the role of death in society. By identifying the challenge of anticipating death, preparation of death, taming death and timing death, the researcher is more capable of analyzing the history of these challenges as they effect the adolescent’s current role in society.

Clive Seale’s (1998) work, *Constructing Death*, is also an influential work when considering the sociology of death in today’s society. Rather than produce an anthropological history of death and society, Seale choses to focus on the present trends of the social phenomenon of death and bereavement.

Part I of Seale’s work proposes, rather than a denial of death, that society as a whole has actually evolved to the point where death results in minimal disruption to social order, unless the person is “fully engaged in core activities” (p. 70). Denial of death is actually more accepted at the psychological level of thought as a method of defense and to encourage more productive survival. Symbolic routes towards immortality are discussed as well as mortuary rituals.

Part II of *Constructing Death* reviews various cultural scripts and their various influences, such as the media and medical professionals. This section also allows for a clearer understanding of media’s role in the perception of death and bereavement. The trend towards more patient-centered medical care is also a focus of this section, including the active involvement of patients in their own end of life decisions.

Part III concludes that as societies views shift toward more active acceptance of death, they are also able to equip for their own end of life. In turn, this acceptance
increases self-identity and emotional accompaniment during death for those in the immediate support network. The author discusses various methods which members of society take as an active approach to making the dying experience an opportunity for personal growth.

By briefly reviewing two major works in the area of the history of death and dying, along with a more modern analysis of the sociology of death and dying, it is easier to develop a framework to analyze the effects of such concepts on the adolescent, such as the denial of death as a catalyst for survival and the adolescent acceptance of death towards a heightened self-identity. The next section reviews the various themes pertinent to the study of adolescents and death.

**Themes of Work**

Four dialectical themes have emerged from previous works regarding the adolescent experience of death. The four themes identified are the biological, cognitive, social and an affective theme. The biological theme is concerned about the vitality of the adolescent during these years when death is the lowest statistical possibility of any age group. The cognitive dialect involves the period of rational decision-making and the capacity for those decisions to either bring about or detour death.

The third theme is that of the social dialectic. The fear of being socially isolated or isolated from the relationships that the adolescent holds dear are imperative concerns as well as the need for increased social support during this age. “Interactions with other people, especially if the experiences tend to be relatively favorable are one of the clearest indications of being alive.”
The fourth and final dialectic identified is the affective dialect and the effect of death on the formation of identity. (Noppe & Noppe, 1991). For the purpose of this writing we have combined the cognitive and affective themes to review together.

Age and Death

Older adolescents are viewed more capable to mourn and express empathy more successfully than the younger adolescent. The adolescent views him or herself as more mature than other peers who have not underwent the same degree of death experience. Yet, due to the assumed resiliency of adolescent years, if the adolescent experiences death during this time period, there is the possibility of increased apathy towards other life events. “Why bother?” attitudes and an increased sense of vulnerability may develop. (Podell, 1989). Another study suggests that the number of exit life events (those events involving permanent separation or loss), not the age of the individual, were found to increase the potential for depression in Young Adolescents (Meyer, et al., 1993).

One text cites that based on previous research, adolescent understanding of death is based on experience, rather than age or intelligence.(Kamerman J. B., 1988). An experienced five year old could understand the finality of death, whereas a nine year old with less experience is unable to comprehend the same concept. Previous research also suggests that there is ambiguity regarding fear of death related to age (Daaleman & Dobbs, 2010). Of those adolescents studied in 1991, Oltjenbruns found 74% reported a deeper understanding of life as a result of their experience with grief (Oltjenbruns,
1991). This study also identified that 96% of the 89 subjects studied report at least one positive outcome from the experience of bereavement.

The physical changes that age brings about in adolescent females can sometimes affect the grieving process, due to the increased hormonal changes during this biological period, resulting in greater emotional expression. The study also suggests that in order to assist the adolescent through the grieving process, one should “promote honest communication, provide factual information and facilitate discussion about feelings and concerns” (Oltejenbruns, 1991). The cognitive development that is egocentric in nature predisposes adolescents to consider their grief to be unique (Oswalt, 2010). So attempting to generalize the adolescent response to death is often difficult. The grief response becomes more difficult if the adolescent comes from a history of ambiguous social relationships.

Gender and Death

Gender plays a significant role in the outcome of death anxiety between men and women. Evidence suggests that girls exhibit greater internalization of problems following the death of a parent, while boys exhibit greater behavioral reactions such as driving, smoking, and acts of violence (Dowdney, 2000; Saler & Skolnik, 2006). Studies have also reported that girls may experience positive effects from witnessing death (Sandler et al. 2003). In other words, females may assume parental roles in bereaved families, thereby restructuring family roles allowing females to adopt developmentally appropriate tasks. Research has found that in the loss of a teenage friend to violent death, grief and bereavement can encourage resilience and increased maturity for the teenage girl.
Men may not be as open with their fears, while women may have a greater anxiety due to their often accepted caretaker role of the dying (Russac, Gatlin, Reece, & Spottswood, 2007).

Time Since the Death and Cultural Background

The impact of time elapse since a death on adolescence behavior is complex. According to Dowdney (2000), adolescent response to a death such, as sadness and depression decline over time. However, other mental health problems may increase or persist over time. Studies have reported that time elapsed since the death is not uniquely related to outcomes (Haine et al., 2006; Raveis et al., 1999). Rather, an adolescent’s coping resources following a death determine long-term functioning and outcomes (Felner et al., 1988). Therefore, sociologists can investigate social and community factors that influence adolescents’ reactions, as well as their time-specific behavioral changes.

Very little research has been conducted on cultural differences in adolescents’ bereavement experiences. To date, I do not know of studies that have examined the role of culture in adolescent’s adaptation following a death of a close relative or friend. The few cross-cultural comparisons of death reactions have found similarities and differences between cultures. For example, Schonfield and Smilansky (1989), compared Israeli and American adolescents and found that Israeli adolescents possessed a greater understanding of finality compared to their American counterparts.

Moreover, cultural-bound assumptions have been documented on grief reactions among adults. For instance, in the United States, compared to other countries, grief
reaction literature has focused on individuals, rather than communities; denial of the notion that important attachments may endure following a death; and pathologizing of common grief reactions (Shapiro, 1996). While such assumptions may be prevalent in the dominant American culture, it is important to recognize that racial/ethnic families may not adopt such beliefs. For example, the following are hallmarks of African American death rituals that assist in the grieving process. Intense involvement of a funeral director in preparations for mourning and burial; gathering of friends and family at the home of the deceased to offer support and share in the common grief; and a wake during which music, songs and hymns are played or sung. Additionally, some African Americans hold a service known as a "Home-Going" service with special emphasis on adolescents’ grief.

Hispanic/Hispanic-American populations also have diverse cultural backgrounds including individuals from the Caribbean islands and those who come from Spain, Mexico, and Central and South America. Most notably, common patterns in the aftermath of death are: high involvement of the priest in the funeral plans; family and friends are encouraged to be part of the commemoration; a rosary is said by surviving loved ones, often at the home of the deceased (Ball, 2003). Among some Hispanic groups, the rosary is said each night for nine nights after the death. In some families a rosary is said every month, and annually following the death. It is often repeated on each anniversary (Merz & Consedine, 2012). Funeral services often include a Mass. Loved ones are encouraged to express grief; and to be involved in the procession to the grave (www.GriefSpeaks.com.)
Many Hispanic survivors also commemorate the loss of their loved ones by commitments, which are taken very seriously (Merz & Consedine, 2012). Those who fail to honor them are considered sinners. Additionally, money gifts to help cover the expenses of the funeral and burial are often provided. Studies have shown that death rituals are important in grief reactions (Currier & Neimeyer, 2006; Hardy-Bougere, 2008).

Self-Image and Death Experience:

Wainryb and Recchia (2012) describe the importance of understanding the effect of previous experience and outcomes as the determinant for actions in future similar situations. The self-evaluation of the adolescent’s actions within the context of a situation are also intrinsically linked to the views of themselves. The adolescent develops a pre-occupation with the self-definition and determining the most appropriate beliefs and values for oneself.

Despite ethnic identity, life meaning is found to play a remarkable role in the development of adolescents. (Kiang & Fuligni, 2010). A study conducted on adolescent – sibling bereavement identified increased identity awareness and increased meaning in relationships with others (Batten & Oltjenbruns, 1999).

Effects of Bereavement

Some negative effects of bereavement during the adolescent years are shock, guilt, confusion, fear, loneliness, anger, insomnia, disbelief, sense of hopelessness and others. (Ens & Bond, 2007). Ens and Bond also found that the positive effects of grief include a deeper appreciation for life, greater concern for others, heightened emotional
bonds, better communication skills and increased empathy (Ens & Bond, 2007). The most significant finding of the Ens & Bond research was the lack of differentiation between adolescents who had experienced the death of a family member and those who had no experience with death. Both group shared the same level of death anxiety (Ens & Bond, 2007). Schultz (2007) suggests that during bereavement an adolescent must concurrently deal with the developmental changes of that age which, do not stop for the bereavement process to occur, and that those studied found a deeper appreciation for life.

Religion and Death

Brabant (2010) found in her research that “age” has a correlation with a “moment of death” reality construction. Swanson and Byrd (1998) found a significant positive relationship between extrinsic religiousness and death anxiety in young adolescents. Lazar (2006) later studied the correlation between fear of death and religious motivation, finding a positive correlation between the two.

A study conducted on funeral home directors found that individuals in high death exposure areas who “know who they are” have a sentiment that life is meaningful and purposeful. The study also found that age, coupled with increased spirituality, reduced levels of death anxiety. (Harrawood, 2010).

One very intriguing study conducted by Shu Ching Yang and Shih-Fen Chen on Taiwanese adolescents indicated a correlation between the experience of loss and a greater understanding of death (Yang & Chen, 2009). Belief in God’s will, or a higher purpose, is seen as a theme as well as the ability to relinquish control to a higher power
in a study related to spirituality (Wortmann & Park, 2009). It is imperative that one find positive meaning after a loss, and doing so is necessary for one to help the bereaved increase their capacity for positive affect, in order to encourage meaningful reconstruction. This could become paramount in the adolescent given the developmental level of the adolescent lends to question more life meanings (Boyraz, Horne, & Sayger, 2010).

Limitations of Existing Studies

Overall, the most remarkable limitation of the existing researching is the paucity of research on adolescents (specifically adolescent females) and how they make sense of death; cope with grief and the way in which they lead healthy and fulfilling lives. Moreover the knowledge base is deficient, regarding cultural factors related to adolescents’ response to death; along with sociological factors that might play a role in grief reactions.

Little research has focused on the way that adolescents discover meaning in the death as reflected in how they understood the cause of death, observations at the death moment, understanding of the life of the deceased after the death, the life of the bereaved after the death, and the burial and mourning rituals that follow. The continuing bond the bereaved may feel with the deceased. For example, the deceased appearing in dreams or initiated by the bereaved themselves as their talking with the deceased have been neglected in previous studies. Moreover, few studies have developed a theoretical framework
on adolescent who witness a death. This study fills the void through an in-depth grounded theory approached with adolescents.

Summary

The literature presented here provided a review of two major works in the area of sociology, death, and adolescents. The research presented then provides a review of two major themes of analysis developed from various research – the biological theme and the cognitive theme. The literature reviews also outlines the effects of bereavement on the adolescent as well as the role religion plays in the bereavement process.

The next section of this work will discuss the methods used to construct the research, including data collection, analysis and processes used to fulfill the qualitative design.
CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Purpose of the Field Research

Few studies have focused on adolescents and death, (or more specifically female adolescents) exploring the meaning attached to witnessing a death at an early age. Most studies have used quantitative methods. Although quantitative methods provide extensive analysis, qualitative methods are the most appropriate for this research for multiple reasons. First, this study presents a theoretical framework on adolescent loss. Second, based on grounded theory analysis, it allows study participants voices to be heard. As stated by Saldana, “You’re looking carefully at the small details to get to the bigger picture…it’s defining or essential elements…and their variable qualities.” (Saldana, 2011 - Kindle Edition)

Second, qualitative methods are used because it allows for contextual analysis including language. For example, the teenage population uses phrases that may have a varied meaning, or euphemisms that are not easily comprehensible to the researcher. For instance, it is noted that current phrases among teenagers include phrases such as “turnt up” which means a particular activity is anticipated to be enjoyable or an activity, statement or environment has already proven to be enjoyable or approvable. As in the statement, “This party is turnt up” Therefore, it is imperative to interview the adolescent to more ensure that meanings of words and phrases and interpretation of words and phrases are thoroughly discussed. The understanding that qualitative analysis and more specifically grounded theory is “deeply empirical” allows such meanings to evolve during
the course of observation and interview. The researcher can grasp fully the meaning of words and language more fully with minimal limitations (Clarke, 2007).

Institutional Review:

The Institutional Review process was initiated by applying for review online at the University of North Texas in Denton. Dr. Erma Lawson acting as the supervising instructor reviewed all research proposals prior to submission. The initial review required corrections which included providing two separate Informed Consents, one for adult adolescents and one for child adolescents. The initial review also requested a copy of images that could potentially be used during the interview process. All requested information was provided. Consent from a local high school was obtained for the purposes of recruitment. Although permission was granted to do so actual solicitation using flyers or announcements was never required. After all corrections were made the Institutional Review Board granted permission for the study to proceed per review board guidelines and for duration not to exceed one year.

Procedures

Sample size for this study consisted of 12 total participants. Although two males were interviewed, the recruitment process began to lean more towards the female perspective rather than the male. For the methods section I will report all findings but limit the inclusion of information regarding the males interviewed. Of the 12 participants, 4 have reported an immediate death experience. The second group of 4 participants have reported a mediated death experience of a close relationship (such as family
member, peer or sibling) but without actually witnessing the event. The final 4 participants were chosen based on reporting no significant death experience within the last 7 years if at all. The purpose of this design was multifaceted. On one hand, varied death experiences during the same age allows for more extensive comparative analysis of the effects of such death experiences on the formation of thoughts, regarding and meaning of death for the adolescent. An appendix has been provided to identify the labeling of participants. See Appendix A

All attempts were made to ensure that varied socioeconomic status were represented. When a student would show interest, they were asked a set of preliminary questions such as “How old are you? What is your experience with death? Where are you from?” Their responses were compared to the other groups that were already represented so as to hopefully not outweigh one over the other. Although this attempt was made a deficit was found regarding White Anglo Saxon Protestant students represented in the study. Upon review of those who inquired about the study and those who were declined, only one student fit this criterion was asked to participate but they were unavailable for interview. It must be noted that the study population is primarily minority, considering they are in the majority at the sample location.

Study Inclusion Criteria

No bias regarding study inclusion was preferred in terms of the gender, race or class of the participant. Students who expressed an interest in participating had to fall under one of the three above mentioned categories. Either they had to have witnessed the passing of someone, had a significant loss of someone or had no experience with
death reported. Emphasis was placed not on the socioeconomic background but rather the experience of death that the student had. Meaning, if all those who had witnessed a death are of the same race then it was not because the selection criteria were based on race but rather on experience.

Recruitment

Recruitment began in April (2013) among former students that met the study inclusion criteria. I called previous students who were 19 years old or younger. Of these students, none refused taking part in the study. Study participants used social networking sites to recruit other students. Participants remarked on how positive the experience was and posted comments on social network sites, such as Twitter and Facebook, encouraging others to participate without the consent or knowledge of the researcher. For instance, one female participant who has a vast following on Twitter posted “Mrs. Jackson is working on her master’s she needs to interview teenagers if you know her go find her.” This one statement resulted in approximately 7 student’s participation in the study. Other participants who knew of peers that had experienced a loss encouraged their peers to participate. Two participants were obtained by this method. Friends and co-workers who were known to have children that were teenagers were also solicited as well. Two students were obtained by this method. The researcher’s daughter who is 16 years old was also used as a study participant.

I called or text participants who were recruited, and explained the purpose of the study; all those who were asked agreed. For those participants who had a recent traumatic loss, I spent time to ensure that the student was comfortable discussing the
experience. I explained to all students that participation was voluntary; and that they could withdraw from the study at any time. One particular parent of a 14-year old, who initially volunteered her daughter to participate, withdrew. The mother reported that the teenager had reacted emotionally to the loss of her grandmother, at the age of twelve and she believed discussing death might result in unresolved emotions and be unhealthy. I reassured the parent that the student could withdraw without penalty of any kind.

Important to note is that during the recruitment process of the study, an unfortunate event occurred. The unexpected death of a student by suicide was reported among the sophomore class. As a result, potential participants found to have been significantly affected by this loss were avoided to respectfully allow a time for grieving to occur. Those participants significantly affected by the tragedy who had already requested to be a part of the study and whose parental consent was obtained, but had not yet been interviewed, were re-evaluated to determine whether or not participant and parental consent were still appropriate. This also affected the study group by exposing some students who had not previously experienced a loss to now being categorized as experiencing a death.

The student’s suicide resulted in two participants declining participation. Additionally, this tragedy increased participation. Written memos were taken regarding the reactions of the students and faculty to the incident. The tragedy, although unforeseen and a very unfortunate event, was also an opportunity to witness first-hand the various responses to death by the adolescent population.
In most cases, participants sought the researcher out to participate. Due to some student’s status as a minor, I requested parental contact information when applicable. Initial contact was made via telephone, during which time the purpose of the study was reviewed and any questions the parents had were answered. A request was made to meet the parents for informed consented, but in all cases the parents preferred to have the consent sent home with their child and returned. Verbal consent was obtained for all students via telephone prior to sending participants home with an informed consent. After obtaining informed consent, a time was scheduled to interview the participant. One study was completed in the home of the participant. All others were completed on campus in an empty classroom.

No significant change was noted regarding content. As a matter of fact it was this researchers opinion that the classroom setting was more comfortable for the students due to the already setup social dynamic of teacher/student. When it was offered for the researcher to come to their homes the students became anxious and would often state “that’s kinda weird you coming to my house” or “No that's okay you’re a teacher we can just do it here” The classroom is setup with long desks accommodating 5 to a table. During the interviews, the participant would sit across from the teacher with the recorder in the middle. A sign was placed on the door that stated “interview in progress.” Due to the fact that the participants were minors a door to the office was left open so that others could see in. This is customary practice anytime an adult is alone with a student in a room on campus. Interviews were scheduled when the adjoining teacher was present for tutorials or class. It was the researcher’s observation that the participants felt
most comfortable in this environment and often expressed they experienced less
distraction than they would have at home.

The interview that was conducted at home was conducted in a nice dining area
with adequate light and plenty of space. The participant was frustrated at times due to
the fact that there were small children running around and thus she could not focus like
she wanted on the interview. She finally requested that the mother of the children take
them in the back room and “keep them busy.” She was also pregnant which lead to
some physical discomfort at times from sitting. She often propped her legs up to
become more comfortable. Overall all interviews were conducted in adequate space
and with accommodations made as necessary.

As more students requested to participate a determination had to be made to
select more ideal candidates for the study. Thus students were asked what their current
experience was with loss and if they had experienced any loss between the ages of 14-
19 years of age. Depending on their answers to the above questions it was determined
whether or not there was a need for that participant’s involvement. For example, the
four participants needed for mediated death experience was the first group of
participants to fill up. After the desired number of participants was reached, those
students who only had a mediated death experience were respectfully denied
participation.

Data Collection

Data collection occurred in two stages. First, participants completed a socio-
demographic questionnaire. The questionnaire included basic demographic information
and ethnic background. Second, data was collected using a semi-structured open-ended questionnaire. The questionnaire included eleven questions. An example of the question was, “Have you ever witnessed a death,” “how has your experience with death affected your relationships with your parents, peers” and “tell me how you would explain death to a five year old.” The questionnaire was pretested with an adult and adolescent participant three weeks prior to the study. The question “What do you remember about the death?” was changed to “Think back to that day for a moment and tell me everything that you can remember.”

Prior to collection of data, I showed the questionnaire to the participants who reviewed the questions. Participants were encouraged to be as open as possible, reassured that no information would be identifiable and that they were free to say whatever they wanted. I also reminded them “Finally, you get a chance to say whatever you want to say and as much as you want to say for however long you want to say it.”

Once participants were comfortable and all questions answered, voice recording was begun. Most if not all the questions asked prior to beginning were related to the purpose of the study rather than the study directly. The questions asked by participants were things such as “what do you do with the questions after you record them?,” “How does this help you get your Master’s Degree” and “Does everybody who wants to get a Master’s degree have to do this?” For voice recording, the researcher used a Samsung Galaxy II voice recording app. This researcher felt that this was the most secure method of voice recording due to the fact that the phone has a dual password protection system.

The phone itself has a home screen password and the voice recording app has
password protection as well. At the end of each day the voice recordings were downloaded to a secure USB drive to ensure backup of the information in the event the phone was lost which was also password protected. The voice recording sound was tested prior to the beginning of the recordings and found to be appropriate for transcription. Memos were written on the socio-demographic questionnaire for each participant in order to refer back to ideas that were of significant value.

After the interview process was completed, I allowed time for questions and comments. Typical questions asked were “how did I do,” “did I answer okay.” Participants were reassured once again that there is no right or wrong answer and their participation and answers were all vital and appreciated. To supplement the interviews the researcher wrote reflective notes immediately following the interview. At minimum, two days passed between the recording of the interviews and the subsequent transcription in order to approach transcription with a more objective view. All transcription was completed via Microsoft Word rather than transcription software. All interviews yielded over 150 pages of rich transcript. Dragon Software was attempted but found to be more of a hindrance than a help. It is in the opinion of the researcher that manual transcription allowed for an increased need for the researcher to meticulously review the work being transcribed rather than having software assume some of that responsibility.

Data Analysis

After interviews were transcribed they were entered into MAXQDA software for coding analysis. Multiple codes were used in the beginning such as “mediated death
experience,” “immediate death experience” which were later condensed to be simply “death experience.” The simplicity of MAXQDA was found to be useful. It allowed the researcher to input a code and then define the code. Subsequently a code book was easily printed as a reference. The software system also allowed for the search of particular words that may have been used by “the participant such as “time” or “wise” and easily printed out a list of all words and the number of times they were used by an individual participant or all participants as a group. Once the initial coding was completed some preconditions, meanings and results were found to share a trend throughout multiple interviews. These are shared in detail in the “Analysis” section of this writing.

Reflexivity

My interest in adolescents and death began as an adolescent while watching friends of mine lose loved ones close to them. As peers experienced the loss I often wondered why it is that some teenagers lose loved ones but still manage to become successful and resilient while others who lose loved ones have a tendency to subsequently have prolonged difficulty with resolving the effects of the loss. As an adult, my interest became re-invigorated while working as a hospice nurse. I witnessed numerous immediate deaths where adolescents were witnesses to the death. In doing so, I realized that often times the adolescent exhibited signs of difficulty coping but did not receive the attention that younger children did regarding how to manage their need for coping. It was often assumed that they were old enough to handle the grief and expected to handle the loss on the level of an adult.
I then became a clinical teacher at a local high school. My role is to teach students who have an interest in exploring a future in healthcare careers. As a teacher of a very small group of students a close relationship often develops between the students and me, as a quasi-parental role. When the students experience a loss it is tragic to see the effect it has on a student that you have grown to admire and respect.

Although I am very close and sympathetic to the adolescent community I also understand that in order to develop better coping strategies for the adolescent, accurate and un-bias research is necessary. For the research to be effective it must represent the large group of adolescent individuals. It must also be willing to admit criticisms that may allow for future research to evaluate further more appropriate implementation strategies on behalf of the adolescent. My history as a healthcare professional lends well to the need for objectivity in the face of a desire to express one’s own emotions.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

This chapter reports on the data collected from one-on-one interviews with twelve adolescent participants ranging from the age of fifteen to nineteen years of age. Three participants reported no significant experience with death. Five participants reported a mediated experience; they did not witness to a death but were told about it by another person. Four participants reported witnessing the passing of an individual. Throughout the analysis, three primary themes developed: pre-conditions to the construction of a meaning of the death for the individual experiencing the loss, the construction of that meaning, and the consequences of that meaning as constructed.

Demographics

The participants included in this study are representative of a variety of backgrounds (see Table 1). All participants were between the ages of 15 and 19. The Mean age was 17.25 with 16 years of age being the most frequently occurring age. Two participants were male; one Caucasian, the other 2nd generation African Immigrant from Nigeria. Two female participants were bi-racial. The first was a 19 years old, who is half Caucasian and half African. The second multi-racial female reports Caucasian, Mexican and African American as her predominant background. Eight participants reported a Christian faith, and four reported that they are Muslim. Eleven of the twelve participants report they are in the top 35% of their graduating class or higher. One male participant could not remember his class rank. I subsequently looked it up for him. The
15 year old is unable to report her class rank due to a change in high schools at the middle of the year. She reports she is an “okay” student with B average grades.

Table 1

Overview of Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age:</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Death Experience</th>
<th>Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Deidra</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>2 Immediate Experiences</td>
<td>top 12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eva</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>16</td>
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<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1 Mediated</td>
<td>top10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hailey</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1 Mediated</td>
<td>top 20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Bi-Racial</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Multiple Immed. &amp; Med.</td>
<td>top25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delilah</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African – Gambia</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>1 Mediated</td>
<td>top 35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inez</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>Multiple Immed. &amp; Med.</td>
<td>top 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>African – Nigeria</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>top 30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Melissa</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>African – Nigeria</td>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>3 Mediated</td>
<td>top 5%</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Christian</td>
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<td>top10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lily</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Bi-Racial</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>top10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tommy</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>1 Immediate 1 mediated</td>
<td>top30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jaylynn</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>African-American</td>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Preconditions

To determine common variables significant for the adolescent toward the development of a meaning in death, we must first understand that “meaning” is a difficult term to use. In some circumstances, the death of an individual may have little to no meaning for the teenager, such as the death of a stranger on the news. In what follows, we assume that for a death to have “meaning” the teenager will be able to state that the loss has had some lasting effect, however minimal or grandiose. We also cannot always state that each death has the same meaning for teenagers across the board. The experience of death for the teenager and the resulting existential reality formed is subjective and unique. Our goal was to determine if any objectivity at all can be formulated with regard to the experience of loss for the teenager. We can proceed
after acknowledging any analysis is limited by the participants and their own formulated reality but in no way all-inclusive or generalizable. Among the pre-conditions noted are the relationship that teenager has with the deceased and the previous experiences that the teenager had with death and the manner in which the death occurred (either traumatic or anticipated).

It is important to note, of the twelve participants interviewed, all believed that there is a significant difference between the reactions of males and females toward death. Yet, only two participants were males, so it is difficult to adequately analyze gender effects. There is a great deal of potential research in the way of adolescent death experience and gender. Unfortunately, this particular study population does not lend itself to be an adequate enough representation to properly analyze that comparison. While some information obtained from the male participants may be used throughout the presentation of the analysis the focus is primarily on the female response.

Relationships

Participants expressed an association between their relationship with the deceased and its effect on how they reacted after the loss of an individual. The closer the relationship to the deceased, the more heightened the reaction to their death. When little relationship is found between that of the participant and the deceased minimal reaction is exhibited and expected.

Eva, a sixteen year old student, stated "I don’t know the person so I'm not affected…maybe if it was like someone closer like my parents or a brother or sister I’d
When Hailey was asked if she felt experience or relationship affected had the most impact on response to loss, she said, “Relationship with the person that passed because they’re so close to that person.” Sarah explained she develops a relationship with some of the patients at her job in the nursing home and “I am closer to some and if they were to pass away it would be harder than others.”

Delilah had lived with her deceased grandmother for the first five years of her life in Gambia, Africa. When she explained the relationship with her grandmother, she said that she viewed her grandmother as her mother very early on in life. As a result, she felt the loss was more difficult to handle. Inez recalls the pleasant “big-brother” type bond that her and her cousin had before her witnessing his death in an automobile accident.

It was this ‘cause I don’t have older brothers and so he and my older cousins were overprotective of me. It was like you can’t have a boyfriend, you can’t do this, you can’t do that. You can’t wear shorts. It was one of those types and we had a really good relationship. And it was cool. I think, he always called me ugly, always and I always called him “feo” which is Spanish for ugly.

This relationship is not limited to persons but any relationship that the adolescent feels is significant. Christian recounted the loss of his duck as a child and how his mother made light of the relationship stating “it’s just a duck” but when he described his relationship to his lost pet, he states “it wasn’t just a duck it was my best friend.”

The significance of the relationship on the grief pattern may be a result of the threat to habitualization one feels as a result of the disruption in social interaction. Whether positive or negative, the association one has with an individual or entity, as with the loss of a pet, creates a consistency which decreases the ambivalence and stress caused by decision making (Berger & Luckmann, 2001). The type of relationship one felt with the deceased may as well cause a change in the view of loss and coping.
(Abakoumkin, Stroebe, & Stroebe, 2010). Even the relationship with a pet is influential to the development of grief response as it “is frequently our first face-to-face encounter with death and often affects how we grieve as adults.” (Podrazik, Shackford, Becker, & Heckhart, 2000).

Anticipated Response vs. Actual Response

There were perceived differences at times between the anticipated response (the response one expects to see as a result of a loss) and the actual response (the exhibited response that is displayed as a result of a loss). If the anticipated response is not exhibited, an adolescent may think the person grieving is insincere. In one situation, a young girl from the school had passed away and a memorial was planned for her. At the memorial, Evelyn a 19 year old African-American female and best friends with the deceased, stated that she observed the following:

I know they came just to pay their respects and whatever, but then like there was girls like at the front talking, I guess that thought they were running it. Like I didn’t like that because I never seen them before and I don’t know who they were and I knew like who Jay’s best friends were and like who she hung out with all the time, and I felt like after she died a lot of people not being fake but they were trying to be more than what they really were. Trying to say that they were really good friends but they were like associates and that’s all.

Eva stated after a loss she felt “like sometimes people fake it they just don’t really feel that way sometimes.” She also criticized how she dealt with her own loss, she said “I remember I was upset but I wasn’t as upset as I feel like I should have been…I even went and got my eyebrows done. That’s so mean and inconsiderate.”

The above quotes identify that female teenagers have a pre-conceived idea of the appropriate social reaction to death. The greater the relationship, the more
significant the response expected. More time spent with the deceased equals, more tears allowed to be shed. Too great a response may result in being interpreted by peers as falsifying the relationship one had with the deceased. These anticipated responses may also be a result of defined social roles. Kubitz, Thornton and Robertson (1989) found that males who express a significant amount of emotional grief are viewed more negatively than those who do not. Likewise, females who do not express emotional grief as is expected are viewed with a similar negativity.

Previous Experience

When determining the effect of a death on a teenage girl, previous experience plays a significant role as well. For those with no familiarity with loss, the anticipated response was often described as severe or uncontrollable. If the participant had experienced death before, the subsequent reactions were not as emotionally intense. With increasing exposure to death came decreased emotional response and quicker recovery.

Inez, a Hispanic eighteen year old, stated “Because I’ve seen a lot growing up and I’ve had a lot of people go away in my life, whenever somebody tells me someone died, I’m just like oh, okay.” Deidra explained that she has witnessed two deaths and the increased exposure “Uh it makes me I guess be able to take it better than most people.”

Yet, Lily a 16 year old who has never experienced death visualized her first experience and expressed her anticipated response with fervent emotion “I would
probably like LOSE IT! Like freak out...Like if it was a sister of mine I would probably be crying my eyes out but...yeah I’d be seriously freaked out.”

Sarah explained how working in an environment where death is common results in an increased tolerance,

I guess where I work, death is now becoming something that’s more, I don’t know if it’s ever something you get used to, but I guess with the people that I work with when someone dies they’re like ‘oh well that’s sad. Well let’s go in there and clean up’. It’s like a routine now.

Sudden vs. Anticipated Death

The way in which a person dies is reported by participants to impact how the adolescent responds. Whether it be sudden/traumatic, or anticipated (such as a long term illness) results in a varied response from the teenager. In the anticipated death, the teenager is given more time to consider the potential loss before the actualization. This allows for closure and an acceptance of the inevitable. Deidra knew that her grandmother was ill before she passed and wasn’t shocked when it happened.

I remember one time my mom had to leave the house and go to her and I was asking her you know what happened and she was telling me that she had some kind of a problem I’m not sure what it was ...she was telling me you know she was like she’s okay and I was like how do you know and she was like certain things happen when a person passes away and I you know like asked her about it and she was like you know you lose control of your bodily functions and cause my grandmother she like urinated and I had asked her why did she do that and she said because she’s passing away you know turning cold and going like a little blue and so when I saw that...I knew that she had passed away like right in front of me.

A year later, when she lost her great-grandmother, she stated that it wasn’t surprising, “my great-grandmother died and it wasn’t more it wasn’t like tragic because
she was like one hundred and something years old it was just one of those inevitable things” Eva stated the following about the loss of her grandfather

I took care of him a lot because he was sick so every summer I would go to Jerusalem and I’d take care of him. I’d stay home when everyone went out I’d stay home and make sure that his blood pressure was okay that he took his pills on time…and I have my other grandpa my dad’s dad I feel like his death is coming soon.

Delilah recalled watching her grandmother suffer from a chronic illness prior to her passing.

Okay um how I see it is um she was very sick for a while she had diabetes and the doctors would tell her and like um you know advise her you know just like take care of your health you know eat properly just manage it don’t um ignore it make sure you’re taking care of your body and I think it just basically in my opinion she just got to the point where she was tired she was tired of not living you know because there were a lot of things she couldn’t eat like she wanted to do a lot of I think she was just tired of doing things she didn’t want to do she was tired of having to fight it and basically be treated like a child my parents and like my mom’s sisters and what not cause she has six kids they would like um basically baby her and like tell her that she has to do all this stuff like basically she has to take all her medicine and all that I think she was just really exhausted kinda um suffocated so I think she was just like you know what I think it’s about that time.

All of the above are examples of anticipated death, where the adolescent female has more time to process the loss and grieve. On the other hand, with traumatic loss the adolescent response changes, Melissa explained the loss of her best friend in a car accident.

I think everybody was shocked because I think everybody was expecting her to you know go off to school a lot of us were expecting her to come back so we could do stuff before we all go our separate ways so like it was very surprising like sudden cause you know no one expected her out all people to pass.

When asked what she thought had the most impact on how teenagers view death, Eva stated cause of death, citing a situation where she had heard of a traumatic death involving the mother of her brother’s good friend:
My brother’s friend’s mom was found dead on the side of the street and I was scared. I felt scared, like that happens? I see it all the time on *Law and Order* and *Criminal Minds* but does it really happen? So I felt really scared towards that death.

Evelyn recalled “I had talked to her the day before she had died so like yeah it was weird” when recalling the death of her friend to a car accident.

According to the interviews, the adolescent is expected to have a heightened response if the death is sudden or severe. This confirms most of the literature with regard to traumatic death response. For example, a recent study conducted on childhood traumatic grief explains that the exposure to traumatic death increased the likelihood of complicated grief for a child. (Brown et al., 2008). These griefs are associated with lack of closure and a sense of untimeliness. These deaths are more likely to result in “exaggerated and potentially complicated grief responses” (Clements, DeRaneri, Vigil, & Benasutti, 2004. Pg. 151).

While response to traumatic death is exaggerated, the response to anticipated loss is more subdued, since the teenager has time to reflect, anticipate the loss, and prepare themselves. The anticipated losses presented are often a result of chronic illness in which the teenager weighs the benefits of continued suffering and illness with what they consider a more “peaceful and “painfree” state.

**Meaning of Death:**

The meaning of a death has an introspective dimension for the teenager. As we discussed previously, during this phase of adolescence the teenage girl can abstractly theorize for oneself the meaning of life and death. As she evolves through the teenage state of self-interest, the death itself can become part of a process of self-actualization.
and a realization of what others mean to them and what they think life and death mean as well. Among the meanings of death identified most often by adolescents are that death is inevitable, not only for others but for themselves as well. Experiencing the loss of someone is an emotion that is difficult to describe, and the experience of loss often results in an increased maturity or propensity to properly analyze the true nature of a situation and its level of severity.

Inevitable Mortality

The adolescent who is exposed frequently to death exhibits a more “facts of life” attitude towards human mortality. A nineteen year old recent high school graduate named Sarah works at a nursing home. She stated that she sees people die at least once a month or more and for her

It’s not so much troubling for me it not ‘OH MY GOSH! It’s so sad!’ I mean…I’m just accepting that it’s a part of life…it hits you harder when you realize that you know this is someone close to me it could happen to me.

Deidra stated “death is something natural that it’s something everyone will experience” Hailey stated “death is something that would happen to anyone because it’s gonna happen someday to everyone” Delilah said,

It’s like you never think that it’s gonna be you or like somebody that you know until it happens and it just really makes you think it’s like wow that could be me it could happen to anyone.

I pause momentarily to discuss more in depth how this concept of inevitable mortality came about. During an evening with my five year old daughter she informed me her fish had died. She came to me stating “Mommy my fish is dead.” Interested in the possible responses, I asked her “What do you mean dead? What does ‘dead’
mean?” She said “I don’t know it’s what you say when your fish is broken and you have
to buy a new one.” This prompted one of the questions I posed to the participants “How
would you explain what death is to a five year old?” Most referred to some sort of
inevitability, that it’s natural or it will happen to everyone. They all confirm at some point
or another that we will all suffer the same fate.

Melissa also provided an example of how the teenager is able to relate the
experience of death to their own mortality “I feel like anything can happen to me too I’m
not saying that I’m gonna die tomorrow or next week but anything could happen to me”

Unfortunately, there is little research to demonstrate when the child in fact
develops this associative property of death. Yet it would seem the thought surfaces at
least partially from the very experience of loss itself.

Subjective Consciousness of Death

To indicate the aspects of an experience that are lived from the first-person
perspective and introspectively available, I shall use the term “qualia,” as characterized
by the following qualities. It is ineffable, intrinsic, and private. For the teenager, the
experience of loss has specific qualitative dimensions (Marcel & Bisiach, 1993). Often
the teenager is without any appropriate terminology when describing what the loss of an
individual feels like. When asked “how did it feel for you to lose them?” the most
common words are “I can’t describe it.” Sarah stated in her interview “That’s like trying
to explain being pregnant to someone who’s never been pregnant before. You just
can’t.” When Eva was asked to describe her experience with death her response was
“I don’t really know. I don’t how to describe it to (pause). What is death? What is the
definition of it? I don’t know” One wonders here if teenagers believe that their experiences are ineffable because they haven’t mastered the nuances of language necessary for conveying those experiences. There is, after all, phenomenology of pregnancy, and of loss and of grief – but it takes a certain emotional and intellectual maturity to undertake and to comprehend.

Another identifying quale of loss for the teenager is the intrinsic value related to the specific experience of loss for the individual. Just as a gold ring may have varying personal value, depending on how it was acquired, so the feeling of loss has its own intrinsic properties for the adolescent. For that matter, loss itself (at any age) has intrinsic properties.

Delilah expressed that the loss of her grandmother was devastating because “I lived with her for like five years….I really thought she was my mom.” Inez explained at the moment when she lost her cousin she was running from the scene of a car accident and had to leave her cousin behind. “It made me feel really bad because I left him behind. But I had no choice, I was little, like 13/14, too at that time.” She expressed feelings of regret and difficulty rationalizing her role in the situation. Evelyn describes how her experience included friends present when she found out about the loss of a mutual friend,

It was the day of my going away party for college and that little group that we had I mean I really think that it was God because I don't think that we could have took that by ourselves.

Most if not all participants described a unique scenario and one where their feelings were exclusive to the experience of loss. Thereby, affirming the intrinsic property.
Privacy is the third factor designating a circumstance as a quale. The death of an individual results in a very private circumstance for the teenager. Here we want to be careful about the term “privacy.” To say “he’s a very private person” means that he doesn’t volunteer much information about himself. But qualia are ‘private’ in the more radical sense that no one can know what my qualia are – it’s the old problem, “when you see red, how can I know that it’s the same qualitative experience that I experience when I see red?” That problem would remain even if I described my sensations of red in painstaking detail, since verbal descriptions are just another kind of behavior and would not collapse the gulf between two different subjective consciousnesses. The death of the same individual may result in varied qualitative experiences for those involved.

When discussing the topic of loss with an adult friend after the passing of her father, she explained “You don’t understand, no one can understand what it’s like for me to lose my dad. Not even my brother because it wasn’t the same relationship. He was his son, I was his daughter. It’s different.” When Lily was asked what she thought the average response to death is she stated “It depends on the death of the person. Like who the person was to them.” Deidra states,

I feel like everyone needs a different approach… if you have certain feelings that you don’t think that it’s okay to feel this way, it is okay because people take death and dying process in different way.

Eva explains how her experience is different because her reactions aren’t the same as others “I don’t know I feel like I don’t react to death as emotional as everyone else does.”
All of the above are examples of how grief fulfills the quality of privacy for the subjective conscious of the adolescent. Even if the experience is similar one cannot know with all certainty that the experience is the same. If a grandparent dies the experience for one adolescent grandchild may be far different than for another.

The forth identifier for a quale is the quality of an experience being directly apprehensible in consciousness; one knows that they have experienced something and to now understand more fully what that experience means. To use the analogy presented before by Sarah, after a woman experiences childbirth for the first time she often may feel part of a sorority of understanding that she did not feel a part of prior to that experience. Similarly, the adolescent upon living through the experience of a loss begins to fully understand what the loss of someone truly means. Inez recalls how she would tell a five year old what death means by saying “When you’re older you’ll understand” Inez stated “Until you actually go through it you really don’t know what it's like to lose someone you love.” Lily who has never experienced a significant loss says,

I don’t really know what it is like to lose someone I really care about because I never have. I mean I can like say what I think it would be like, but I can’t say for sure because it hasn't happened yet. You really don't know until it happens how you are gonna react or what you’re gonna say and do, I guess.

The above confirmations suggest that the adolescent perceives the phenomenology of loss as one that cannot be reproduced by another in the exact same way.

The two identified meanings derived from the participant interviews that are described here are the formulation of the impression of inevitable mortality for the adolescent and the approach towards loss involvement as a qualia form of knowledge and meaning.
Consequences

The consequences of the teenager experiencing a death/loss can be physical as well as emotional and psychological. They can also be positive as well as negative. Among the physical characteristics are a lack of sleep, lack of appetite and the potential for physical pain. Melissa explained “I couldn’t sleep it was a lot my head was hurting a lot I couldn’t sleep I was so out of it.”

The emotional and psychological consequences are exhibited in the initial reaction as well as the latent responses. Initially the teenager may feel sad, confused, and sometimes relieved, as is the case in chronic illness. After the initial response, the teenager may exhibit an increased anxiety. Eva stated, “I worry that my grandpa’s death is gonna really affect my parents and I don’t want that because it will affect me…I feel just like uggh…I feel worried.” Melissa expresses a significant loss when discussing how she now feels regarding the loss of her best friend:

I will honestly say I am always lonely I’m always lonely now I don’t really have any close friends…I just do me you know I get very lonely sometimes and I think like what would be happening now if she was still alive I think about that but you know it is what it is.

Although on the surface one might think that the effects of experiencing death are holistically negative this is not always the case. Multiple positive consequences were identified to the teenager experiencing a death.

Among these positive responses is a development of controlled emotions and increased maturity. Multiple participants stated that as a result of their experiences with loss, they no longer get angry as quickly, or when they do get angry they are more eager to reconcile. Inez discusses the change in her relationship with her mother as a result of the multiple losses she has experienced, “I make sure we don’t leave or I don’t
go to the store mad or we don’t go out mad we’re okay. You know, we hug each other, we go out to eat, we do everything together.” Deidra, a 16 year old African-American female, has witnessed the loss of both her grandmother and her great-grandmother. She states the following,

I know that I don’t like to end anything mad with someone I’m the type of person that if I’m mad at something you’ll be the first one to know it and so we can just go ahead and get it out because life’s too short to just hold grudges.

An overwhelming number of participants state that they feel that they make better decisions. That they consider the feelings of others in their decision making, and feel wiser, more mature. Inez states “I think to experience that kind of loss like that you have some notches in your belt as far as experience and maturity.” Hailey explains that as a result of loss and other negative experiences “you really you learn a lot and I guess you learn from your mistakes but you’re really challenged in all the things but you have to get through it”

Summary

To summarize the overall analysis, we must consider the following preconditions: the relationship between the adolescent female and the deceased, the circumstances of the death in question and her previous experiences with death. The meaning of death for the teenage girl is derived from the lack of control the adolescent feels during the loss and the subjectivity of the experience. As a result, she is susceptible to not only negative physical and psychological changes but positive changes as well that have the potential to bring about an increase in emotional control, judgment, and overall maturity.
CHAPTER 5
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the research presents the theoretical framework developed by way of the analysis of participant interviews. An outline of current theories, as well as the implications for application of this research is addressed. Possible areas of greater theory development are also mentioned in order to develop a theoretical framework within which to analyze the information presented.

The first goal of the research was to determine if the physical witnessing of a death played a more significant role than the experience of loss itself. This study was unable to determine a substantial difference between the two phenomena. Whether traumatic or accidental the presence of the adolescent was not as significant as other variables. There could be no correlation found between the immediate death experience and the response of the adolescent towards meaning making. A possible reason for this is due to the crucial role relationship plays in the response of the adolescent. The relationship of the adolescent to the deceased appeared to supersede most if not all other variables when determining the effect of death on the meaning development of the adolescent.

The relationship of the deceased was the primary indicator of how the adolescent responded to a death. The closer the viewed relationship the greater the meaning attached to the loss. The loss of a parent superseded that of a distant relative and the death of a best friend was more relevant than that of an acquaintance. This finding would support previous research that places a tremendous amount of weight on the social development during adolescence. The adolescent world view seems limited to
their personal experiences with others and as a result the loss of a relationship results in a disruption of their perceived social order. This finding supports the theme of social dialect developed by Noppe and Noppe (1991). The social dialect describes the significant importance of social development for the adolescent who fears isolation from relationships. As a result we can conceptualize a theory that the fear of isolation drives the greater significance towards relationship as a precondition of a development of meaning for the adolescent. Easily stated, if the fear of isolation is the predominant social theme then the loss of the relationship which creates the greatest isolation is the most significant of losses for the teenager.

Concerning the emotional response of death, the research also indicates that female participants expressed a great deal of emotional response to death or expectations of emotional response. The adolescent female judged themselves and others if the expected response was not in accordance with this predetermined guideline. This confirms the previous work which determined that females and males who do not grieve as expected are viewed negatively (Kubitz Thornton and Robertson, 1989).

The next question posed by this research was what meaning is developed from the experience of death. While there are a number of articles related to the meaning of death during adolescents, they focus on the meaning of death as in “What do you think it means to die?” rather than “What does experiencing death mean for you?” This may seem as a superficial differentiation but when the concept is explored further what is discovered is that the two are far different. The meanings of death as described by Noppe and Noppe (1997) are positioned to question how the adolescent views the
action of dying. Indicating that the late adolescent is more concerned with legacy and the early child is more concerned with the afterlife. This research places more weight on the internal phenomenology of the loss experience for the adolescent.

The research also presents a meaning of death for the adolescent as one that includes an increased understanding of inevitable mortality and the experience of death as a quale. Noppe and Noppe (1997) confirm that inevitability of death is a primary concern for early adolescents (middle school age) but that the adolescent chooses not to discuss their fears. It would appear as though this research would support the above finding, with the exception of the openness of discussion. The discussion of inevitable mortality, rather than being a fear, is now an accepted and easily discussed truth for the late adolescent. More research could be used in this development of thought for the adolescent regarding the inevitability of death. What is it that predetermines this conceptualization?

A noted addition the presented writing identified is the self-professed maturity as a consequence of death experience. Noppe and Noppe (1997) believed that reframing the concept of death to include such a thought would provide insight into the understanding for death development for the adolescent. This research supports the adolescent view of maturity as a consequence of experiencing death.

A significant number of participants confirm the sentiment that the experience of death created a more mature outlook on life and decisions. When they described what they thought was the understanding of a child it was far more simplistic and did not include inevitability or full understanding of the consequence of death. They positioned the adolescent as “older,” to “know more” and as “more mature.”
Those participants that expressed repeated exposure to death also professed a higher maturity level than their less experienced peers. This study could be used to support other transitional activities that the adolescent may perceive as “coming of age” activities such as job acquisition, independent living and decision-making. The greater the exposure to such circumstances increases the self-perception of maturity for the late adolescent.

In conclusion, this chapter provides an outline of the development towards a theoretical framework regarding the preconditions, the meaning, and consequences of the death experience for the teenage girl. A number of possible theories are presented to support current theoretical designs as well as provide greater qualitative insight for the adolescent experiencing bereavement. For chapter 6 the goal is to put in a conclusive format all of the information presented. The suggestions for future research will also be discussed as well as methodological implications.
CHAPTER 6
DISCUSSION

Summary

Everyday America’s adolescents are faced with the possibility that they might lose a loved one. They might be a 16 year old cheerleader in the suburbs who has been helping her family care for their chronically ill grandmother. They could be a 17 year old living in inner city Chicago who witnesses yet another shooting of a life-long friend. The point is that as our children grow we can no longer protect them from the tragedy of loss by dropping them off at a baby sitter during the funeral or simply by telling them “they’ve gone to Heaven” in hopes that the statement will be enough to quell their curiosity. They will grow to understand what it means to die but what will that implication mean for them and how they view the world?

As members of the sociologic community we must find it necessary for our youth to be supported during bereavement. Without much needed policy change and more programs to assist adolescent through this difficult time we run the risk of negative mental and emotional effects. If these negative effects are not met with proper intervention it is quite possible that we are to blame for increases in mental health issues and the potential for reckless behavior among teens experiencing loss.

Although improper management of the teenage girl through the death experience could result in negative consequences the positive support of the adolescent through such a life altering event has potential for increased maturity and more productive decision making by the female adolescent, which could result in greater success for her throughout her life.
The role in the development of proper interventions must first begin with the understanding of what it truly means for her to experience the loss of a significant relationship. What they determine as the primary influences towards their meaning development and the consequences of such experiences. Through this study we have developed a more phenomenological understanding of how adolescent girls view the death experience and the implications that result from such an experience.

The purpose for this study was to determine what meaning(s) develop for the adolescent from the experience of death? What are the variables affecting the development of meaning and what is the resulting consequence of the meaning that is developed? The potential need to understand if there was a difference in the experience of actual witnessing of death and the mediated death experience was also questioned.

A qualitative approach was utilized to help bring a voice to the adolescent female. Twelve teenagers were interviewed. They were divided in to three groups of varying death experiences and their responses analyzed using a grounded theory approach. By this method the teenager’s perspective was better understood from a phenomenological view.

A primary indicator for the response of the teenager was the relationship of the adolescent and the deceased. This relationship presents as a primary indicator for how the teenager will respond to the death of a loved one as well as whether the death was a traumatic death or an anticipated loss. The meaning developed seems to be quite similar in either respect but the expression is different.

The meaning itself includes varying thoughts but all surrounded by an inevitable mortality and a concept of death as a quale experience. The female finds it difficult to
explain their thoughts regarding death but place themselves at a level of higher understanding than the child but not as great as the adult. The adolescent also correlates their experience with a self-identified maturity.

Primary codes identified were preconditions, meaning, and consequences. Sub-codes included were “relationships” “anticipated vs. traumatic death” among the preconditions. Maturity was identified as among the potential consequences to the death experience. And the meanings made included sub codes “inevitable mortality” and “quale.”

While in the past, research on adolescent’s experience of death has been directed towards how they feel about the death, this study focused on the development of death as knowledge for the adolescent. The difference is what it means to the adolescent to have witnessed a death rather than what does death itself mean to the adolescent. The theoretical framework allows us to explore in greater detail what the basis is for these thoughts. The research adds to the literature by exposing the idea that females develop similar meanings during the adolescent years and share some commonalities in their experiences.

Potential for Future Research

While the research presented was critical in identifying the true nature of loss for the adolescent, it is not exhaustive. A few areas that are identified for future research are as follows: The role of the adolescent as caregiver, The pre-teen and elementary school child’s response to death, various types of loss (such as the loss of a pet for a child versus an adult), and technology as a method of communication during loss.
In a few of the interviews, it was noted that the adolescent female was responsible for the role of caregiver. The adolescent assumed the role of either caregiver of the chronically ill or caregiver of younger siblings in the absence of parents preoccupied with the chronically ill. It would be of great interest to determine how assuming the caregiver role at a young age affects the coping strategies of the teenager as well as the resulting formulation of reality construction.

Also helpful would be an analysis of the meaning formation of loss in the pre-teen and school age child. This would allow for increased comparative analysis and potential insight into the fundamental development of meaning formation.

The interviews also suggested that various type of loss result in various types of grief for the adolescent. Future research could explore in depth the different forms of loss and their effects on the adolescent such as the loss of a pet for early school age children. The experience of adolescent loss of a teacher or coach and the elementary child’s experience of peer death would also be two interesting areas of research.

Another critical area of research that should be of great use is the intervention of technology in how information regarding death is transmitted and received for the adolescent. Multiple participants alluded to the use of social media as a source of communicating the death of a loved one or as the way they first were informed of the loss of a loved one. An area of research might be how this affects the grief process and how the information is presented. What are the social norms of social media use when death is involved and how does this vary from one culture to the next?
Conclusion

In conclusion, our understanding of the adolescent development of meaning during the experience of death raises numerous questions regarding future decisions they make as adults. Just as a seed if not nurtured cannot grow into a fruitful tree, our youth if not nurtured and understood may not bear the fruit of productive and fulfilling adulthood. The goals of this research whether met or found inconclusive, sought to identify crucial areas of understanding for the adolescent experience with respect to death. We determined the preconditions of the death experience the meanings made throughout the course of the experience and the resulting consequence for the adolescent.

It is the fervent thought of this researcher that to better understand the adult we must first understand the adolescent, the youth, the child and the infant experience. To know our present we must know our past and our past as the adult includes that of the adolescent. This should be but a mere stepping stone to the encouragement of more exhaustive research in child and adolescent studies.
APPENDIX A

SAMPLE TRANSCRIPTS
I: Alright so um we already reviewed what were gonna do today so I’ll just start out with some of the questions what do you think the average teenager’s response to death is?

P: Um I think some people would be confused maybe I think teens adapt a little bit better as far as taking it in probably won't talk as much though

I: And why do you think that is

P: Um I’m not sure I know as far s me I don’t like to talk about about I do the say that oh I’m sad about but I won’t go much more as far as detail I don’t know why though

I: Do you think that boys vs girls have different responses

P: Umhm

I: How so

P: I think that girl more they talk about they’ll go a little more in depth I don’t think teenagers in general as far as a classification will talk about it but I think girls will be more supportive and more open to talk about it than guys would be.

I: Umhm do you have anything in mind that you think would be the cause of those responses

P: Maybe because teenagers don’t ask those questions of each other. Like you know grown up would oh do you want to talk about it how do you feel and teenagers are just if you want to talk about it I’m here but won’t just get to the root of a problem or something like that

I: Can you think of a time when death became a subject of discussion between you and your friends
P: Uh yes last week. We lost somebody in the band and it was kinda weird because we did talk about it um just to make sure because it was more of a tragic thing and we talked about it just to make sure no one else was feeling that way

I: Umhm Um. Tell me about that how was that situation for you.

P: Um for me it was hard because I did know the person we weren’t just really close but like something just hitting home like that that was more difficult to talk about.

I: Was that your first experience with death

P: No maam

I: What was your first experience with death that you can recall?

P: Um when I was in fourth grade I actually saw my grandmother die I remember it was a Sunday and we were watching Anaconda the second one and my great-grandmother her mother she was on bedrest at the time and she called her for something I think she wanted something to drink or something and she got up to walk to her room and she just collapsed in the middle of the hallway

I: Oh goodness

P: And um It wasn’t the first time she had collapsed but I knew that you know that she had passed away because she had all the classic symptoms and my mom was a nurse and the first time something like that had happened she had talked with me and um

I: Do you remember what your mom said to you?

P: About that time or the first time that it had happened

I: About you said she had talked to you about it
P: Oh yes because I don’t know why she did that but like sometimes she’d have those episodes I remember one time my mom had to leave the house and go to her and I was asking her you know what happened and she was telling me that she had some kind of a problem I’m not sure what it was I think it was some kind of a thyroid problem and she was telling me you know she was like she’s okay and I was like how do you know and she was like certain things happen when a person passes away and I you know like asked her about it and she was like you know you lose control of your bodily functions and cause my grandmother she like urinated and I had asked her why did she do that and she said because she’s passing away you know turning cold and going like a little blue and so when I saw that stuff you know I was a little bit hysterical but I knew I was hysterical because I knew that she had passed away like right in front of me

I: Now when you say hysterical what do you mean by hysterical

P: Like um well I went to a room by myself and I was like crying uncontrollably and it was hard to breathe um shaking like nervous I didn’t know what to do because I’m not the oldest one I’m like the middle out of my three cousins and it’s my older cousin and then it’s me and then my younger cousin and I’m like the level headed one like when something goes wrong they come to me and like it was like I didn’t want them to see me overreacting because I didn’t want them to overreact so I tried to like calm myself down but it was a little hard and so I went to a room and just cried and stuff and then I went to find my other cousins to make sure they were okay um hmm

I: Did anybody call 911

P: Yeah my little cousin he liked
surprised me he just went right to the phone and called 911 and um one of the paramedics was a man who went to my church and he was telling my mom like okay were gonna take her to the hospital and it was kinda weird because you know my mom is a nurse but she blanked she was hysterical and so that made me more nervous.

I: Was this your mom’s mother

P: Yes it was my mom’s mother

I: Okay was that the only experience that you can recall

P: Um when I was in the 5th grade my great-grandmother died and it wasn’t more it wasn’t like tragic because she was like one hundred and something years old it was just one of those inevitable things I remember she died on a Sunday too and she was on like hospice or whatever in the home and so we had all gathered around and I had been like helping my mom take care of her you know like dressing her wounds and helping turn her and stuff like that and so I was a little bit more prepared for it but I was really close to her and so when she passed I was I wasn’t hysterical but I just wanted to be by myself and um I remember one of my aunts coming to me saying you know you gotta get it together for my other cousins so I didn’t really

I: Did you see her pass away

P: Umhm

I: Wow that’s kinda young

P: Umhm

I: How does that make you feel that you were like fourth and fifth grade and you had already seen two people pass away
P: Uh it makes me I guess be able to take it better than most people because I’m the type of person I’ll cry about it you know I’ll be sad but I’m more worried about how it’s affecting the people around me so I want to make sure that they are okay

I: And how about 6 7th 8th 9th 10th grade

P: As far as seeing more deaths no ma’am I know I lost a like my couple of my aunts and my dad’s great-grandmother passed but we weren’t like close or anything but it was the first time I saw him cry so that was kinda like weird I guess it made me sad cause you know like you never see that person sad or anything but he was like close to her so I just wanted to like make sure he was alright you know. Okay you know

I: Okay so the most recent incident you had was with the classmate

P: Umhm

I: Tell me about how you felt that day tell me about what happened how did you find out..

P: Um it was on Wednesday I was going to second period you know we have that little passing period and when I got to the band hall everyone was like sad they looked like shocked and I was wondering what’s wrong with y’all and so one of my classmates he told me he said that Hobbs had committed suicide and I was like what don’t play like that that’s not funny he told me he wasn’t playing and so I looked around and I noticed more people were like sad and stuff I figured well maybe he’s telling the truth so I think I was a little in shock because I just came back to class and I was like wondering you know really? Because I had just seen him the day before. Um I think I’m more like not angry but I feel like let down a little bit just because it’s a person like you’re around all the time for most of the year you know and just to know that had to happen
and it’s like why didn’t anyone know that why didn’t anyone know he was feeling that way and uh and like why did it have to come to that pretty much and so

I: What do you think? Like if you had to speculate why do you think that that was the route that was taken

P: Honestly I don’t know I mean oh it’s quick to say oh he was bullied but to my knowledge he wasn’t and you know then there’s rumors going around that oh he did it over a girl but I don’t think that you can just blame one event one person for something like that I feel like it was building you know

I: Okay what did you notice about the reactions of others when this occurred?

P: I noticed it hit people hard and it hit people it hit people unexpected people pretty hard and it was like you know wow I didn’t think you’d show so much emotion for this person.

I: Umhm

P: Um I know a lot of the people in band won’t talk about it or the people that were more close to him you know they won’t talk about it cause it’s really sad and more people that weren’t close to him like I wasn’t really close to him and I’m more open to discuss like how do you feel about it

I: Okay. Um so I have a five year old daughter and let’s say she came to me and asked me Mommy what does death mean how would you answer that question to a five year old

P: I would tell her that death is something natural that it’s something everyone will experience at one point um to a five year old I guess you wouldn’t really expect them to understand so I guess I would tell them you know it’s when they go back to
meet Jesus and be where they were meant to be. Um I would explain to her that its sometimes hard to accept it that it’s not always a bad thing you know that it happened because I believe that good stuff comes out of bad things and with the loss of a life a new life will come and so I would tell her it’s okay to be sad to be upset about it but it’s not necessarily anybody’s fault

I: Alright now let’s say you had to explain death to a teenager how would you explain it to a teenager

P: I would tell them I would probably tell them it’s something natural it’s something that has to happen um and like I know teenagers won’t really like talk about it so I would let them know like if you have certain feelings that you don’t think that it’s okay to feel this way it is okay because people take death and dying process in different way and I’d just let them know that if they wanted to talk about it that it’s okay to talk to me

I: Very good and so what would be the difference you think in trying to relate to an adult versus the five year old you explain and then the teenager and then you had to talk to an adult about death how do you think that you would respond to the adult who lost someone

P: I would tell them well it’s to me I wouldn’t feel like it was more about explaining the death process I would explain bout what to do after it so I would tell them you know it’s not gonna be easy but having to deal with something especially if it was like a daughter or son or something but um and I know that not everyone wants to hear it was in God’s plan but I would tell them it’s natural and it’s not a bad thing and you know to take what they need out of it because you should always learn a lesson out of
something you know it’s a good thing or a bad thing you should always take something from it don’t let anything be in vain and so I would probably tell them yeah I understand it’s hard right now and not everyone wants to talk about it and stuff but if you do then you can talk to me.

I: How do you think your experiences with death if at all have affected your relationships with your family

P: I know that I don’t like to end anything mad with someone I’m the type of person that if I’m mad at something you’ll be the first one to know it and so we can just go ahead and get it out because life’s too short to just hold grudges I don’t hold grudges actually it’s hard for me to hold grudges like if you do you wrong me in the most terrible way I’m like alright I’ll just chalk that up and we can get passed it I don’t like to leave the conversation mad like if my mom makes me mad at something and were on the phone and I hang up I’ll call her and and like okay I didn’t mean that cause I don’t ever want to feel like the last memory someone has of me is an angry memory cause I know that my uncle struggles with that a lot because when I grandmother died they were like on bad terms and I my mom is my best friend so I couldn’t have that on my heart so I tell her I love her when we leave and something and I just text her randomly you know like I hope you have a good day or something because I don’t want it to ever be like man I wish I could have told her this or man I wish I could have done this something like that.

I: When you start talking about your mom I notice that you get a bit emotional is there a reason why

P: Um well last year um she went into heart failure and so sorry

I: No that’s okay
P: And like it was scary because I always say like I don’t know what I would do without my mom you know and it was close it was a close call and she was in the hospital for like a week and um like the whole time I was just nervous did I do everything that I could have done was I as good as I could have been and um like I just wanted to be around her the whole time I didn’t really tell anybody like there or four people knew and it was just like eye opening because like what do you do when you lose your mom and I knew how it affected her and like I always say that my granny had to take care of the whole family and when she passed it was a lot of tension and um a lot of separation amongst our family and in noticed my mom trying to do the same thing that my granny did and I feel like my granny died doing that and I don’t want to lose my mom like that and uh we talked bout it when she was in the hospital and I told her that if she were to pass away that all of the burden would go to me because I'm like the level headed one and the one that doesn’t want any arguments and wants to keep everybody together and it was eye opening for me cause I’m like you can’t do that you can’t make everybody like each other all the time it’s gonna happen the way it needs to happen that’s just that and we talked about it she’s like I don’t want you to feel that way and stuff and she was like it’s not a burden on me but you can tell because she’s like taken in my aunt and my aunts three kids and then me and she does everything for us and people like our family they always ask her for things but they never want to give it back. She has a favor they don’t want to do a favor for her and I just I don’t want that to be me and I see myself going like down that way a little bit because I’m like if you needs something just ask and like I get angry sometimes because like my aunt because I don’t think she realizes sometimes like how her approach affects people and she really
like loud and antagonistic and she like to pick at people and I get mad cause I’m like um like I let people take advantage of me like not really but like if you want something from me then I’m like just take it and so I try to like not go that way like not do that like I make it a point like you have to ask I’m gonna give it to you but you have to ask my mom she just like lets people take and take and take and she doesn’t tell them like you need to give it back and not just you know material thing but anything like if they need to talk they can talk to her but she can’t necessarily go to other people about her problems and I don’t want that to be me and so when she had her experience or whatever in the hospital like we talked about that for a long time and I just told her like we both gotta get better at not wanting to have other people’s problems on us you know. So yeah

I: That’s a scary thing to have to face losing your mom just the potential of it is sometimes as bas as the loss how do you think the experiences with death affect the way you react with your peers your siblings and your friends

P: I don’t think I get mad as easily as I would I don’t let things get to me you know in high school there’s a lot of petty dramas and stuff and if someone says anything about me I don’t think anyone does but if they were to it wouldn’t affect me it’s like okay that’s cool you know and things like I get angry like why did you do that but I won’t necessarily know that it made me angry I’m like take that in stride and were gonna move on from this I try to be like above everything and I try to be more positive about everything nobody owes me anything and so I try to remember that and so they don’t have to be nice to me you know they don’t have to say good things about me and I think that’s a lot of my character like okay we can get over that
I: Ok um so you feel as though whenever you talk about how you react to things and how your friends react to things do you see a differentiation

P: Umhm because I know people that will let the littlest things get to them and just ruin their whole day I don’t like no one to have like power over me and I like if you something you does can ruin my day then you have way too much power I like to laugh it off and so I’d rather just make a joke out of it then get me down I tell people I don’t get embarrassed like you can’t embarrass me because you don’t have power over me I can take it I can dish it so I can take it and I think a lot of like the people that I hang around it more easy for them to dish it then to take it and I think that I’m one of those people that I can take it back

I: Now do you think the fact that you have experienced death and you’ve experienced two deaths at a very early age do you think that that has had any effect on how you are

P: I think so because I think when a person experienced a loss especially because my granny raised me when my mom when to school. My mom she had me at 17 and she was like okay I’m gonna be the best mother I’m gonna be but I need a career as well and so when my mother came up here to go to school my granny took care of me so I lived with my granny until I was like in the third grade and so I think to experience that kind of loss like that you have some notches in your belt as far as experience and maturity and so I think to experience two losses of people that were really really really close to me and then go through like a near death experience with my mom I do feel like I got a little more maturity on me because um like seeing the situation and knowing how I’m gonna react to the situation instead of just like oh man that just
made me really mad I know how I’m gonna react I’m more like well is it worth it to get mad is it worth it to get upset

I: Finish this statement for me life is…

P: Life is what you make it if you want to have a good time you’re gonna have a good time regardless if its raining or if you make stuff bring you down. If you want to have a good experience you’re gonna have a good experience not everything is gonna be great you’re gonna have days where you are like I don’t wait to talk to anybody don’t mess with me don’t look at me but if you want it to be a good experience a positive experience a positive it will be a positive thing

I: So like even in the negative experiences you can make those negative experiences have a positive result

P: Umhm

I: Okay is there anything else that you would like to say or that you think is beneficial regarding teenagers and death

P: Um I feel like everyone needs a different approach to a situation but most people if you ask the right things then they’ll open up to you if you say the right thing they’ll give you a little insight rather than just oh I’m okay your yeah I’m sad but whatever you know.

I: Let me ask you this whenever that incident happened last week I noticed that you weren’t the only student that didn’t want to go talk to the counselor even though there were counselors that were specialized in grief that were here I noticed quite a few students refused that service. Why do you think that is?
P: I feel like the counselors were reserved for the people that knew him more and that took it a little harder than I took it because I know my mom is really supportive and I know if I need to talk to her I can talk to her and I feel like not everyone has that relationship that I do have with my mom and so I feel like the people that the counselors needed to were the ones that weren’t gonna have anyone to talk to or that didn’t have anyone to talk to about that stuff.

I: Okay. Anything else?

P: Shakes head no

I: You sure

P: Yes ma’am

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I: So um the first question I’m gonna ask you is what do you think the average teenager’s response to death is?

P: Um I think it’s I don’t think it’s as emotional as adults sometimes I think that most students are or most teenagers they don’t really express it they keep it to themselves or at least that’s how I am I don’t like to express my feelings especially around other people and I feel like sometimes people fake it they just don’t really feel that way sometimes I think like I even fake it I don’t really feel upset I just feel like I should be upset

I: Can you give me a scenario that you think

P: Ok so like when my grandpa died I remember I was upset but I wasn’t as upset as I feel like I should have been

I: How old were you
P: Um it was two years ago so 15 years and I remember like that day I even went and got my eyebrows done

I: Umhm

P: That’s so mean and inconsiderate of like my mom’s emotions and her feelings but yeah I feel like I should have been more upset but like I wasn’t I don’t maybe I was feeling numb or something

I: Explain your relationship with your grandfather

P: I was really close with him I took care of him a lot because he was sick so every summer I would go to Jerusalem and I’d take care of him I’d stay home when everyone went out I’d stay home and make sure that his blood pressure was okay that he took his pills on time got him water constantly so I was really close with him but I don’t know I feel like I don’t react to death as emotional as everyone else does

I: What would you say if you feel as though your reaction isn’t normal what would you say is the normal reaction would be or what do you think you should have done

P: I don’t know I should have been more upset

I: More upset like how crying and

P: I cried but I didn’t cry a lot and after a while I just forgot like I don’t have that feeling of like inside something’s missing. Like my mom tells me she feels that something inside of her is missing that she misses her dad of course I mean it’s her dad but maybe if it was like someone closer like my parents or a brother or sister I’d react differently

I: Umhm okay do you think boys versus girls respond in a different way or do you think it’s the same across the board
P: I think guys are less emotional but sometimes I fell like they hide it my brother. I remember he was more emotional than I was cause like he my sister text him that grandpa died and he got off work and was freaking out and he was upset he was really upset because my mom had told him to go visit him and he hadn’t

I: Umhm

P: So I feel like he felt guilty

I: And maybe that was the cause of his reaction

P: Umhm

I: Is your grandfather the most recent incident regarding death

P: my grandpa isn’t the most recent I’ve had other people die but they’re not close to me their close to my parents like my dad’s uncle or whatever but I wasn’t upset at all.

I: So the grandfather was the one that you would say is the most recent that you would consider a loss

P: Yeah and I have my other grandpa my dad’s dad I feel like his death is coming soon

I: How old is he

P: He’s 85 turning 86 and

I: Does he live here

P: Yeah his state is just bad he doesn’t eat or drink he doesn’t know where he is half the time

I: Does he have Alzheimer’s or just dementia

P: I don’t know we think he has Alzheimer’s but
I: How does that make you feel that you’re anticipating the death of your grandfather

P: Um I don’t really feel any different I know that sounds like bad but I just don’t I feel like it’s just natural

I: The death is just natural and it’s just a part of life kinda thing?

P: Umhm

I: Okay alright um and you said you were really close to your grandfather and he lived in Jerusalem

P: Umhm

I: How do you think that effect your relationship do you think the fact that you lived here and the fact that he lived there

P: I think because I wasn’t there at the time of his death and I wasn’t around the people that were like mourning over him I feel like that’s the reason I wasn’t as emotional as I should have been and my mom wasn’t here too.

I: How did you find out that he had passed away.

P: Umm I woken up and I had gone on facebook and everyone was like RIP blah blah blah and at first I was like hmm maybe that’s someone else it just didn’t click in my head that it was my grandpa that died. And so I go to my dad and I was like people are like writing these things on facebook and even my mom’s cousin she messaged me saying like sorry for your loss blah blah blah on facebook and I asked my dad and he was like yeah he passed away I just didn’t want to tell you like right in the morning when you wake up.

I: How did that make you fell finding out about your grandfathers death that way
P: On facebook? Uh it was um I was just shocked I wasn’t like uh why didn’t they tell me in person because I don’t think being told in person is better than being told through facebook the reaction is still the same for me

I: Ok what did you think about the way the other people reacted like your friends and family loved ones what sticks out as far as their reactions

P: My dad barely shows emotion so he was just chill he was relaxed about it all. My brother was upset my sister was upset and my mom was in Jerusalem but when she got back it felt like she was depressed for a while and she even told me like for a while she like almost gave up on herself.

I: Um how did that make you feel hearing your mom say that

P: I was upset but I feel like when I was younger or even like two years from now I wasn’t as aware like right now I’m more observant a couple of years back I was just like I was just here I didn’t really like pay that much attention to how everyone felt or like what they were going through but now my eyes are open I see what they feel

I: You say your eyes are open is there any situation that you feel made you change and now suddenly your eyes are open

P: Oh yeah my brother he went through a depression during the summer last summer and he had like anxiety problems and all that and he just me and him got really close during the summer and he stayed with me the whole time and tell me like how he felt it just made me realize like how you should pay more attention to like how people react to certain things

I: How significant was your brother’s depression
P: Um it was really bad I think like cause I watched him cry every night and I never see my brother cry and he would cry like it was loud crying

I: Okay so it was pretty bad

P: Yea but he explained to me more like why and it made me understand like how people reach to certain like he explained it was over a girl for one and how he had just built his whole life around this one girl and she ended it with him and then it was also because we come a religious family and he was like falling away from religion

I: What is your religion?

P: Muslim

I: How do Muslims what is their stance on dying what is their view

P: Its natural the person who dies the person I don’t really know I don’t know I only know Muslim so I don’t know what another person’s view is

I: Is there an after life

P: There’s like a kinda like an in between phase like where you haven’t gone to heaven yet but your somewhere in space and then once everyone has died there’s a heaven or a hell

I: So there’s like a waiting room

P: Yeah it’s kinda like a waiting room you’re waiting to get into heaven

I: I remember when I was a hospice nurse I got to witness the funeral of I guess the funeral rite for a Muslim patient I had two Muslim patients there are some guidelines are their not as far as how people are supposed to be buried Have you ever witnessed that
P: Have I been to a funeral No I haven’t been to a funeral A Muslim funeral No
I’m considered a child I don’t get to go. I’m not invited

I: Oh well what’s the age at what point you’re allowed to go

P: I don’t know it’s I think it’s just me because I’m seen as like small and young I
don’t think it’s like

I: Because you’re petite

P: Yeah you know just tiny

I: Oh ok

P: Uh but I mean I don’t think they want anyone younger than 17 18 just because
one you don’t want them like shocked because there’s open casket and closed and we
pray for the person who died and then my mom told me that she got to bathe my dad’s
aunt and she can’t even look at her she can’t even describe how she felt and you have
that like yeah they’re protected I guess

I: There’s a ritual in Muslim deaths where you the women that are closest to that
person if it’s a female that dies the women that are closest to that person have certain
jobs that they have to do any they have to prepare the body and if it’s a man it all men
because they preserve the sanctity the privacy

P: Yeah they’re separated they aren’t all together

I: And during that process they actually cover them with a sheet and so even
when they are bathing them they’re covered with a sheet and you don’t see anything
you just bathe and there’s special oils and perfumes that after that bathing process that
then they go and they bathe them with the oils and perfumes prior to them being
wrapped and prepared and um there’s no artificial devices like for instance if a patient
had artificial nails things like that they have to be removed things like that I was actually a part of that process one time for a patient and I was blessed and honored with the privilege of being there and present because the daughter felt as though it was something that she could handle and as a hospice nurse she asked me to be there to support her while she was bathing her mother. It was a very beautiful ceremony actually I should say it’s a very beautiful thing

P: And then they wrap them in all white that’s how my aunt was wrapped she was wrapped in all white

I: It a very beautiful ceremony something you should be proud of um do you remember watching the other people reactions whenever your grandpa passed away and any kind of that struck you as hm I wonder why they did that like facebook and saying things on facebook

P: Everyone was upset and everyone was upset on facebook and it was because my grandpa he was loved he was like the first principal in Jerusalem you know first school they just loved him he was a good man and all that and my dad’s side whenever because my mom’s side is all in Jerusalem and I was with my dad’s side and felt like I went to my uncles house and I don’t really call her my aunt she’s like my uncles wife and I felt like she didn’t even care I don’t know maybe that’s her I felt like she didn’t care and my cousins weren’t like oh sorry you know my dad was upset but of course he was like relaxed about it my brother was upset my sister was upset but it wasn’t like anything significant about how they reacted

I: Um okay I have a five year old daughter and let’s say she came to me and asked you Eman what does death mean how would you describe that to a five year old
P: Hmm I’m not good with that kind of stuff I would be like ……uh…..deep sleep and they don’t wake up…mmm…I don’t really know I don’t how to describe it to what is death what is the definition of it…I don’t know

I: What do you think the definition of death

P: You’re just not breathing

I: You’re just not breathing?

P: Nope you’re done

(laughing)

I: Okay well I’ll take that so what do you think is the difference between a child and a teenager versus an adult in their understanding of death

P: Well a child doesn’t really know what death is I mean I barely know what death is but they don’t understand the concept of it like this person won’t come back they’re just gone forever uh a teenager understands an adult understand but I don’t know

I: So what would be the difference between the teenager and adult?

P: By teenager what do you mean?

I: Uhh 14-19

P: Mmm I think just being able to cope with it is different and adult would be able to cope with death I don’t know it depends on how close a person is I don't think there a big difference between a teenager and adult

I: Okay what do you think does make the difference you were saying what?

P: Um the relationship of the person who died

I: You think that’s more significant than the age

P: Yeah definitely
I: Alright um how do you feel your experiences with death and loss have affected your relationship with your family if at all

P: Umm my grandpa and my aunts death I mean I don’t feel any closer to my family I don’t feel further I fell the same

I: How about your friends do you think that knowing you’ve had family members who have passed away do you think it affects your view of your relationship with your friends differently

P: No because barely any of my friends know this person passed away from my family

I: Okay finish this statement life is

P: A journey

I: A journey

P: Yeah

I: Can you explain

P: Um it kinda like go through life discovering what you want what you need what others want discover everything cause you never really like discover you all the way you like dying not knowing who you really are like right now I don’t know who I am I don’t know what I want yet I mean I know I want to be in the medical field to be a doctor one day is that really what I want sometimes I wonder is that really what I don’t do you get what I mean

I: I get exactly what you mean

P: I mean I get I don’t know I feel like I just don’t know

I: You don’t know about life in general
P: You don’t know there’s so much to know I feel like sometimes I don’t know anything at all

I: How does that make you feel

P: Anxious sometimes I feel just like ugh I feel worried

I: You want a book sometimes that tells you exactly what you are supposed to be feeling

P: Yeah u mean you know because I wouldn’t because I don’t know if what I’m feeling is right or if the book is true sometimes I just get anxious I have the conscious feeling of worry I don’t know why it’s just there

I: Umhm When you worry what’s coming to mind

P: Um worry about how lie my parents expectations I worry about my grades I worry about how people see me I know I should but it still matters to me I don’t want them to like think bad I don’t want them to think I’m not smart or any of that I worry about things that could happen that I worry that I put others before myself like I worry that my grandpas death is gonna really affect my parents and I don’t want that because it will affect me not my grandpas death but their reaction to it

I: How so how do you think that that could affect your parents

P: Oh I don’t think my mom could handle another death my dad I mean I saw his reaction when my uncle dies and he was just like relaxed he shows no emotion so I don’t know but my mom I don’t think she could handle another death cause she’s like close with my dad’s dad also I think she’d just be depressed

I: And you think that would affect you how

P: Seeing my mom depressed
I: Umhm

P: That would just stress me out because I already get stressed when she's stressed if she's tired I feel stressed out like I don't want her to be tired I know my brother would my grandpa we think he has a lot of money he doesn't tell anyone but we think he does and he's like oh well when he dies at least the stress of money will be gone and on our family won't be that much I mean it's true though I mean the money you have to have it

I: Okay I have another question last week the campus experienced a death okay were you familiar with that person

P: No

I: What did you think about the responses from your peers to death?

P: There are some that I felt were genuinely upset and there are some that just weren't they faked it and I noticed it like there was this one girl like I think I'm about to cry like no you are not about to cry you're about to make yourself f cry so that people think you're upset

I: How did that make you feel

P: About the girl

I: Umhm

P: I was irritated because I saw it I noticed that she wasn't like really upset about the matter so like why do you fake it I don't know the person so I'm not affected so then I'm not gonna pretend like I am

I: How did that make you feel when you saw her react like that you were irritated

P: Umhm just irritated
I: How about the other people

P: Who were really upset um they were just upset and um how did that make me fell um I was just like sorry I wasn’t upset I mean it sucks but you keep moving on you can’t just stop. Okay that’s normal

I: I know they had counselors at the school and a lot of students didn’t want to talk to the counselors that they brought in for people why do you think that is

P: Because the counselor is a strange r and probably they don’t want to be judged I don’t know I’d rather talks to a stranger than someone close to me I feel like a stranger wouldn’t judge me

I: Umhm

P: Um but maybe because the counselors are old kinda here (laughing) they’re not young

I: So who do you thing that the students would be more receptive to

P: A friend I feel sometime that students push away family in times of need I push a away family I just don’t express my feeling to my family

I: Why do you think that is

P: Why I don’t

I: Umhm

P: I don’t know because I don’t want to be judged I feel like my parents are judgmental

I: And you feel like your peers are judgmental

P: Nuhuh not even to my friends and peers I don’t even express myself to them

(Laughing) I just keep it in
I: You just keep it in that’s the way how do you feel that keeping it in affects your ability to do other things

P: I’m more irritable like this year I’ve been more stressed emotionally physically mentally so I’m just like very irritable all the time and I’m like jittery I hate having a lot of people around me I get I don’t know annoyed I don’t like sitting in the cafeteria because there’s so many people and they’re so loud and I’m just like uggh I can’t handle it

I: I understand completely okay is there anything else that you can think of that you think is important to know about teenagers and death

P: Um there isn’t really like a certain feeling that they have towards death maybe I don’t know I feel like most teenagers they just don’t have a feeling about like they’re not really upset or they aren’t feeling upset they’re just sad for a little while and then it’s gone

I: Why do you think that is

P: I don’t know because teenagers are into they’re materialistic not all but most are so like once they get their iPhone their laptop or their car whatever they forget it’s all gone

I: Do you think that’s good

P: No I mean good for them for coping with it but but it’s not really good

I: It’s not really coping

P: Nuhuh it’s just pushing it away one day you’ll remember and you’ll be like oh was I really like this

I: What do you think is the most significant thing when dealing with a death do you think it’s the age of a person or do you think it’s the relationship to the individual do
you think it’s the number of people watching the show what do you think is the most important factor as it relates to death

P: Relationship and cause of death

I: Relationship and cause of death how do you mean

P: Um for example my brothers friends mom was found dead on the side of the street and I was scared I felt scared like that happens? I see it all the time on law and order and criminal minds but does it really happen. So I felt really scared towards that death and I wasn’t toward the guy who died at our school so I think cause of death like if that person died you know being shot I’d feel more sympathetic towards them that someone who like has an illness

I: Umhm

P: And relationship of course but I had no relation with that person I was just shocked

I: Alright anything else

P: I’m not crazy

I: No you’re not crazy anything else?

P: Nope.
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I: Alright what do you think the average teenager’s response to death is?

P: Um Like from anybody? I’d say drinking I think it’s drinking.

I: Drinking?

P: Yes drinking.

I: Alright do you think girls respond differently to someone passing away than boys do?

P: Yeah I think girls like show more emotion than guys.

I: Why do you think that is?

P: Because guys don’t like to show their feelings.

I: Why do you think guys don’t like to show their feelings?

P: (laughing) because they feel like it means they’re soft.

I: What do you mean by soft?

P: That they actually care I guess

I: Umm, and that’s not a trait that men should have?

P: I think they should but guys do think they should show that they care.

I: Can you think of a time when death became a subject between you and your friends

P: Well kinda I mean we talk more about Jesus coming back.

I: Like give me a scenario where it became a topic

P: Uh cause my friend had a dream about it an she was telling us cause all of us were in the dream

I: What was the dream
P: Um that we were at the WalMart in Nacadoches and that um that Jesus had come and then she was like her mom no. um all of us were like stuck in WalMart and none of us got taken back and that her mom was like going up and Jesus was like continue and she was like no I'm waiting for my daughter and he was like she's not coming and then her mom started crying and then the gates I guess started to close and then like a whirlpool came and then the devil and a whole bunch of demons jumped out and started attacking them and us.

I: That's scary

P: It was it made me cry cause I didn’t go

I: So that was a dream that was referring more to the rapture.

P: Umhm

I: And how did that make you feel that discussion you said it made you feel upset

P: Yeah it made me like re-evaluate myself a lot

I: What are your thoughts about death

P: Um I know it's like a part of life and I feel depending on like what your situation is it could be a good thing like if you're suffering and stuff like I feel it's a good thing and you can finally be at peace and then I feel like some people die and they're not ready even though like God is ready for you.

I: Have you ever witnessed someone pass away

P: Like die in front of my eyes?

I: Yeah

P: No

I: Okay have you ever had someone close to you pass away
P: Yes

I: When was the last time that you remember that someone close to you past away

P: It was in December

I: In December, and who was that?

P: My uncle

I: And you were pretty close to your Uncle?

P: Yeah, he was my favorite uncle

I: And so you were 18?

P: Yeah I was 18

I: Okay and where does your Uncle live

P: In lousiana.

I: Okay tell me about your relationship with your Uncle

P: Um well like a lot of my family in Louisiana they don’t like us in Texas and he was like the only one I could really communicate with like we could actually like have a good conversation without us being rude or offensive

I: Umhm think back to the day that you found out that he had passed away and tell exactly like what you can remember about that day.

P: Well he has been sick for a while now so that it sounds like we were expecting him to die so I think I was walking to my dorm and my mom called me and she was just like Uncle Norman died. And I was just like okay and um…

I: What was your response
P: I cried a little bit not because I didn’t want to cry but I just couldn’t cause like before that my friend Kia had died and before that Janice had died I felt like I was just done crying.

I: Umhm So within the last year you’ve had 3 people pass away

P: Well actually like 4 but 3 that were like close to me.

I: Ok since you’ve been in high school well now you’re in college since your first year of high school to your first year of college can you count the number of people that you know that are close to you that have passed away?

P: 3 those three

I: Okay so three and then your uncle

P: No 2 and then my uncle

I: Okay three total 3

P: Yes

I: Okay and you say you couldn’t cry you felt like you were done crying

P: Umhm

I: How did you feel whenever Janice passed away?

P: I couldn’t stop crying (laugh) like everything reminds me of her and like now like at the most random moments like I’ll cry like with me it helps to like look at pictures of her like in my dorm I have like a picture like I slept facing a wall and that wall had a picture of her like that helps me I guess

I: How close were you and Janice
P: Um we weren’t best friends but we were like close friends she was more than like just a friends or something so we were really close

I: Was that the first time in your life that you’d ever experienced a death

P: Not the first time but like the first time that somebody like actually close to me

I: What do you think the difference is between like how you reacted to Janice’s death versus how you reacted to your uncle’s death like you were saying with Janice you couldn’t stop crying and then with your uncle you just really couldn’t cry

P: I think that was like with my uncle being in Louisiana like as we grew older we stopped visiting as much so like most of our conversations we were like over the phone but with Janice like I interacted with her all the time and then we all had a little group that had the same few classes so it was like a little bond that we all had and then like I had talked to her the day before she had died so like yeah it was weird

I: Umhm okay. Do you remember what you were thinking I mean tell me about the day that you found out that Janice passed away

P: I’m not it’s bad but no like it was the day of my going away party for college and that little group that we had I mean I really think that it was God because I don’t think that we could have took that by ourselves. SO like after my little going away party all of us in our little group we went to one of our friends house and we were gonna like just have a little sleepover and then like the only person who was missing was monique and tina and then monique had called me and she was just like screaming and I was like Monique why are you screaming like get off my phone screaming and then like I thought she was joking and then I caught the word died and then I was like who and she was like Janice and hen it was like I didn’t even think our friend Janice and I was like
Janice who and she was like Janice alfarez and my mouth just dropped and everybody was looking at me like what and I said Janice died and then we all just sat there and started staring at each other and started crying and then we started looking up like the news reports because I couldn’t understand much that monique was saying so we started looking up the news reports and yeah and then we just stayed up all night talking and stuff.

I: How do you think having your friends there with you affected your reaction

P: Because I guess cause like I wanna say we all had the same relationship I guess but like we all were like in that group like if I’m with somebody that doesn’t know the person that died like they can’t feel what I’m feeling or they don’t know what to say they’re just like it’s okay but like having other people who know exactly how it feels I guess it’s like comforting.

I: Umhm okay um I have a five year old daughter let’s say that she comes to me one day and she asks me what does death mean? How would you answer that question?

P: I would say uh it’s when God calls us to be with him I mean that’s partially true but that’s what I’m telling a five year old.

I: Umhm now I know with you you bring up religion a lot how significant do you think religion is regarding death?

P: It’s very significant

I: How so
P: Like I think the way you die how you die um yeah I think that like really depends on I believe everything happens for a reason and that God has a plan for everything the way you die I think it’s based on what God has planned

I: How do you think religion plays into the way you grieve when someone passes away

P: Ummm I try to just like pray about but when I grieve I mean it plays a small part honestly because when you grieve you grieve and all you can do is pray but like that’s it

I: How do you think experiencing the three deaths that you experienced do you think it had any effect on your relationship with your mom and dad?

P: It made me well I love my dad but like I love my mom more (laughs) and like dad since I was little he’s been a truck driver and like this is like the first like since November this is the first time He’s like been around me that much uh so really honestly no effect with my dad but with my mom it made me like want to tell her all the time like how much I appreciate her how much I love her you know stuff like that.

I: How about your relationships with your peers your friends

P: Um I always like honestly like I just feel like the people I have now are like that’s all I want I don’t want any more close friends I feel like if they’re I don’t get like scared but I don’t want to get close to somebody and like they leave me and so just the people that I have now I cherish our friendships that’s all I can do and I try to not let petty things destroy our friendships because like if they were to pass I would feel really bad.
I: Now whenever Janice passed away there was a large group of people that knew Janice how did you see other people reacting and what did you think of those reactions

P: Well like I mean I know some people at the candle light I know they came just to pay their respects and whatever but then like there was girls like at the front talking I guess that thought they were running it like I didn't like that because I never seen them before and I don't know who they were and I knew like who Janices best friends were and like who she hung out with all the time and I felt like after she died a lot of people not being fake but they were trying to be more than what they really were trying to say that they were really good friends but they were like associates that's all

I: Why do you think that is that sometimes people do that

P: Just to be seen or feel important or just to be like they see everybody else sad so they want to be sad too.

I: Okay um finish this statement life is

P: I'm sorry I started laughing because I thought about what Hannah Montana says

I: What does Hannah Montana say

P: Life is what you make it so let's make it rock (laughing)

I: Okay

P: I would say a challenge

I: How is it challenging

P: Because there’s like I mean there’s just so many thing you experience do’s and don’ts trials and tribulations cause and effect situations and hmm
I: Is life good is life bad positive negative

P: I think it depends on the person

I: How does it depend on the person

P: Like if you’re a negative person and you go about things the wrong way and you deal with your situations in life the wrong way then life’s gonna be bad for you and vice versa

I: Okay um let’s see what’s a television show that you like to watch?

P: Spongebob

I: SpongeBob why do you like to watch SpongeBob?

P: Cause it’s funny and like it’s funny it like cartoons I love cartoons the only non-cartoon show I watch is bad girls club

I: Have you lived here all your life

P: Yes

I: Where’s your family from

P: Like my parents or my siblings?

I: Your parents

P: My parents are from Louisiana

I: Okay and in your like in your national heritage are you strictly American or is there French creole

P: Nope nothing

I: Okay um when Janice passed away a lot of the kids did make a memorial um what did you think about how the news of Janices death traveled because a lot of it had to do with social networking
P: Yeah it traveled fast like for that many people to show up and it was not even like a full 24 hours that they had planned to candle light it traveled fast

I: What do you think about finding out about the death of a person through social media?

P: Well I also think it depends like I would have been irritated if I would have been on Facebook and saw that Janice had died because I feel like i was one of her closer friends so I should have like I did receive a phone call so yeah I think it depends on your relationship with somebody because if it's like someone you went to school with and you like see it on Facebook that wouldn’t have bothered me but if it was like someone that I interacted with frequently then I would want that phone call.

I: Okay um did anything happen during Janices death or were there any comments that you didn’t like

P: Um well actually yeah like Monique like she kept saying I told her not to go. I just felt like that was kinda disrespectful to her family because she was going down there to see her grandpa and to visit but when monique was like talking like her family was right there she was like “I told her not to go” and I just thought that was kinda rude I would have been offended

I: Okay and what about other people’s responses I remember I think there was like one girl that

P: Oh yeah I was about to say that. Well yeah the Angelica girl she was like Janice deserved to die which no matter like I don’t feel like no one deserves to die and even if that’s like how she truly felt she could have kept that to herself.

I: Uhm
P: She didn’t have to put that on Facebook

I: Okay. Recently there was a death of a student that goes here he’s a sophomore and um he committed suicide and the kids found out the next day when they came to school and they had quite a few grief counselors come in and um I noticed that not very many some of the students wanted to talk to the grief counselor what do you think inhibits a student from wanting to talk to a grief counselor

P: I think that like death is a sensitive thing it’s a sensitive topic so it’s easier to talk to somebody that you know causes that’s like whether they’re counselor or not that’s just like a stranger and you’re like pouring your heart out to them

I: So you having gone through this with Janice had this been like when y’all were still in school do you think you may have been one of the one’s who didn’t want to go?

P: I don’t but if I would have it wouldn’t like I wouldn’t have said as much or everything that I felt

I: Who would you say everything that you felt to?

P: Um my friends mainly

I: So if somebody were to come to you tomorrow and say I want you to design or implement a program at a high school in the even that someone should pass like a peer should pass away what would you see as your ideal design what do you think is more

P: I think you like train the teachers. Teachers that the majority of the students like and interact with the kids often

I: Why do you think training the teachers rather than having grief counselors is a better option
P: Because the teachers should know their students’ pretty well and I mean the students would be familiar with their teachers versus counselors

I: And what about peer groups

P: I think that’s a good idea yeah I think so cause I mean it is easier talking to somebody that you go to school with or is in your age group

I: Um and now let’s say we had a peer group where we had seniors that had experienced a death before and they were put in with freshmen and juniors and sophomores that had recently experienced a death do you think that would be a benefit or do you see negatives arising from something like that

P: I think that would be a good thing you know like if the seniors were able to tell their story first cause I feel like if someone tells me their story and I can relate then I feel like I can talk more because they understand so like if the seniors are to tell their story and their experience I think it would help the underclassmen

I: Um do you think that teenagers should be more educated on death or do you think that the current information that most teenagers know about death is sufficient?

P: What do you mean by educated

I: Um well like when Janice passed away do you feel like if somebody would have sat you down before and said “these are normal responses to death it’s grieving is normal crying is normal being angry is normal um people going through denial is normal the girls you know negative comments are gonna be normal you’re gonna see people who uh suddenly react to the death who don’t have a relationship with that person um all these things are fairly normal you know these are all ways to cope with death and finding peers to talk with and finding an adult that you are comfortable with and kind of
giving the whole population of students this kind of education do you think that would help students or do you think students would be like ehh..until it happens to you you really don’t know kind of thing

P: I think it would be helpful cause like when Janice died the only thing I knew was to cry so I feel like if they do other things that

I: You do feel like I mean you said the only thing you knew to do was to cry are you saying you felt like you didn’t know what to do

P: Yeah yeah I didn’t know what to do so I just cried and like I dwelled on it for a long time and I feel like if I would have not dwelt on it and found another way to cope with it like deaths not easy but it would have been easier

I: What do you think makes the biggest difference the age of a person or the experience as far as how they cope

P: I think its experience well I think it's both

I: What effect do you think experience has on the way a person copes

P: Like I can say with me I have very in the past family members have died but I wasn’t like close to them but as time moves on and more and more people die not saying I got used to it but I almost want to say like I accept it and move on

I: And then how do you think age plays into that

P: I don’t think they like understand completely like my nephew he just turned five and the other person close to me was his aunt and when she died like the other day we were on the phone and he had went to the hospital and he was like one time my titi went o the hospital and she died he just said it with no emotion and he just talks about it like you know nothing he knows that she’s not alive but I don’t think he understands
completely so I don’t think the younger children understand exactly what it is they don’t grasp that concept

I: What do you think your experience with death has had on your belief system?

P: Um

I: Has it made your belief stronger has it made you question it has it made you what do you think?

P: Uh it hasn’t made me question It but it has made me question god like why did he like allow that to happen or not just allow it to happen but like what’s His purpose behind it yeah (laugh) yeah

I: Why are you laughing?

P: Because I was like “yeahh”

I: So when you think about it and it makes you ask why do you think that it made your religion stronger or no effect it just made you question

P: I don’t think it made it stronger or weaker it just made me question Him not It

I: Okay is there anything else you can think of as far as teenagers and death that you think is important to know

P: You mean just like overall

I: Overall yeah anything

P: Um I think well it depends on like how they die but I think it brings like awareness like Janice died from the drunken like the people that hit her were drunk that like the main thing like teenagers dying like texting and driving it just brings more awareness what to do and what not to do. And then like I have one friend she’s like real bitter like I don’t even know how we are friends like she will tell me she don’t want to be
my friend she don’t want to make friends and as like after we becae friends she was just like not necessarily like someone dies but someone always leaves her so she doesn’t like making friends umhm

I: And was this person a friend of Janices too

P: Yeah they were

I: So do you think that her response has to do with like she has had more experiences with death

P: I think so she’s never said it but I think that’s what it is

I: They were close friends yeah they weren’t best friends but they were regular friends

P: The same age 18

I: Okay is there anything else why do you think that your reaction was what it was and the other girls reaction was bitter?

P: Because like Janice was like the first person that was really close to me to die I don’t know how many people that were close to her that have died in her past I don’t know and like I think she’s just bitter before she started experiencing death I don’t know how she was

I: Is this person a religious person

P: Not at all I mean we talk about God but anybody can talk about god

I: What do you think the difference is between talking about god and being religious

P: Um I mean cause like if you believe in god he’s probably gonna come up in your conversations here and there but like I really don’t like the term religion but like I
guess it’s how you live your life it’s clear if you you are like strong in your faith versus just like mentioning god in your conversation.

I: okay is there anything else.

P: nope that’s all
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL LETTER
Supervising Investigator: Dr. Erma Lawson
Student Investigator: Wendy Jackson
Department of Sociology
University of North Texas

Re: Human Subjects Application No. 13174

Dear Dr. Lawson:

As permitted by federal law and regulations governing the use of human subjects in research projects (45 CFR 46), the UNT Institutional Review Board has reviewed your proposed project titled "Adolescents and Death: A Qualitative Study." The risks inherent in this research are minimal, and the potential benefits to the subject outweigh those risks. The submitted protocol is hereby approved for the use of human subjects in this study. Federal Policy 45 CFR 46.109(c) stipulates that IRB approval is for one year only, April 2, 2013 to April 1, 2014.

Enclosed is the consent document with stamped IRB approval. Please copy and use this form only for your study subjects.

It is your responsibility according to U.S. Department of Health and Human Services regulations to submit annual and terminal progress reports to the IRB for this project. The IRB must also review this project prior to any modifications. If continuing review is not granted before April 1, 2014, IRB approval of this research expires on that date.

Please contact Shelia Bourns, Research Compliance Analyst, or Boyd Herndon, Director of Research Compliance, at extension 3940, if you wish to make changes or need additional information.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Kaminski, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Chair, Institutional Review Board

PK/sb
APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORMS
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to participate in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

Title of Study: Adolescents Effects of Witnessing a Death

Student Investigator: Wendy Jackson RN BA, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Sociology. Supervising Investigator: Erma Lawson, RN PhD

Purpose of the Study: You are being asked to participate in a research study for the purpose of researching the effects of witnessing death on adolescents.

Study Procedures: You will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your own views regarding adolescents and death that will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour of your time. The interview will be taped and transcribed. You may be shown pictures reflecting images of death or dying persons and asked to comment.

Foreseeable Risks: The potential risks involved in this study are discomfort or anxiety related to the discussion of the sensitive topic of death.

Benefits to the Subjects or Others: This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to you, but we hope to learn more about the unique experience of teenagers and how they view death.

Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records: Your name or other identifying information will not be used in connection with this study. All transcribed interviews will remain under lock and key; and tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet. The confidentiality of your individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Wendy Jackson RN, BA at 214-893-5348 or Erma Lawson, RN, PhD at 940.565.2296

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011

Page 1 of 2
Research Participants' Rights: Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

- Wendy Jackson RN, BA has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.
- You understand that you do not have to take part in this study, and your refusal to participate or your decision to withdraw will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as a research participant and you voluntarily consent to participate in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

printed name of participant

signature of participant

for the student investigator:

I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the subject signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the participant understood the explanation.

signature of student investigator

office of research services
university of north texas
last updated: july 11, 2011
University of North Texas Institutional Review Board

Informed Consent Form

Before agreeing to your child's participation in this research study, it is important that you read and understand the following explanation of the purpose, benefits and risks of the study and how it will be conducted.

**Title of Study:** Adolescent Effects of Witnessing a Death

**Investigator:** Wendy Jackson RN, BA, University of North Texas (UNT) Department of Sociology. **Supervising Investigator:** Erma Lawson RN, PhD

**Purpose of the Study:** You are being asked to allow your child to participate in a research study for the purpose of researching the effects of witnessing death on adolescents.

**Study Procedures:** Your child will be asked to answer a series of questions related to their own views regarding adolescents and death that will take about 30 minutes to 1 hour of your child's time on campus at Lakeview Centennial High School. The interview will be taped and transcribed. Your child may be shown pictures reflecting images of death or dying persons and asked to comment.

**Foreseeable Risks:** There is the risk that your child may experience anxiety while participating in the study. Your child does not have to answer any question that makes them uncomfortable or anxious and he/she may discontinue their participation in the study at any time. If your child wishes to speak with a school counselor regarding any such anxiety he/she may contact the Lakeview Centennial High School Counselor’s office.

**Benefits to the Subjects or Others:** This study is not expected to be of any direct benefit to your child, but we hope to learn more about the unique experience of teenagers and how they view death.

**Compensation for Participants:** None

**Procedures for Maintaining Confidentiality of Research Records:** Your name, your child's name, or other identifying information will not be used in connection with this study. All transcribed interviews will remain under lock and key; and tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet. The confidentiality of your child’s individual information will be maintained in any publications or presentations regarding this study.

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
Questions about the Study: If you have any questions about the study, you may contact Wendy Jackson RN, BA at 214-893-5348 or Erma Lawson, RN, PhD at 940.565.2296.

Review for the Protection of Participants: This research study has been reviewed and approved by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). The UNT IRB can be contacted at (940) 565-3940 with any questions regarding the rights of research subjects.

Research Participants' Rights: Your signature below indicates that you have read or have had read to you all of the above and that you confirm all of the following:

Wendy Jackson has explained the study to you and answered all of your questions. You have been told the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study.

- You understand that you do not have to allow your child to take part in this study, and your refusal to allow your child to participate or your decision to withdraw him/her from the study will involve no penalty or loss of rights or benefits. The study personnel may choose to stop your child’s participation at any time.
- You understand why the study is being conducted and how it will be performed.
- You understand your rights as the parent/guardian of a research participant and you voluntarily consent to your child’s participation in this study.
- You have been told you will receive a copy of this form.

Printed Name of Parent or Guardian

Signature of Parent or Guardian Date

For the Student Investigator or Designee: I certify that I have reviewed the contents of this form with the parent or guardian signing above. I have explained the possible benefits and the potential risks and/or discomforts of the study. It is my opinion that the parent or guardian understood the explanation.

Signature of Student Investigator Date

Office of Research Services
University of North Texas
Last Updated: July 11, 2011
Student Assent Form

You are being asked to be part of a research project being done by the University of North Texas Department of Sociology.

This study involves research of the effects of death on teenagers

You will be asked to answer a series of questions related to your views regarding death that will take about 30 minutes to one hour

If you decide to be part of this study, please remember you can stop participating any time you want to.

If you would like to be part of this study, please sign your name below.

Printed Name of Student

Signature of Student

Date

Signature of Student Investigator

Date

APPROVED BY THE UNIT
FROM 4/12/13 TO 4/11/14
APPENDIX D

INTERVIEW GUIDE
Qualitative Questions:

Rapport:
1. How was your day today?
2. What classes did you go to today?
3. Do you have any questions before we start?
4. Do you want me to tell you more about what we are going to do today?
5. What are some favorite television shows you like to watch?

Transition:
6. What do you think the average teenager’s response is to death?
7. Can you think of a time when death became a subject of discussion between you and your friends?

Main questions:
8. Who was it that you witnessed pass away? That passed away?
9. Can you tell me about your relationship with that person?
10. Think back to that day for a moment. Now tell me the as much as you can remember about that moment starting from the beginning.
   a. How did that make you feel?
   b. Do you remember what you were thinking when that happened?
   c. How did you feel about the other people’s reactions?
11. I have a 5 year old daughter. Let’s say she came to me one day and asked me “Mommy, what does death mean?” How would you answer that question?
a. Can you explain why you used that phrase? Do you believe that statement too?

12. How you feel about your relationships with your parents? Friends?

13. Tell me how you think the experiences that you have had with death affect those relationships.

Closing Questions

14. Is there anything that you would like to tell me that I haven’t asked that you think might help me?

15. Do you want to ask me anything at all about this or something else?
APPENDIX E

SOCIODEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE
Sociodemographic Questionnaire

Date: ________________      ID# _____________

Name:
______________________________________________________________________
(First)      (Middle)    (Last)

What race/ethnicity are you? _____________________________________

Education:
Current Grade Level: 9th   10th  11th  12th

Employment Status:
Do you currently have a place of employment? (If so where) YES   NO   Where:
____________________

Living Arrangements:
______ Both Biological Parents
______ One Biological Parent and One Step Parent
______ One Biological Parent Only
______ Joint Living (Meaning you spend half of your time with one biological parent and half of your time with
       Another biological parent)
______ Other (ex: Grandparents, Aunts/Uncle)

Are there any adults in the house other than your parents? If so how many and who?
____________________

How many siblings do you have and what age are they?
______ Brothers    Ages: _________________________
______ Sisters    Ages: _________________________

What is your current class rank? __________

Are you involved in extracurricular activities or clubs on campus if so which ones?
_______________________________________________________________________
REFERENCE LIST


